

# One - Man Mixed Practice

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Bob asked me to explain how I do practice work; how I do program work in my practice. I have a general practice in a small town and in Big Valley, California. He gave me six questions to answer. The first question was, "How did I get into herd work or program work?" I fell into it! I was called in and I worked strictly on a call basis for many years. Fortunately, I was working with well-educated, highly-intelligent people who didn't question my integrity and it was strictly on a call basis—either they called me or I went down on my own and provided all the drugs and vaccines, etc., on a 20% mark-up. This went along for probably 15 years without one account. I picked up another account a few years later on the same basis and we worked along on that for about five years and then they tried me on a program where they paid me so much a marketed animal and that didn't work—I felt too much responsibility and they hated to see me come! In 1968 I had a job about 100 miles away from home and went up there three or four times. Then I went to them and told them I would do it on a once-a-week, full-day, so many dollars on the full day basis, based on 10 hours and if I was gone from my office eight hours it would be the same and for 12 hours it would also be the same. On my other two accounts this worked so well that with them I switched to that as soon as I could, and I am doing that now. I purchase all drugs with no mark-up to myself; I'm strictly their purchasing agent. This, changing from being on call, even though there was a great deal of understanding both ways, took me from being slightly on one side of the fence right over and I'm part of the management now. There is no question ever and I look at myself as an assistant manager and a consulting veterinarian.

What other preparations did I do to get into this work? Well, I have a cattle background and I was in a small animal practice for a year and that was enough! How do programs work into my emergency work and other parts of my practice? My other practice is a large animal one—about half dairy and half feedlot and then I am a small animal practitioner too. The only thing that ever suffers is my small animal work and that is why I am in the program work—to get away from the small animals! Financially, my income is about the same

year after year because if I lose a large feedlot because they have sold or quit me or some other reason, the small animal practice takes up the gap and I go and find another feedlot. The dairy stays practically the same. The emergencies and the other parts of my practice are very well taken care of by an excellent office girl. She is capable of separating the true emergency from the make-believe emergency and finding out the importance of the different calls and programming them. There are very, very few emergencies any more. She knows the people and also, a colleague in a neighboring town has worked with me for 15 years or longer and he covers any honest emergency for me. I pay him and I charge my account—I pay for the trip to my town which works out fine.

Another one of his questions was, "How do I charge?" It is done on an hourly basis to take care of extra work that I do and also the miles. I do not charge by the mile because I do not have a commercial pilot's license and I fly on some of my work and keeping track of miles is too hair-raising!

I do feedlot work on a program basis because there is no other way to do it. I think my job is to make them money, so I have to go into all phases of the feedlot industry. All problems end up in the hospital whether they are employee problems, poorly designed pen problems, or etc., so I have to look at the whole situation and the only way to do that is on a program. My feedlots are small; they are only five to 15,000 head and so the 5,000 one I can take care of very nicely on the half-day a week—the others have to be about a day a week on a 10-hour day.

My major problems are communications and an ability to educate. You have to be a teacher—you have to teach them everything constantly and then have the ability to deal with the personnel. You probably have heard many times that there is the veterinarian, the management and the head cowboy in between. A good head cowboy can make the veterinarian and management look very, very good. In the area of communication my most successful work is done in a lot where I spend at least half my time visiting with the management, sitting in his office or riding in his car visiting with him. It staggers me that you have to be constantly

repeating how to pass a stomach tube or how to give an I.V. injection. That is one thing I heard at Denver: a great deal of criticism when veterinarians have to teach lay people to do some of these routine surgeries. In our country where there are so

many cattle, a veterinarian could not possibly do it all—they do everything and we could not take the time to do it all. Our time is too valuable to the company.

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## “Pet” Beef Cattle Practice

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I feel like a sheepman among cattlemen here this afternoon in talking about a topic such as “Pet” Beef Cattle Practice. I might as well have called it pleasure cow practice and I will not apologize but I will explain how I happened to come upon the assignment. Last year in a “bull session” with Dr. Harrington and a few others about practice concepts and directions about bovine practice, I made the remark that I had not heard much said in recent years about “pet” beef cattle practice as a replacement for the old backyard milk cow and that I thought it had potential for the bovine practitioner so I am here to talk about it! Let me say that this year in the United States about 25 million cattle of all breeds and mixtures of breeds will be finished in the nation’s feedyards. What is the potential to bovine practice of the giant feedlot where probably 60% or so of these 25 million feeder cattle are being finished this year? Have we now 100 veterinarians who devote themselves full time to feedlot practice? What is the potential of the large ranch herds? How many veterinarians are involved with them? I do not know. I know that of the approximately 40 million beef calves born this year in the United States, less than half are produced by commercial cattlemen—the commercial breeder of sufficient size to be a legitimate target for planned herd health programs for our professional consideration. More than half are produced by small herd owners; people who are in the beef production business for “pin” money. Perhaps the small beef herd is largely replacing the small chicken flock as the “pin” money producer for the small farmer so that is one potential that is still in existence—the old traditional small herd work. Another has appeared within the last decade or so which came to my attention without my really realizing it. The people

seeking help in bovine practice in my area were small herd owners whose primary interest in agriculture might have been the desire “to get away from it all” and the great outdoors: the city dweller who loved the country. Here was an entirely different breed of clan from the part-time cowboy farmer whose pride was hurt when he had to admit that his cow doctoring was not getting the job done and only called me when certain failure was no longer avoidable. In recent years there has been an exodus of affluent people from cities, people with ancestral roots in a rural environment and a strong motivation back toward the basic values - people buying small tracts of expensive land and building at least weekend hideaways on them. A few pleasure horses will not help to defray the costs or pay the taxes but a few cattle might! One such individual that I heard about recently bought a small farm and 10 heifers and waited for them to calf. He waited and waited, and then a friendly neighbor told him what he really needed was a bull so he traded the 10 heifers for one! These people do need help and much more to the point, they are demanding it and they are ready and willing to pay for it. No doubt, they do have as much right to it as the pleasure horse owner. No doubt either that their insignificant economy of size does not disqualify them from herd health programming. As a matter of fact, in my practice, it has been a rare occasion that I have made a fire engine call that I have not found the opportunity to turn the lesson in one way or another to herd health advantage. I think maybe even 20 or 25 years ago I was practicing herd health management before I had ever heard the term. Back to the point, these people have a justifiable interest in the economic performance of their small herds, however limited. They have the intelligence to seek