

# How I See the Future of Food Animal Practice

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Compared to when I started practice, I feel there are more opportunities now than ever before if we are willing to accept the changes that are occurring in the industries we serve.

We are dealing with many producers that are much more sophisticated and more importantly more specialized in livestock production. Each cattle cycle eliminates the less efficient and the survivors are the more elite group.

We have to accept more responsibility for herd health maintenance and transfer more responsibility for individual animal care to the producer without losing quality care.

Years ago I recognized that a practice based on individual animal care was not profitable for either me or my client. Client education was the key to bring up the awareness of what veterinary medicine can do for him as well as training him in basic individual animal care. Properly handled, individual animal care improves under this scheme.

If you haven't read *Megatrends* you should. I believe a lot of what is expressed in this book. We are in the information era and we practitioners are in the information dissemination business. We should also be actively involved in the information generation.

*Megatrends* states that we are doubling our scientific technology every 5½ years and that this will accelerate to 40% annually shortly. If we think we are getting behind now, wait till this pace hits us!

A couple of years ago the National Cattlemen's Association (NCA) sponsored a survey regarding technology utilization. This survey concluded that the poultry industry utilizes over 90% of their available technology, swine producers over 70%, and cow-calf producers under 50%. This is probably open to debate; possibly we are generating useless technology more in cattle research. However, I feel that we have not presented our portion of the technology well enough or have not had enough attention from the cattle industry.

**Now if the economic stress doesn't get the cattle industry's attention, we'll never get it.**

**I'm not saying that bovine practice will ever be a desk job; I'm sure it will always be a lot of hard physical work, but our future has to include a means of sorting out the usable new technology and turning it to profit for us and our clients.**

For the most part I think we are already doing a good job in the field, contrary to what some academicians and many governmental bureaucrats say. We practitioners are doing a good job and as our members are growing we will do much better.

Most of our clients rarely have a one on one contact with any specialist other than their veterinarian. This means that

we need to not only provide our own expertise but also serve as a catalyst to encourage contacts with other specialists when needed.

In my span of practice years, I have seen a tremendous change in how I make my living. Most of my time now is spent doing things that didn't exist or at least were not accepted when I started practice. For example, pregnancy palpation, semen testing, prewean processing, consultation, pelvic evaluation, estrus synchronization and vaginal spaying, just to name a few.

Our performance in the future will depend to some degree on how well we keep up with advancing technology and the changes occurring in the livestock industry, but when you look at the national averages on percent marketable calves and the disease costs, there is a lot more that we should be doing with tools that we have now.

I have a number of herds that have had 93 to 95% marketable calves based on per 100 cows the bulls are turned with. I also have clients that seem to run closer to 85%. Surely we have a future when you look at the numbers—large numbers of herds are under little or no care.

**During the recent bad times in the beef business I have been very busy. My best clients are the people who have been working harder to become more efficient.**

The more conscious cattlemen become of the value of increased efficiency, the better the utilization of our services will be. We should come close to 15:1 return for a cow-calf producer. To do this we have to be very involved with a solid well planned program. A now and then effort won't hold up. Very few other investments will even come close to us. We should show this to not only the cattlemen but their bankers.

I'm sure the recent decline in cattle numbers had a profound effect on some areas more than others. It appears to me that we have a couple of major negative factors that could affect our future. One is a decline in cattle numbers and the other is the ever present threat of taking drugs away from us.

**For some agency to require new efficacy data on products that we dumb practitioners have been using effectively for 30 years tells us how much confidence that agency has in practitioners. We have lost a high percent of the drugs we used to use and if this trend continues it might affect our future.**

It bothers me, and it should bother all of us, that much of the adverse publicity that the cattle industry receives by the news media involves veterinary medicine. We need to demand that the criticism of accepted products and procedures be based on good science. The fact is that the

cattle industry only uses drugs after they have been cleared and should not be condemned for this use.

When an effort is made to discredit a proven, accepted veterinary product by orchestrating a media blitz, we as bovine practitioners are involved and need to react. The present attack on bacterial antibiotics resistance involves every one of us. The early result is eroding the confidence of the consumer in beef. The end result will affect our future.

I'm proud of this organization's activity and the cooperative programs with NCA. These activities with NCA are very beneficial to both groups and place us practitioners in a very favorable light with our clients.

As practitioners we must be involved with the cattle industry organizations. It serves both the industry and our profession to be involved with policy formulation rather than finding ourselves trying to change or conform with policy that we don't find compatible. I find that these industry people really appreciate the help and that basically our interests are all the same. We practitioners are such a minority serving such a minority that this will be an important factor in our future.

**We need to demand and support a more appropriate**

**emphasis on bovine medicine in our veterinary schools. As the cattle industry becomes more complex our training programs must keep up. If food animal practice is to progress we need more, not less clinical training and experience in an academic environment.**

Our future will also be improved and more productive if the efforts at continuing education are accelerated. Continuing education is an individual's responsibility, however, the opportunity must be available. The AABP programs are outstanding but we need more access for the individual practitioner to indepth information all year long. I think the future of food animal practice is full of opportunities, but I think we are much like the industry we serve. The beef industry never felt they had to sell their product; we need to sell our product.

**Over the years our profession was going to die for one reason or another and we always managed to grow. Now that very growth is supposed to be our problem. We will expand our involvement and impact as our numbers grow. Food animal medicine is the most noble part of the profession and will of necessity survive and thrive.**