

Influencing dairy profitability beyond traditional dairy veterinary services: “It’s not just about the cows!”

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Introduction

In spite of a strong desire, even when vocalized, it remains a challenge for the role of the dairy veterinarian to move beyond that of a traditional one. In larger herds with a high reproductive work-load, we are at even greater risk of becoming specialist technicians. Instead we seek opportunity for greater involvement to deliver comprehensive services and to be recognized for such, both personally and financially.

Given the frequency of our visits, knowledge, and analytical skills, veterinarians in a unique position to provide inputs that complement the advice given by other consultants. The failure to do so has economic consequences for both the veterinarian and the dairyman. The income associated with additional consultation is lost, as is the associated job satisfaction. In turn the farmer might not optimally utilize the veterinarian’s input, foregoing the economic benefits of such. The opportunity for and the value of inputs will differ for every client and we need to remain cognizant of their motivation.

Materials and Methods

The objective of this presentation is to share perspectives, opportunities, and tools that might allow veterinarians to move beyond traditional roles. It will be prefaced by a review of the available research describing the dynamic between dairymen and veterinarians and how this might

impact an animal health production management (AHPM) program. Then will follow a description of the experiences of others, interspersed with the personal experiences of the author working with large total mixed ration (TMR) fed herds in the USA.

Results

The following describe attributes and roles that although seemingly subjective can be associated with a significant economic impact: gatekeeper; conduit; executor; verifier; monitor; facilitator and mediator; trainer, motivator and coach; applied nutritionist; technologist; champion of animal welfare, food safety and judicious antibiotic use; and confidant. Each will be elucidated and described in context, revealing a need for continuing education. The level of the relationship between a veterinarian and his/her client will determine the opportunity and value of each.

Significance

It is concluded that the veterinarian is in a unique position to become an integral part of the management team and to be fairly compensated as such. It takes a willing owner and a sizable investment by the veterinarian to facilitate this shift. The onus rests on the veterinarian to broaden his/her knowledge and skills and to demonstrate their value.