

Whole Health Agriculture: Oxford Real Farming Conference

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by Karen Seyersted



Karen Seyersted has experience of practising physiotherapy and Complementary and Alternative Medicines (CAM) in France, Scandinavia and the UK and has an MSc in Integrated Healthcare. Her interests are mainly in salutogenesis and the role of CAM in combatting antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

2021 started with the annual Oxford Real Farming Conference (ORFC) which, due to the pandemic, went online and global. This meant new opportunities; instead of the up to 1,400 delegates who are usually present in Oxford Town Hall and nearby venues, this year there were more than 5,000 attendees in total. This gave Whole Health Agriculture a unique opportunity to showcase the role and potential for homeopathy and other complementary and alternative medicines (CAMs) in livestock health and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) to an international audience.

First ORFC 2021 session:

Panel debate

Alternative health approaches to infectious disease and AMR, an international perspective

Regarding the potential for homeopathy to meet global challenges, Brazil is a country to look to these days, and the work of Professor Leoni Bonamin and her team is ground-breaking. Leoni works in the department for Environmental and Experimental Pathology – Universidade Paulista (UNIP) in Sao Paulo. She is also on the editorial board of the journal *Homeopathy* and is the main editor of the *International Journal of High Dilution Research (IJHDR)*. Her research is primarily in homeopathy and high dilutions, using in vitro and physico-chemical methods. The work of her extended research team in both basic research and in field studies opens new perspectives regarding the potential of homeopathy.

A look into their world made me wish to be reborn as a homeopathic researcher in Brazil. In addition to exciting studies being conducted, politics in Brazil are slightly more favourable towards homeopathy than in the UK, and a world apart from the current situation for alternative medicine in my native Norway.

According to Leoni in post-conference communications:

In Brazil, the faculties have the right to offer homeopathy as an elective to undergraduate students, but unfortunately few faculties do it. However, homeopathy is an official specialisation in veterinary medicine, similar to the following recognised areas: small animal clinics, acupuncture, dermatology, oncology, pathology, intensive care, surgery and anaesthesiology. Vets who want to practise homeopathy must be approved by a national examination to receive the title of 'specialist in homeopathy'. A



similar situation is seen for doctors and pharmacists.

Leoni presented results from 'Homeopathy as a clean technology on farms'. Clearly, not only the research ideas and design show innovative skills, but also the use of words; homeopathy as 'clean technology', why not? Among the research questions she has been asking are: *is there scientific support for the use of homeopathy in farming, is it useful to control infectious disease and AMR, how does it work in living beings, and could it be harmful to the environment?* Some of the basic research has been done on macrophages and *Leishmania Amazonensis* (a protozoan parasite which causes severe disease) and shows how various homeopathic remedies in different potencies affect biological processes on a cellular level. In field research, giving remedies to mothers – dairy cows – reduces susceptibility of

offspring to certain infectious agents.

In a (by now famous) study from 2016, Passeti et al demonstrate how the antibiotic Oxacillin is significantly more effective in treating methicillin-resistant

Tracey Simpson runs a 900-cow dairy farm. She spoke about Rotavirus and how it can be prevented using the *Rotavirus nosode*.

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Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) in vitro when combined with homeopathic *Belladonna* and the MRSA nosode than a control group which has been treated with sterile water. This study is only one example of a trend observed also in other areas of knowledge today; complex global challenges such as AMR are best solved through cooperation across conventional boundaries. In other words; we need integrative approaches to solve complex problems.

After presenting the groundbreaking MRSA study, Leoni took us to the fields with a study she calls 'New Technologies using Water Sources'. To study how far the homeopathic signal can propagate in water, the research team put *Phosphorus 30c* in a water source connected to two lakes and used water samples from an untreated, unconnected nearby lake as control. Solvatochromic dyes, well

▷ known from the research of Steven Cartwright, who also served as part of the research team, were used to show how the remedy propagated throughout the system. This study indicates that the use of homeopathic remedies in large volumes of water, both in farming and in other ecological contexts, has the potential to be assessed with physico-chemical monitoring and may hence be used as an 'environmental medicine'. What's not to like?

Taking this one step further, in an area where monkeys were dying out, *Phosphorus 30c* was inserted into water sources. Four months later, monkeys started to reappear, and after another month the monkeys started to reproduce. This is an example of how homeopathy can play a role in environmental challenges and sustainability.

Our second speaker was Dr Vet Liesbeth Ellinger from The Netherlands. She has been running homeopathy courses for farmers there for over 20 years. With a team of researchers from Wageningen University, she is also a key player in homeopathic livestock research. Her most famous study is the triple-blind randomised control trial (RCT): *Homeopathy as replacement to antibiotics in the case of Escherichia coli diarrhoea in neonatal piglets* from 2010, where piglets from mothers that were given the *E. coli* nosode regularly during the last month before birth had significantly less diarrhoea than the piglets born from mothers in the placebo group. The plan is that this study will be replicated with a slightly different research design due to ethics regulations at a larger scale once the pandemic situation is under control.

As the audiences at ORFC are not necessarily familiar with how homeopathy can be used to prevent and treat disease, Liesbeth also gave other examples of how homeopathy can be used as a real alternative to antibiotics, and the role of homeopathy in epidemics. She also mentioned her courses for farmers in the Netherlands, and

how they support each other, for example via WhatsApp groups. For farmers who are not familiar with the wonders of homeopathy, it may have come as news that homeopathic treatments do not distinguish between virus and bacteria and that the remedies do not cause resistance. It should also be good news to the audience that there are no medicine residues in meat and milk when livestock are treated with homeopathy, as it works on an energetic level.

Liesbeth also presented some useful remedies and their common use, such as *Caulophyllum* to stimulate birthing processes, *Carbo veg* for calves not breathing after birth, and *Rhus tox* for a cow that cannot rise for several days after calving.

Finally, Liesbeth explained the methodology, setup and results of the piglet study, which should by now be well known so I will just give a quick recap: 26 sows were given the *E. coli* nosode in a 30c potency twice weekly in the month before giving birth, which resulted in six times less cases of diarrhoea in their offspring than in the 26 sows that were given a placebo. Some piglets got diarrhoea despite homeopathic treatment but the problem was less severe, there was less transmission, and the duration was shorter than in the placebo group. In conclusion, a nosode selected according to a specific problem on a farm can be used to



They have developed a routine of using Rotavirus nosode in the water troughs every three months

prevent disease, but this study also indicates that well-designed RCTs show the potential of homeopathy, and that homeopathy can play an important role both in epidemics and in combatting AMR.

However, the piglet study research team also made clear that what works on one farm does not necessarily work on a neighbouring farm, hence the need to know what specific micro-organism is involved when using nosodes as prophylaxis. Every study has to be tailor-made to each farm.

Our next speaker was one of WHAg's more recent acquaintances; dairy farmer, homeopath, veterinary nurse and business woman / owner of Homeopathic Farm

The piglet study research team made clear that what works on one farm does not necessarily work on a neighbouring farm



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In an area where monkeys were dying out, Leoni's team put *Phosphorus 30c* into water sources. Within months, monkeys started to reappear, and then reproduce.

Links to WHAg's ORFC presentations

Alternative Health Approaches to Infectious Disease and AMR:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1pOxo-VPwY>

An Exploration of Feminine Values in the Context of Livestock Farming:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcV0N1P0248>

Services (HFS) in New Zealand, Tracey Simpson. Tracey runs a 900-cow dairy farm with her husband and took over HFS a few years back from Tineke Verkade. They serve around 3,000 farmers all over New Zealand, most of them running farms with 150-1,000 livestock. Some of their clients rear up to 7,000 calves a year. If you want to treat hundreds and even thousands of livestock, and to do so successfully using homeopathy or any other modality for that matter, it is a prerequisite to find practical solutions! And there is a lot to learn from the solutions they have found.

Tracey spoke about Rotavirus and how it can be prevented using

the *Rotavirus* nosode. On their farm, Tracey and her family rear 300 calves each year. Some years they see that young calves develop diarrhoea from a young age and they have experimented with different ways of using the nosode both to prevent and to treat this problem. Rotavirus is a virus that causes diarrhoea. The cow will shed this virus under stress during calving. The problem can be brought on by bad weather, feed shortages or calf housing issues. Hence they have developed a routine of using *Rotavirus* nosode in the water troughs every three months, and of giving it to the calves in water or in milk within the first week of life as prevention.

They also use the nosode individually sprayed on mucous membranes during an outbreak, the results of which can be seen within a few hours to a few days. During an outbreak, they must of course monitor the calves closely and also support them with fluids and sometimes other homeopathic remedies due to the risk of dehydration.

Tracey also described how farmers in New Zealand support their livestock with other nosodes such as *Cryptosporidium*, *E. coli*, *Salmonella* and *Coccidiosis* with good results during times of stress.

As we sometimes tend to think of 'homeopathic farms' as smallholders (with a few chickens, sheep, pigs, cows or goats), Leoni's,



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▷ Liesbet’s and Tracey’s stories bring new perspectives on the potential of homeopathy. We are truly grateful that they could join us at our session.

Last but not least, WHAg’s Head of Livestock Health, homeopathic vet Chris Aukland, who is also one of the founders, teachers and brains behind Homeopathy at Wellie Level, presented the results of our Alternative Livestock Health survey. These results were presented in detail in the 2021 Spring issue of *Homeopathy in Practice*. In our session at ORFC, Chris summarised how we may learn from farmers who integrate homeopathy and other Complementary and Alternative Medicines (CAMs) in livestock health management.

Responsible use of CAMs not only benefits health but also animal welfare as long as farmers are trained in good husbandry and know when to call the vet – and

what can be done for the animals while waiting for the vet. What is being used in farming is also relevant for human health in more than one way: we are what we eat, what we repeat and what goes into the soil, plants and livestock that eventually become our food. In addition, the results of the survey give ideas that can be used in health education and research. Studying success is inspiring!

Second session ORFC 2021: Workshop

Feminine values in the context of livestock farming

To give some background to this session, The Food and Agriculture organization (FAO), a specialised agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger, estimates that 40 to 50% of people working in agriculture are women – with variation between regions, countries and enterprises.

Liesbeth’s team found that piglets from mothers that were given the *E. coli* nosode had significantly less diarrhoea than the piglets born from mothers in the placebo group

Attention is often given to the burden placed on women; but what about the specific qualities and values women bring? It is said that women have a more intuitive feel for livestock, that they are more ‘in tune’. On the surface, some aspects of the cycles of life – such as reproduction, birth, nurturing – require

Responsible use of CAMs not only benefits health but also animal welfare

qualities which are considered 'feminine' but is that too superficial a characterisation? And, if true, is this due to innate traits, acquired behaviour and / or values? Does it matter? Do we need more understanding in order to better achieve gender equality?

In the workshop, Josette Feddes, originally from the Netherlands but with farming experience also from France and the UK, Tracey Simpson from New Zealand, and 'our own' Pammy Riggs from Devon introduced us to their experience as livestock farmers.

Even if 'feminine values' are not at first sight the most relevant topic to homeopaths, we see that a lot of feminine traits if not values (which are a bit harder to define) are present among livestock farmers who choose to learn and use homeopathy and other CAMs. After all, life as a livestock farmer is dealing with intensely female lives 24/7. The role of a farmer can be compared to being part midwife, mother, manager and businessperson, all in one person. The midwife needs to be caring and gentle, whereas the businessperson needs to be thinking about production levels and creating an income.

To cut a long story short, in the discussions we found that trade-offs and conflicts are partly down to gender, partly personalities and partly cultural differences. Within each person there are both feminine and masculine traits and values, and it is important to be aware of them and keep the discussion open.

Interestingly, in February 2021, an article was published in *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*: 'Alternative Medicines on the Farm: A Study of Dairy Farmers' Experiences in France'. Authors Hellec, Manoli and Joybert, combining animal science and sociology, examined French dairy farmers' understanding of and experiences with CAMs, mainly homeopathy, aromatherapy and phytotherapy. Among the topics they discuss is the role of female farmers introducing CAM practices in farming.

Takeaways from ORFC 2021

We would like to thank our speakers at ORFC 2021. The key takeaways from our ORFC sessions are for me first Leoni's messages that homeopathy is a tool to improve bio-resilience and can be used as clean technology to meet environmental challenges, and second how important and urgent it is for homeopaths to be present and active on the AMR arena.

In addition, I believe we as CAM practitioners, whether male or female, can be proud of our feminine values as these include a more holistic approach to health and health management. The discussion between feminine and masculine values might be compared to the negotiation between conventional / reductionist and CAMs / holistic medical (human and veterinary) science. This is also reflected in the left brain / right brain model in neuroscience; the left brain being more mathematical and reductionist whereas the right brain is more holistic and intuitive. Our world is currently crying out for a more holistic approach to almost everything and the opportunities for holistic approaches such as homeopathy are endless; we just have to continue to work hard, choose our battlefields and be good at what we do.

As for Whole Health Agriculture, we aim to provide farmers, whether they define themselves as conventional, organic, biodynamic or regenerative, with more tools in their toolkit and hence more choices. We want homeopathy and other CAMs to be part of the solution, and every farmer to be able to adjust and refine what they use according to their needs. It is a joint learning journey. In the long run, we probably learn more from livestock farmers who use homeopathy and other CAMs regularly than farmers learn from us / teachers of homeopathy, as they observe animals daily and use, experiment and expand their knowledge on a regular basis, sometimes 24/7, and all year round.

Homeopathy is a tool to improve bio-resilience and can be used as clean technology to meet environmental challenges

Since January, we've been developing a series of courses and webinars, some for farmers only and some for an extended audience including pet owners. Our first webinar was on the use of nosodes as prevention and, based on demand, we have also started a one-year pilot project educating complementary livestock health advisors including advisors and farmers in the UK, Ireland and Norway.

You can learn more about our activities by signing up to our newsletters and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram: <https://wholehealthag.org>.

We would also like to repeat the appeal from our article in the Spring edition of *HiP*: if anybody reading this has experience in livestock farming, is a homeopathic vet or a conventional vet with an interest to get involved, we would love to hear from you!

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