

Veterinary partnership aims to improve service

UK concept rolling out across Canada with Abbotsford leadership

by DAVID SCHMIDT

ABBOTSFORD – There is strength in unity, and a new network of independently owned veterinary practices across Canada hopes to reap the benefits of that strength.

XLVets Canada launched last November with eight founding partners, including AgWest Veterinary Group of Abbotsford.

AgWest co-owner Brent Fawcett is the partnership's first president, which includes seven other practices in Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario. Together, the eight practices represent about 60 vets.

Fawcett says veterinarians are "a small community" whose members "rely on each other." The idea to form XLVets Canada was "born out of meeting each other and discussing mutual challenges" at veterinary conferences, he says.

Though not an official partner, WestGen was a driving force behind the partnership. WestGen has a minority interest in AgWest, and the offices for both AgWest and XLVets Canada are at WestGen. WestGen CEO Chris Parry is an outside director on the XLVets Canada board.

XLVets was pioneered in the UK in 2005. XLVets UK now includes 60 practices with more than 600 veterinarians. XLVets affiliates also operate in Ireland and New Zealand, making it the largest global network of independently owned veterinary practices.

XLVets all share the same vision ("by working together we can achieve so much more") and the mission, "to provide leadership for the collaborative community of veterinary practices, setting standards for members and promoting collaborative enterprise and spirit."

Collaboration is key.

"If my practice is having a challenge, I'm pretty sure another practice is having the same challenge," Fawcett says. "We have an in-house referral program which allows us to call on other XL members for specialty services."

XLVets Canada expects to have member practices across Canada by the fall.

"We're trying to build a community. Our goal is to take on members who have the desire to become better and help make them better," Fawcett says. "We want to provide something that's a step up from accreditation."

"XLVets exists to ensure its member practices can leverage the advantages of

scale and process management, but not at the expense of absolute control," the partnership states in a media release announcing its formation.

While XLVets is a collaboration among veterinarians, it is itself part of a collaboration with WestGen in Proventus Agri Solutions Ltd., which seeks to provide Canadian beef and dairy farmers with "unbiased expertise from a network of independent, industry leading professionals with just one contact point," Proventus states in the same release.

"Proventus is a facilitator," explains communications co-ordinator Kassie Jansen. "Farmers have access to more information than ever but don't have time to deal with it. They need someone to bring that information to the farm in an unbiased, organized way."

Fawcett uses milk yield as an example. Increasing milk yield could require a change in nutrition, a revised breeding strategy, improving animal health or other strategies. Since the solution usually involves money, good financial advice is just as important.

"Everyone has something to sell to the farmer but are doing it independently," he says. "Proventus will bring everyone to the table to come up with a co-ordinated solution. We can come up



AgWest co-owner Brent Fawcett is the first president of XLVets Canada, a new national network of privately owned veterinary practices that pledge to provide a collaborative approach to service their clients. SUBMITTED PHOTO

with a plan and monitor it all the way through."

Parry offers the example of a farmer about to build a new barn.

"If I built a barn, I would talk to 10 people. It would be great have those 10 people talking together. That's what we do."

Jansen stresses Proventus will not force farmers to work with WestGen or XLVets,

which both hold ownership stakes in the company, or MNP, a partner without an ownership interest.

"We can collaborate with a farm's existing service providers. If Proventus is seen to be biased, it won't work," she says.

Proventus will provide an initial consultation at no cost. It will include an estimate of the eventual cost of the

service.

Parry explains WestGen's involvement by noting WestGen is "not just an [artificial insemination] company nor a profit-driven enterprise. We're a society that exists for the benefit of our producers. They told us they need better access to information and that's what we're trying to facilitate through Proventus."

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