

Veterinary Services to Small and Moderate Sized Producers

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Abstract

The beef industry is steeped in tradition. This is one aspect that draws producers into the industry and entices generation to follow generation. While it is always good to honor tradition, one must adapt to the changing times at the same time. It has been said that change is neither inherently good nor bad, just inevitable. As veterinarians, we also have traditions that shape our industry. It is up to us to shape the practice where we work to make it an acceptable environment where we are willing to work. One area where we must focus is helping our clientele become comfortable with a mind-set that will allow us to provide them the beneficial services we can offer. The practitioner's challenge is to provide high quality service to their clientele and receive adequate financial compensation for these efforts. Food animal veterinarians are often limited in the price they can levy against a service provided by what that service can add in value to the animal. Thus, to increase revenue to the clinic, a veterinarian either has to perform service more frequently or find alternative services to offer. As the beef industry evolves, the roles we fill as veterinarians to the industry must evolve as well. The size and mind-set of our clients changes, and the demographics of a practice's client base changes as well. Practices may find themselves driving farther, relying on technology, competing against other sources of knowledge (real or perceived), and being asked to perform or provide services not currently offered. Practices able to do this may find the business more attractive to new associates who seek a position in a multiple doctor, progressive practice.

Résumé

L'industrie du bœuf a une vénérable tradition. Cette facette attire les producteurs dans l'industrie et entraîne les générations à emboîter le pas. Bien qu'il soit toujours bien d'honorer la tradition, il faut aussi pouvoir s'adapter aux changements. On dit souvent que le changement n'est jamais ni bon ni mauvais en soi, seulement inévitable. En tant que vétérinaires, nous avons aussi des traditions qui ont façonné notre profession. Il en revient à nous de faire en sorte que l'environnement de travail soit acceptable dans notre clinique. Il est important de s'assurer que notre clientèle

soit confortable en adoptant un état d'esprit qui nous permettra de leur offrir les services bénéfiques que nous pourrions. Le défi du praticien est d'offrir un service de grande qualité à sa clientèle et de recevoir en retour une compensation financière adéquate. Pour les vétérinaires d'animaux de consommation, il existe souvent une limite au prix que l'on peut demander en échange d'un service dictée par ce que ce service peut rajouter à la valeur de l'animal. Ainsi, pour pouvoir augmenter les revenus à la clinique, un vétérinaire doit donc soit servir plus de clients ou soit offrir d'autres types de service. En parallèle avec l'évolution de l'industrie du bœuf, les rôles que nous jouons comme vétérinaires dans l'industrie sont aussi appelés à changer. L'envergure et l'état d'esprit de nos clients changent de même que la démographie de la clientèle d'une clinique. Les cliniques devront peut-être faire affaire plus loin, s'appuyer sur la technologie, rivaliser avec d'autres sources de connaissance (réelles ou perçues) et avoir à offrir des services qui ne sont pas présentement disponibles. Les cliniques capables de s'adapter ainsi seront plus attrayantes pour les vétérinaires en quête d'emploi dans une clinique progressive comportant plusieurs docteurs.

Introduction

It is important to address quality practice from two fronts, not only molding clientele but molding your own business. As veterinarians, we are expected to provide certain services to producers. This often has been described as "fire engine" practice. Pulling calves, replacing prolapses, and routine herdwork can become mundane and lead practitioners to either leave practice or become dissatisfied with their lifestyle. Often the time it takes to provide these services leaves us little chance to guide these producers in other endeavors. In an effort to keep a working relationship with smaller producers, our practice has worked diligently to foster a relationship with them. We have developed management relationships with small stocker yard/starter yard clients by managing their herd health and feed data. Many smaller producers do not currently have a system in place to keep these records. Unlike a commercial feed yard that has a labor force to oversee large amounts of data, many of these operations consist of one or two people. There are also opportunities to help with heifer development in cow-calf herds or herds develop-

ing replacement heifers for resale. We have positioned ourselves to be able to help producers coordinate the development process in these animals. Small operations at times find it difficult to dedicate time to continuing education. By helping provide this opportunity you can increase the bond with the client while promoting your business and the opportunities that are offered.

Records Management—Stockersoft

The literature illustrates that veterinary involvement in the herd records program and management can be financially beneficial to the client.² White *et al* found that clinics spending more than 10% of their time on client record keeping showed significant financial gross increase year to year, compared to clinics that spent less than 10% of their time on this activity.¹ This is an area that can be added on the cow-calf and stocker side of practices. One service added for our calf clients is managing a database to track input cost and health records. This provides accurate treatment records, providing information on which animal has been treated, post-treatment intervals, as well as treatment histories that allow us to analyze the entire treatment program. Also provided to the client is a closeout report to evaluate the profit and loss of a pen, and the factors that influenced it (Tables 1 and 2).

It is often difficult to maintain a client-patient relationship with these types of clients, and this record keeping system provides a mechanism to have frequent interaction with a client that otherwise might use our services sparingly.

Heifer Development

Heifer development is a vital part of a cow-calf operation, and has become a marketing component for some beef operations. It is important to produce a quality end product independent of whether the producer intends to maintain ownership or sell a pregnant heifer. There are many steps to this end. We offer to our clients assistance with pre-artificial insemination, semen selection, artificial insemination, and pregnancy diagnosis. By promoting in our practice the importance of developing heifers and the advantages of artificial insemination, we have been able to increase the number of animals we put through these programs.

Continuing Education Meetings

Many smaller producers are tied to their operation due to lack of labor force. It is difficult for them to be

Table 1. Final Lot Closeout (entire lot).

Expenses	\$/lot	\$/hd	\$/lb gain
Feed cost	\$3,226.43	\$43.60	\$0.24
Yardage	\$2,640.50	\$35.68	\$0.19
Freight	\$200.00	\$2.70	\$0.01
Medicine	\$1,101.25	\$14.88	\$0.08
Processing	\$1,680.45	\$22.71	\$0.12
Interest	\$54.30	\$0.73	\$0.00
Tot exp	\$8,902.94	\$120.31	\$0.65
Income	\$/lot	\$/hd	\$/lb gain
Calf sales	\$45,440.00	\$614.05	\$95.95
- Calf cost	\$35,756.00	\$483.19	\$112.36
Gross inc.	\$9,684.00	\$130.86	
- Expenses	\$8,902.94	\$120.31	
= Net	\$781.06	\$10.55	

gone from the operation to get the education they would like, while at the same time it is more important than ever to educate our clients. As practices evolve into multiple doctor practices, the geographic area they service increases. A highly educated client is a must when dealing with clients that are a considerable distance from the clinic base. In my experience, producers are also much less likely to have emergency calls when coached correctly. This is illustrated by looking at the percent of emergency income derived from the top clients in a clinic. In our clinic, the top 50 clients account for 55% of income and the top 10 account for 36% of income. However, the top 10 account for only 5% of emergency calls, and the top 50 account for 28% of emergency work. This suggests clients that operate at a higher level have less emergency work, and it could be concluded that better educating clients may decrease the emergency workload.

Conclusions

The veterinarian should be one of the most knowledgeable people a producer comes in contact with. By offering services such as data management, heifer development, and continuing education meetings, a veterinarian can utilize this knowledge to maintain a better relationship with clients. With proper preparation, we can become part of the total management team in a beef operation.

Table 2. Stockersoft Cattle Co. Lot Closeout Summary for Lot: 112.

Lot number: 112			Description: Ohio/WV				Cattle sex: B	
Lot: 112 Calf entrance summary								
Date		Hd	Source		In wt (lb)		In \$/hd	In \$/grp
07/20		10	F & T		456		\$486.00	\$4,860.00
0723		64	Keo		426		\$482.75	\$30.896.00
112 Total:		74			430		\$483.19	\$35,756.00
Lot: 112 Calf disposition summary								
Date		Hd	Out to		Out wt (lb)		Out \$/hd	Out \$/grp
08/23		1					\$0.00	\$0.00
08/25		1	dead				\$0.00	\$0.00
09/12		1	dead				\$0.00	\$0.00
10/02		71	Feedyard A		640		\$640.00	\$45,440.00
112 Total:		74			640		\$614.05	\$45,440.00
Lot: 112 Feeding summary – all pens								
Pen	Start date	End date	Total DOF ^a	Hd	Avg DOF	Tot ydg ^b	Tot feed	Tot intr ^c
Hospital	08/17/09	10/02/09	210	21	10.0	\$103.95	\$125.05	\$13.11
Pen 2	07/20/09	10/02/09	5071	90	56.3	\$2,522.30	\$3,102.83	\$41.19
112 Total:	07/20/09	10/02/09	5281	111	47.6	\$2,626.25	\$3,226.43	\$54.30
^a DOF = days on feed								
^b Ydg = yardage fees								
^c Intr = interest								
Closed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
Performance								
Head days	5281	Ave in wt (lb)		430		Total COG ^a	\$0.65	
Avg DOF ^b	71	Avg out wt		640		Feed COG	\$0.24	
Lot ADG ^c	2.58	Avg gain		184		Morbidity	55.4%	
		Total gain		13620		Mortality	4.1%	
^a COG = cost of gain								
^b DOF = days-on-feed								
^c ADG = average daily gain								

References

1. White BJ, Brusk AM, Goehl DR: Professional services offered in rural, mixed-animal veterinary practices. *Online J Rural Res Policy* 5:1-8, 2010.

2. Wikse SE, McGrann JM, Herd DB, Falconer LL, Holland PS, Abello FJ, Rogers GM, Richardson DC, Yoder DR, Ramachandran S: Impact of the Texas beef partnership in extension program on profitability of beef cow-calf herds. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 225:210-220, 2004.



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PRODUCT
INFORMATION

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tence, diarrhea, decreased water consump-
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sociated with the use of florfenicol in cattle.
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