

Flying high with a career as a poultry vet

Vet Sara Perez was described as an “outstanding vet and role model” when she won the Leadership Award at the VetPartners annual awards. Sara, poultry director at Poultry Health Services in York, is now hoping to encourage other vets to consider a career in the sector.



GROWING up, I was very much a city girl, with no background whatsoever in farming. I had always dreamed of being a vet and qualified from the University of Barcelona, a cosmopolitan city and a world away from my life working in the Yorkshire countryside.

I did my fifth year at university in Milan, where I got the bug for travelling and planned to work as a farm vet in Europe while learning and travelling. However, before I qualified, I was offered a job as a pig vet in a feed mill in Spain. Pig production is extremely important in Spain as pork products are the most popular and consumed meat by far.

I kept in touch with a friend from university, who was working in the UK, and decided to join the same practice in Devon where she was. I initially joined as an export and meat hygiene vet, but fate sent me in a different direction.

One of the senior vets at the practice had been injured and I was given the job of driving him around for six months. I really enjoyed the visits to poultry farms and getting to do post-mortems and

farm sampling. Before long, I realised this was what I wanted to do and answered an advertisement to become a full-time poultry vet in Yorkshire.

Young vets spend very little time learning about poultry when studying veterinary medicine, so it's an area they may not think of working in, which is such a shame. Poultry Health Services has excellent internships in place to support vets to develop their expertise in poultry and I get personally involved in the mentoring and training of the vets.

I have found it a rewarding career and have many colleagues who are fulfilled in their work and happy with their work-life balance.

Many vets find the pathology side of the poultry role academically stimulating. Being able to post-mortem one bird and turn around samples quickly to have a positive impact on the health of, say, 20,000 others in the shed is really rewarding. It's rare to be able to do this kind of work with other livestock. You might see an X-ray from a dog, but to be able to get into the lab and examine an animal internally takes your learning to another level.

There are also many career development opportunities within poultry veterinary work. There are lots of opportunities for travel and to see the world as an international poultry consultant, plus fantastic careers in pharmaceutical research. There is even the opportunity to influence policy making as a technical advisor to the Government and bodies such as the European Commission.

I hope that winning the VetPartners' Leadership Award, which is as much about the team at Poultry Health Services as it is about me, will help bring some focus to poultry veterinary medicine as a rewarding career. There is no leader without a team and this award is very much for all of my colleagues at Poultry Health Services.

Being part of the VetPartners' family provides a huge amount of support and I especially enjoy encouraging other vets to consider working within the poultry industry.

I am always happy to speak to anybody considering a career as a poultry vet. It was a very special moment stepping up onto the stage to receive the award and it's so wonderful to be able to shine the spotlight on the poultry veterinary sector.

Anyone interested in following a career as a poultry vet can contact Sara by emailing sheriffhutton@poultryhealthservices.com or call the practice on 01347 820 366 for an informal chat.

Sara Perez qualified as a vet from the University of Barcelona in 1998 and has gone on to earn a Master's in science and a Certificate in poultry medicine and production. Sara, who became a director at Poultry Health Services in 2018, has consulted around the world, written articles for scientific poultry magazines and chairs poultry meetings on a regular basis.

Poultry Health Services is one of the largest specialist commercial poultry and game bird veterinary practices in the UK. Its expertise includes diagnostic testing, helping clients to maximise the health, welfare and productivity of their livestock while improving food quality and safety and contributing to the profitability of their businesses.