

National FAVS Study

Why are UK vet students choosing not to become farm vets after graduation?

A new survey carried out by student-led body National FAVS has explored current UK Veterinary Medicine students' viewpoints on becoming a farm veterinarian after graduation, and the role that EMS and perceptions of diversity and representation play in their decision-making process.

Working outdoors, building lasting relationships with clients, calving, lambing and influencing decisions on public and veterinary health are all reasons why a career as a farm vet can be so rewarding. These are all things we learn about at vet school, and often get to experience first-hand as students, so why at a time of growing concern about declining farm vet numbers in the UK, aren't more new graduates choosing to become farm vets?

National FAVS created a survey in which students were asked about their thoughts on becoming a farm vet and whether their experiences of EMS and their perception of diversity and representation played a part in their decision-making process. Of the 180 UK veterinary students who participated in the survey, **57%** of students were in their clinical years of study and the remaining students were in their preclinical years. The mean age of participating students was 21-23 (**53%**) with an age range of 18 to 45 years old. When questioned, **86%** of students had considered becoming farm vets in the future. The remaining **14%** of students had either not yet considered becoming farm vets or remained undecided.

Whilst a large percentage of students had at some point considered the role during their studies, National FAVS wanted to explore the reasons why students may still choose not to opt to follow this career path after graduation. Students were asked to explain the influential factors in their decision-making process when deciding on a career as a farm vet, and why they may be deterred from entering choosing this profession.

The main points raised by students included:

- Preference for small animal work (21%)
- Lifestyle Factors e.g., work hours, paperwork, low pay & family life (21%)
- Lack of experience or knowledge of farm animal medicine (16%)
- Moral and ethical issues surrounding becoming a farm vet (11%)
- Angry farmers & clients (5%)



Infographic 1: Influential factors in students' decision-making process when considering a career as a farm vet and reasons why they may be deterred from joining the profession (National FAVS, 2022).

How important is EMS?

For many vet students, experiences whilst out on placement during vet school play a fundamental role in shaping their future career goals and aspirations. Students were asked if their **experiences whilst on Farm clinical EMS or pre-clinical EMS** had influenced their decision-making process when thinking about becoming a farm vet.

Whilst it is promising that many students are still considering a career as a farm vet in the UK, the survey confirms that over 50% of students feel that the farm vet profession lacks diversity. It is also concerning that over 40% did not respond positively to the question of whether they felt represented within the farm vet profession, with the most significant factors being the perception of the industry being male dominated industry and lack of farm vets from non-farming backgrounds.

Experiences whilst on Farm EMS were also found to be important in a student's decision to pursue a career as a farm animal vet, therefore, to encourage the widest possible range of graduates into farm vet practice, employers and vets should be conscious of student experiences whilst on placement and aim to provide a supportive and welcoming environment regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background.

How can we make a change? – 4 steps to a brighter future on farm

- 1. Actively encouraging students from non-farming backgrounds to experience farm EMS.**
- 2. Providing a supportive learning environment for students nervous about farm work.**
- 3. Provide diverse role models to inspire students in the farm veterinary sector.**
- 4. Being aware of negative behaviour towards students during EMS and having stricter policies & a support network in place should this occur.**

Farm Vet Student Wellness Initiative (FVSWI)



National FAVS are working to help address student concerns through a new social media group, the **Farm Vet Student Wellness Initiative (FVSWI)**.

The **FVSWI** aims to provide a safe space for students to come together and discuss Farm EMS experiences, recommend placements, and promote diversity, inclusion & wellness within the farm vet sector with the hope of providing more role models for the future farm vets.

Vet students from across the UK & Ireland can join **FVSWI** free of charge and are encouraged to discuss any of the topics covered in this report with the National FAVS committee. If you would like to help support the group, email nationalfavsg@gmail.com to get in touch.

Author: Georgia Owen, BVetMed3 Student at RVC & National FAVS President 2022-23