

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND PROJECTIONS OF MANPOWER
NEEDS IN DAIRY PRACTICE

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The future of dairy practice is a bright one, however it will have a significantly different emphasis than it currently does. There will always be a place for practitioners that are willing to give value for service. Dairy practices will continue to need graduates that are willing to work. By its very nature, our work is reflective of the industry we serve. As a rule, we will find ourselves working longer hours when compared to those in other discipline areas of veterinary medicine. It has been my observation that all of the successful practitioners that I know in dairy practice work very long hours, mirroring the labor of the clients they serve. With this as a given, then what directions will practitioners of the future be taking?

It is this author's opinion that our future work will involve significantly more cerebral effort. Clients will be more aware of the need for both goods and services to be cost effective. If they are not, then we had all better hope they have a significant outside source of income to sustain their operations! Much of North American agriculture is going to continue be influenced by politics. While no one can predict the future of the general agreement on tariffs and trade (GATT), it is highly probable that we will see decreased agricultural political influence for obtaining subsidies and an increasing emphasis on free market forces determining prices. In turn, this will affect the prices our clients will receive for meat and dairy products. We will see these commodity prices continue to lag behind other production cost increases. Subsequently, the historical trend for a continuing exodus of the farm population will continue unabated. Other pressures will influence animal agricultural enterprises as well. Concerns by animal activist, environmental and consumer groups over animal production techniques, waste disposal, land useage, chemical and pharmaceutical useage and food safety all will significantly influence our relationship with clients and emphasis on performance programs for their herds. I believe that farming enterprises will shift significantly to two categories: 1. "hobby" farms where an outside source of income subsidizes the cattle enterprise and 2. "professional" farms where hard decisions are made based on sound business principles. The former operation will present a dilemma for most real dairy practitioners. The hobby operations are most in need of good basic husbandry practices and severely deficient at effectively addressing any of them. Often our greatest successes as well as our most abysmal failures come from such enterprises. It is my opinion that as a profession we will always be perceived as deficient in meeting the needs of this segment of animal agriculture.

Let us address the second area then which I feel does hold a bright future for the dairy practitioner. There will be a trend to larger and larger production units, however the bottom line

criteria will be PROFITABLE units. Increasingly, we are being called on to expand our professional horizons to advise clients on all manner of factors that influence the enterprises' profitability. We mustn't be so myopic as to only view clinical disease as our primary professional focus. We must continually be developing skills in areas which our clientele are most likely to use us as the resource person. So, what will we be doing as practitioners in the future to address these needs? We will be offering more and more management type services and honing our analytical skills. We will be increasingly called on to participate in or offer management advice in order to impact the particular operations' bottom line...PROFIT.

As a matter of practicality, our training will require all of the traditional skills we develop in our basic veterinary school curricula, i.e. internal medicine, surgery, pharmacology, epidemiology, etc. Additionally, as we gain our clients confidence in our competency, we will be called on to address the impacts of management decisions and other significant influences on the profitability of the enterprise. No one practitioner can be realistically expected to have expertise in all facets of an operation, indeed we all have esoteric interests and skills which can be expanded on and integrated into our practice activities. Examples of non-traditional areas that hold great promise for our profession are personnell management and training, facilities, design, feed delivery mechanisms, waste management, inventory control, alternative commodity marketing strategies and many many more.

It is my opinion that we are seeing the origins of these practices now with a number of veterinarians developing specialty skills and services that they perform for clients or offer as consulting arrangements with other practices. Current endeavors include personnel training and motivation, nutritional consulting, quality milk programs, repacement heifer programs, and epidemiology consultation. I believe that there will be a significant effort on the part of practitioners to develop these and other skills subsequent to graduation in order to meet the increasingly sophisticated demands of clients. As important as developing post graduate specialty skills is the need to have the cognitive skills for problem identification and subsequent enlistment of specialized personnel capable of problem solving. Despite our best efforts, we will never be able to be all things to all clients, however the ability to see a problem and to enlist the appropriate help to address it will be the true mark of the skilled practitoner of the future. We must be able to acknowledge our individual capabilities and limits. Our DVM degree is truly a learners permit and the most sucessful members of our profession have demonstrated again and again that our education and hard, dedicated work is a lifelong proposition filled with significant frustration and ample rewards for those who choose to make the most of it.