

# VETERINARY PROFESSIONALS WORKING FROM HOME: TOP TIPS FOR SUSTAINABILITY



By **Suzanne Rogers and Jo White**, Human Behaviour Change for Life  
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**Many professionals in the veterinary sector, as well as those in related fields such as animal behaviourists, primarily work from home or operate in flexible work environments. As businesses, organisations, and individuals, we have a unique opportunity to adopt sustainable practices and implement green policies that contribute to reducing our environmental impact. While working remotely offers its own set of challenges, it also allows us to make thoughtful choices about how we can minimize our carbon footprint and create a more eco-conscious workspace.**

By establishing green habits and environmentally friendly policies, we not only align our professional values with the care and compassion we extend to both the animals and humans we serve, but we also set an example for others in the industry. In today's world, where many people are becoming increasingly eco-aware, adopting sustainable practices can also be an attractive selling point for environmentally conscious clients.

This document aims to provide practical ideas and suggestions for working in an eco-friendly manner from home. Whether you're a veterinarian, animal behaviourist, or a professional in a similar field, these ideas can help reduce waste, lower energy consumption, and create a positive impact on animals welfare, the environment, and our own wellbeing – all while fostering a green culture within your practice or business.

## Working from home - always a greener option?

Working from home is not always more environmentally friendly than working in an office or group environment. The overall sustainability impact of remote work depends on a variety of factors. For instance, when we work from home, we are responsible for heating our own living space, which tends to be less energy-efficient compared to heating a shared office or group workspace. Additionally, in an office environment, resources like energy, water, and waste management systems are often optimised and shared across a larger number of people, making them more efficient than what we might have access to at home. Moreover, many of the green benefits of remote work are offset by the fact that we may lack the infrastructure to properly manage waste or invest in eco-friendly technology, such as energy-efficient office equipment, that could be readily available in larger organizational settings. However, there are plenty of benefits of home working, and lots of things we can do to go greener. Here's how.....

## How to (home) work towards the veterinary sustainability goals

Vet Sustain's [six sustainability goals](#) (which link with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs) can be considered regarding working from home, as follows in this section.



### **Goal: Diverse and abundant wildlife** (links to SDG 2,14,15 and 17)

*Conserve and enhance natural landscapes, habitats and biological diversity and abundance of wild terrestrial and aquatic plant and animal species*

*Examples of how we can do this from home:*

- o However small your garden, we can add plants to sequester carbon, provide a habitat for insects, and even help to address air pollution.
- o Growing our own food to reduce our reliance on packaged foods or those that might be produced using harmful practices.
- o Why not spend a lunch break nurturing your outdoor environment? Check out the Woodland Trust's [ideas for an eco-friendly garden](#).
- o Consider sourcing tea and coffee products for your breaks that are compliant with wildlife-friendly assurance schemes such as the Rainforest Alliance.



**Goal: A good life for animals** (links to SDGs 2,3,14,15,16,17)

*Safeguard and advocate for the health and welfare, in life and at the point of death, of animals under our care and those that are affected by human activity*

As veterinary professionals, the nature of our work revolves around enhancing the well-being of animals. We can take this commitment even further, by actively advocating for animal welfare in all aspects of our professional lives. Through the positions we hold and the influence we have within our industries, we can play a pivotal role in raising awareness and driving positive change for animals beyond the immediate scope of our daily work.

Moreover, we can integrate these principles directly into the way we care for the animals we are directly responsible for. By prioritising the Five Welfare Domains—namely, the provision of good nutrition, a safe environment, appropriate health care, opportunities for mental stimulation, and the ability to express natural behaviours—we can ensure that we are meeting the highest standards of care for the animals in our charge.

Beyond our direct care responsibilities, we can also support animal welfare through the choices we make outside of the clinical or professional settings. For example, making informed dietary decisions can help promote more ethical practices within industries that affect animals. By considering the wider impact of our actions, we not only improve the lives of the animals in our care but also set a positive example for others in the community.

*Examples of how we can do this from home:*

- o Hook the welfare of your pets or wildlife onto your own breaks, so whenever you stop for a cuppa, fill up your bird feeders, or take your dog for a walk after lunch.
- o Incorporate a clear ask into any professional lectures or talks you give to ensure animal welfare is integrated into sustainability, and is at the forefront of what we do as veterinary and allied professionals.
- o When talking to clients, advocate for animals by discussing the Five Domains, to help animals thrive not just survive.
- o Consider lunch options that align with the '[less and better](#)' movement for animal welfare and environmental sustainability.



**Goal: Net zero warming** (links to SDGs 1,7,8,11,13,14,15,17)

*Implement and promote decarbonisation through energy efficiency, the generation and use of renewable energy, mitigation of global warming and sequestration of carbon*

*Examples of how we can do this from home:*

- o Considering [switching energy suppliers](#) to companies offering renewable energy tariffs.
- o Energy-efficient heating/cooling: Use programmable thermostats to optimize heating and cooling in your workspace, ensuring you don't waste energy.
- o Use energy-efficient appliances, and turn off devices when not in use to avoid standby energy consumption. Consider using targeted appliances like a heated blanket, rather than heating the whole room or house.
- o Use natural light: Take advantage of daylight to reduce the need for artificial lighting.
- o Switch to LED bulbs - they use less energy and last longer than incandescent ones.
- o Sequestering carbon: grow plants, whether in the house or in our outdoor areas, to sequester carbon and clean the air in our environment.
- o Every email sent and stored requires energy, and people who work from home or run their own businesses can accrue a huge number of emails - an issue that is sometimes avoided in companies where IT support includes reducing digital waste. Manage your digital use and delete emails when you can. However, an even better way to reduce our carbon footprint through digital waste is to buy fewer digital devices, and then to keep using those devices for as long as possible. When we do look to upgrade, we should look for devices with low energy consumption. [This article from Forbes](#) describes this issue in more detail.

***“From an individual footprint perspective, our digital behaviors add up. One study suggests that a “typical business” user – albeit in the pre-Covid-19 period – creates 135kg (298lbs) CO<sub>2</sub>e (i.e., carbon dioxide equivalent) from sending emails every year, which is the equivalent of driving 200 miles in a family car, just under the distance from Brussels to London.”***

- [Harvard Business Review](#)

- o Consider using [Ecosia](#) as a search engine to plant trees.
- o Take advantage of video calls instead of travelling for meetings, which can help cut down on carbon emissions.
- o Developing climate literacy within our profession: consider attending Vet Sustain's [carbon literacy training](#) and spread the word throughout our organisations.
- o Often part of our job involves visiting clients, and attending courses, meetings and other events that take us away from our usual workplace. If you have to travel, consider using public transport rather than your car. If possible, combine errands or meetings with your work schedule to reduce travel time. Although many situations do require face-to-face time with clients or colleagues, sometimes an online meeting can be beneficial for everyone, especially if an innovative approach is taken, such as a walking meeting. Use 15 minutes of your saved commute time to advocate for change, or posting on social media about the changes you have personally made.  
If you organise events, or give lectures or talks – consider how you could do these in a more planet-friendly way. For example, how to avoid single-use plastic at the event, and so on.
- o Can't go greener? Grow a carbon offset forest with [Ecologi](#) to fill any remaining gaps in making you carbon neutral.



**Goal: Health and wellbeing** (links to SDGs 1,7,8,11, 13,14,15,17)

*Safeguard and enhance the physical and mental wellbeing of people and support a transition to livelihoods and lifestyles that are fit for the future*

*Examples of how we can do this from home:*

- o Mitigating antimicrobial resistance: working with clients involves working with human as well as animal behaviour, and we can use human behaviour change to ensure antibiotics are used responsibly. For example, many owners do not finish a course of antibiotics for themselves or their pets. When appropriate, we can remind them of the importance of finishing a course, and supporting them

through behavioural approaches to administering the tablets. Utilise the [many resources from BVA](#) and species divisions.

- o Promote the health benefits of animal ownership
- o Promoting sustainable lifestyles; e.g., including through recommendations we make for products or services for our clients.
- o Ensure diversity and inclusion considerations in our ways of working with colleagues and clients.
- o Acquire indoor plants – they can improve air quality and can help reduce stress. Choose low-maintenance, air-purifying plants like spider plants and snake plants and ask your neighbours if they have any you could propagate to avoid buying new.
- o Take breaks outdoors: If possible, spend some time outside to connect with nature, get fresh air, and take a break from screen time.
- o Creative co-working: encourage your colleagues to have standing or walking meetings rather than being tied to your desk.
- o Check out [Mind Matters](#), [Well Vet](#), and other fantastic veterinary communities promoting veterinary mental health. Working remotely can be hard and isolating - know that [VetLife](#) is waiting for your call if you ever need urgent help and support.



**Goal: A no-waste society** (links to SDGs 9,12,17)

*Minimise the usage and disposal of resources and materials and support a transition to a circular economy.*

*Examples of how we can do this from home:*

- o Supporting a circular economy with our choices relating to what supplies we buy and how we use them.
- o Have a recycling bin in your home and ensure that all recyclables are properly sorted.
- o Avoid single-use plastic items like water bottles, disposable cups, and straws. Use reusable alternatives (e.g., a glass water bottle or metal straws).
- o Reduce food waste through meal planning, making use of your freezer, and composting.

- o Consider home office purchases: Rather than buying new, visit second-hand furniture stores or online marketplaces. If you do buy new, seek out furniture made from sustainable, non-toxic materials such as bamboo, recycled wood, or reclaimed materials.
- o Use your computer for notes and file storage, and use a digital signature service (e.g. Docusign) instead of printing paper. Use scrap paper when you can, and reuse cardboard boxes and packaging materials. For situations when paper is needed, purchase recycled paper. Other consumables to consider are eco-friendly pens, markers, and notebooks, and when replacing office items like pens, post-its, or folders, pick those made from recycled or recyclable materials.
- o Consider batch cooking for your workday lunches, to save time and reduce food waste.



**Goal Enough clean water for all** (links to SDGs 6,14,15,17)

*Uphold best practice in freshwater conservation and protection to mitigate water stress and prevent water pollution.*

*Examples of how we can do this from home:*

- o Save water – for example, only use what you need for washing up, and use ‘grey’ water for watering house plants.
- o Understanding and mitigating medicine ecotoxicity through responsible and risk-based prescribing. Follow guidance on parasiticide use in small animals from the [BVA, BSAVA and BVZS](#), in ruminants from [RUMA](#), and in equids from [BEVA](#).
- o Help clients to understand the risks of ecotoxicity presented by veterinary medicine use, by providing information on animal care and management during treatment. This might include advice of no swimming following topical flea treatment in dogs, for example. Study drug data sheets carefully for more medicine-specific information.

## Policy ideas for organisations whose members work from home

As well as encouraging individuals in your organisation to adopt these ideas, consider translating some home-working actions into policy and engaging your staff with the sustainability push. This could be done informally, suggesting that members could do as many of the suggestions as possible (perhaps with a competitive element!), or could be more formal and written into organisational policy.

*Examples of organisational policy statements:*

- Use of cloud storage and digital approaches where necessary to reduce paper use.
- Use of emails and digital resources mindfully to reduce the digital carbon footprint and staff wellbeing - for example, no emails to be sent outside of certain hours.
- Creating opportunities for team members to talk to their clients about sustainability.
- When we recommend products, we will prioritise those that have good sustainability ratings.

To encourage engagement, you could organise or participate in remote-friendly sustainability challenges within your team. This could include challenges like reducing paper usage, optimising home energy efficiency, or even virtual tree planting initiatives.

## In summary

Although there is a lot to consider, working from home can be a fantastic opportunity to adopt more sustainable habits. By making simple changes—like reducing energy use, going paperless, making conscious food choices, and taking wellbeing breaks outdoors — you can significantly reduce your environmental impact whilst improving your own wellbeing. Plus, these small changes often lead to a healthier, more efficient home environment. So why not give it a try? Let us know how you get on and if you have any more tips to share!

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Find out more about Suzanne and Jo's work at [Human Behaviour Change for Life](#).