

How veterinary clubs lead with purpose and help create a unique vet business landscape in New Zealand

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Veterinary clubs were formed by farming communities more than 80 years ago. Veterinary clubs have progressed a lot over time, and while some no longer service farmers directly others have thrived and continue to contribute to their communities and the veterinary industry.

Veterinary clubs are part of the rural cooperative community, and have commonality with the likes of Ravensdown, Ballance, Fonterra, FMG, Farmlands, Farm Source, and regional co-ops ATS, Tatuia and many others. We're rurally focused and we're owned by farmers.

However, veterinary clubs are also unique in that we're not owned by shareholders (private or co-operative) instead we're owned by our members. Our ownership is more like your local tennis or rugby club. And that means we are not here to maximise profit for a shareholder, we are here to ensure our rural communities get the best veterinary service for the long term.

What we do with our profit is reinvest it all back into our people, our purpose, our services, and our communities. Veterinary clubs do not pay a dividend or distribute profits in any way, and all profits stay within the community. It's a true modern economic sustainable model that just happens to be 80 years old.

Veterinary clubs' original purpose was to ensure rural communities had access to modern veterinary services. Veterinary services were seen (and are still today) as critical to support farmers develop and grow their rural economy. Over 60 veterinary clubs were established in the 1940s and 1950s. Farmers of this time banded together to employ vets, set them up with good salaries, vehicles, equipment and even housing, there was even the odd plane access to fly into remote farming areas too.

Veterinary clubs quickly established north to south and farmers were able to grow with better animal care and advice. These veterinary clubs worked closely together, and many involved in the veterinary club movement were also instrumental in helping establish key regulation, and industry bodies like NZVA, Massey University Veterinary School, VCNZ, and VPIS. The DNA of our modern way of working together was heavily influenced by the Vet Club's leadership.

Over the following 80 years individual veterinary clubs went through many changes, but today we have large clubs like Vetora, Anexa and Taranaki Vet Centre trade very similar to their original structures, just bigger. We also see smaller clubs like Hunterville and Eltham who have successfully focused on remaining independently focused on their original community. Either way these clubs big and small are thriving. Investment in research, developing clinical infrastructure and providing long term employment continues today.

Some clubs still exist in the background as landlords who provide critical reinvestment into modern clinical infrastructure to ensure private rural practices have access to good facilities too. You will see from the West Coast, to Southland, to Northland to the Bay of Plenty. The fabric of the original 60 veterinary clubs is still here today. So even though these clubs are not as visible, they still play an important part in making rural practice an attractive place to be a veterinarian, veterinary nurse or technician.

As CEO for Vetora Waikato I can talk to our future, which is rooted in our past. We will never become a profit maximiser, or focus on cities, as these are not in our purpose or our future goals.

Our purpose is to ensure our rural communities have access to world class animal health services. Our investment will follow this purpose. We value the good medicine that we do, and we take pride in creating value on farm or in clinic, and we also take pride in supporting the industry to be profitable and sustainable.

Our future includes reinvestment into our modern best practice accredited facilities, so our team and clients can have the best care no matter where they are. We are also investing in research, through our close involvement with EpiVets to back more clinical research and epidemiology science that is relevant to our rural communities.

We will also pivot to adopt new technology, reduce antibiotic use, position ourselves for more advisory services and create pathways for the industry to follow too. We are deliberate on who we partner with, prioritising suppliers with New Zealand ownership, manufacturing, clinical research, and sustainability.

Our people are a talented team of 140 professionals focused on developing their expertise relevant to our clients and communities. Reducing disease, pain, and improving wellbeing and farm animal productivity are keen goals for our team, and we are orientating more towards a future where we are rewarded for better animal health and productivity outcomes. That's where our client and team innovation will be and is focused.

Our long-term measures of success are:

- sustainable profit - so we can reinvest back into our club and community.
- team engagement - so we can retain and grow world class veterinary teams.
- client engagement - so we can build long lasting relationships and loyal clients.

Our future is deeply rooted in our past. Our purpose is not to maximise profits, it's about a highly trusted team being valued for providing world class animal health services to our rural communities. We are a veterinary club with a proud 80-year history, maintaining a strong relevance today, with a focus on tomorrow's challenges for the industry and community we serve.