

# The Role of Bovine Veterinarians in the Future

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## Abstract

Studies have been conducted, organizations formed, and recommendations made to assist in keeping bovine veterinarians on the farm. These efforts have provided some positive outcomes; however, current legislative action supported by some agriculture organizations could redefine bovine practice.

## Résumé

Dans le but de favoriser la pratique d'employer des vétérinaires dans les fermes bovines, des études ont été effectuées, des organisations se sont créées et des recommandations ont été faites. Ces efforts ont donné quelques résultats positifs. Toutefois, la modification de certaines lois et règlements, avec l'appui d'associations agricoles, pourrait redéfinir en ce sens la pratique vétérinaire dans les fermes bovines.

## Discussion

For decades, the veterinary profession and the livestock industry have been acutely aware of the evolving problem associated with rural veterinary practice that historically referred to general veterinary practitioners working primarily on food-producing animals. They have conducted studies, held summits, passed legislation, formed centers of excellence, formed organizations, recommended college admissions modifications, initiated recruitment programs and talked about changing the veterinary curriculum, along with other actions to redefine the role of the bovine practitioner in the future.

According to many veterinarians who gathered at Kansas State University in October 2000, food animal veterinarians were becoming an endangered species. The Kansas State University meeting was organized as a forum to discuss the problem and possible solutions.

During the forum the late Dr. Jim Jarrett, executive vice-president of the AABP said, "We have a unique position in our society. We will be the first profession that's looked to, to provide animal health service to livestock operations. If we don't provide it, the next place they will probably look is to the animal science professionals."

This would result in a lost opportunity for the veterinary profession. "I think if and when that would happen, the veterinary profession will lose a real im-

portant segment of our history and, more importantly, a real opportunity for employment and for service for our colleagues," Dr. Jarrett said.

Recently, the state of Oklahoma passed a law that removes the following "animal husbandry" procedures and equine dentistry from the veterinary practice act. The law was called the "teeth floater" law, but it covers a lot more than floating teeth. Under the new law, section 698.12 of the Oklahoma Veterinary Practice Act will not allow the veterinary board to regulate or license "acts of animal husbandry." This includes, but is not limited to, "dehorning, branding, tagging or notching ears, teeth floating, farriery, pregnancy checking, collecting semen, preparing semen, freezing semen, castrating, worming, vaccinating, injecting or artificial insemination of farm animals; or the acts or conduct of a person advising with respect to nutrition, feeds or feeding."

Under the bill, the Oklahoma State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners will certify equine dentists if they have at least 80 hours of training from recognized schools. Equine dentists will be certified annually as non-veterinary equine dental care providers. They will be charged a \$200 certification fee and will be required to have four hours of continued education to have the certification renewed. If prescription drugs are to be used in the dental procedure, the owner of the horse or equine dentist must buy them from a veterinarian, according to the bill. Equine dentists may pick up widely prescribed sedatives from only veterinarians and only when owners order them.

This law was backed by the Oklahoma Farm Bureau and the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association. Many practitioners spent a lot of their personal time and money to fight it in Oklahoma. In the end, the law was signed by the governor after passing the house and senate.

A similar bill was introduced during last year's Iowa legislative session. It died in committee but is expected to be reintroduced in some form next session. Our discussion during this session will focus on some of the implications of this type of legislation on defining the future bovine practitioner.

## Conclusion

If the veterinary profession does not meet the health needs of the cattle industry, others will.