

# LAVT value in the sheep and beef space

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to highlight, discuss and explore the current and future roles and responsibilities of large animal vet technicians (LAVT) in the veterinary industry in New Zealand, primarily in a sheep and beef space. The methods used to conduct the research for this paper are predominantly personal experience, networking with subject matter experts, farmers and veterinarians in the industry and using this information to suggest possibilities for how the role might be shaped in the future and what options there are for the role to develop in a drystock space. The conclusions are that the development of the large animal veterinary technician role is evolving and that a technician's skillset and professional offering is not limited to the dairy industry that it has traditionally serviced, but it has multiple pathways in which the veterinary industry can embrace and utilize in years to come.

## Introduction

This paper discusses what the traditional role of an LAVT looks like and if there is the same demand for such a skillset in the drystock industry as opposed to dairy. It goes on to explore the possibilities of how an LAVT can add value in the drystock space and what knowledge and technical skills are required to do so. Specific skills are listed and opportunity for growth is discussed before concluding that there are at least five areas of development that can be looked at moving forward in order to improve and expand the LAVT role in the sheep and beef / drystock sector.

## Methodology

The methods used to carry out the research for this paper are predominantly personal experiences and narrative from the author. This includes but is not limited to networking with subject matter experts and this has taken place over several years in both New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Other methods include conversations and relationship building with stakeholders and rural people in the community, as well as veterinarians both within the author's workplace and outside of it. Data collection techniques include on-farm data collection through delivery of the Stockcare Lite package as offered by Farmfirst Veterinary (2025), liaising directly with consultants such as Don McColl (Stockcare 2001), veterinarians in the sheep and beef sector and fellow large animal vet technicians in the industry in alignment with guidance from the LAVT professional guidelines (NZVA 2022).

## Results/findings

The result of the research done with regards to this paper are that the large animal vet technician role in New Zealand is ever evolving. It is no longer the traditional 'veterinary assist' type role, but is independent, multi-faceted and there is room for growth within the role. The potential for growth identified is not only limited to the dairy sector but also sheep, beef and deer and potentially other areas of animal health. The findings in this presentation include technicians being involved in areas of animal health that are considered within the LAVT's scope of practice according to LAVT Professional guidelines (NZVA 2022) but may not be fully explored or accepted in general practice in a majority of veterinary clinics throughout New Zealand at present. These areas include but are not limited to the potential for consultancy, data collection and analysis, laboratory work, i.e. FECRT, FEC and larval cultures, booster vaccination of working dogs, post-mortem, on-farm staff training, velveting, pregnancy scanning, lame cow treatment, ram palpation, wearables and technology development and

implementation in the future.

## Discussion

Findings reveal that consultancy programmes offered to sheep and beef farmers such as Stockcare Lite from Stockcare (2001) and Farmfirst (2025) have huge potential to offer work for LAVT who are interested in pursuing a career in drystock animal health and sheep and beef production systems. LAVTs ability to collect data, analyze this data and then offer solutions to stakeholders is a hugely valuable opportunity that could be explored further within the industry. This type of business involvement could be the way forward for technicians who wish to pursue a less physical/hands on role and with the nationwide vet shortage (Steele, 2024) it could add real value to veterinary businesses, farmers and stakeholders alike. Findings also reveal that many LAVTs currently in practice aren't always being utilised to their potential in terms of technical, analytical and consultancy skills. Often the role of a technician is restricted to seasonal tasks in the dairy calendar such as intramammary administration of mastitis prevention drugs (dry off and teatseal), disbudding, reproduction programmes such as CIDRs etc., vaccination of cattle (and occasionally sheep through conveyor work) and blood sampling. It is rare to find an LAVT that is used for anything outside of the seasonal skillset required by dairy farms. With evidence that more and more veterinarians are leaving industry because of high workloads and stress (Steele 2024), the implications of not empowering LAVTs to gain more knowledge around production animal businesses and what drives them from an animal health perspective, are that possibly more vets will leave the industry due to an unsustainable workload. To combat this, veterinary practices need to be open to the possibility of upskilling and utilizing LAVTs to their potential in every aspect of the business. Particularly in the areas discussed in the findings.

## Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the traditional role of a large animal vet technician in New Zealand and gone on to discuss the benefits and opportunities for LAVT to diversify, expand and grow in the industry – particularly in the sheep and beef sector. The nationwide vet shortage (particularly in rural areas) adds to the conclusion that the positive development of LAVT in veterinary practices will both help to reduce workload and stress levels on vets but also create new and exciting areas for LAVT to move into. Developing skills and knowledge for LAVT in the sheep and beef space will create more support and longevity for the future of the red meat sector as well as rural veterinary practices facing staffing issues due to workload. Something to consider for the future of our industry.

## References

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