

Cow - Calf Split Session

Dr. Edward Shacklady, *presiding*

The Future Use of Computers in Practice

Jay R. Brown, D.V.M.
Beef Cattle Extension Veterinarian
University of Illinois
College of Veterinary Medicine
Urbana, IL

Since this presentation is given in the cow/calf section, I will try to address my views and visions to the use of computers in beef cattle cow/calf practice.

I believe the practitioners here today can be grouped into various categories as far as their exposure to computers in their practices. First some of you have no exposure, but may be thinking about their use. Second, some have a computer but are using it only for clerical and bookkeeping chores. I have been in some practices where the computer is sitting in the corner collecting dust. Third, some of you have a computer and are actively using it and looking for new ways to make it serve you.

To look to the future for those of you who do not have a computer, I would like to relate my experiences utilizing computers in the cow/calf area with herds we serve through the University of Illinois extension service and College of Veterinary Medicine.

First, decide what you want to do with the computer before you buy anything. (Software and hardware). Second, find available software or programs that will do what you want to do before buying any machine (hardware). Third, there are a lot of what I term "Mickey Mouse Programs", which in my opinion are worthless - a pencil and paper would be handier. Next, once these steps have been accomplished, one should then realize the fact the computer will take extra labor and time at first, just to get it rolling. Once you have gained these insights into the use of the computer and have taken the step to purchase one, here are some of the future uses you may want to consider.

Development of reproductive and nutritional programs for your clients which you can charge for if you can sell them on the fact these programs will indeed increase their net income.

Also data analysis, you will not be into research but you may wish to use the computer to analyze data on your clients production and on your own clinic production to see if your recommendations/treatments are indeed having the effect you want.

In visiting practices which have worked at implementing such computer programs, they report an increase in practice income and increased efficiency in such areas as inventory control, recalls/reminders and getting new information to their clients through newsletters.

Many of you are aware the average cow herd in the U.S. is under 50 cows. I believe one future use for the computer in your practice will be the keeping of records for your clients. This service will enable them to provide needed information to their lending institutions for continued financing. This information will also allow all parties to make logical decisions on how to make this part of the total operation profitable.

Now to move on to my thoughts on the future for those of you looking for new applications of your existing computers. As Dr. Ed Sterner mentioned in the advanced computer seminar a few days ago, the only limitations to the use of the computer in practice are the limits on one's imagination.

Some new uses which are available today which you may be unfamiliar with are the following:

Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine has a database which covers over 5000 diseases which is available to any veterinarian with a computer terminal and a 1200 baud modem. The program is called **Consultant**. Once you get hooked up, you can type in the symptoms you are seeing in the herd or individual cow and a list of differentials will be displayed. Also information on a specific disease or condition can then be displayed if desired and even information on the best diagnostic test or technique can be obtained. If you have printing capabilities, all this information can be printed for your future reference.

The Ag Net System is an older database covering economic and nutritional programs which also can be called up and displayed at your terminal if the modem system is available.

I believe it is only a matter of time before a computer based system is available whereby we implant our brood

cows with small electronic devices which can measure certain body chemistries or parameters and send this information to our computer on a daily basis. Each day we could receive a print out of which cows are closest to calving, which cows are border line for grass tetany, or even which cows have conceived and which cows have not. The same scenario may be envisioned for our calves on the cow or in the weaning lot. These sensors could give a daily printout of which calves temperatures are excessively high, which calves are not eating, the ideas can be endless.

I thing it is only a matter of time before our practice vehicles will be equipped with the capabilities to hook up with a main frame such as the Cornell Consultant direct through a cellular telephone modem. This will help with on-farm or ranch diagnosis, or at least aid us in deciding which samples to take for future laboratory testing.

We are truly in the informational age. The computer is a tool which can store and manipulate vast amounts of information. Our clients of the future will demand this information from some source. I would hope we will be the source to supply them with this information and service.

Currently at the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine and Cooperative Extension Service, programs are being developed in the following areas:

A statewide program to keep track of all calves pre-conditioned. Each county extension office will eventually have PC computer capabilities. Any calves pre-conditioned in this county will be recorded on the computer, sent to the campus main program. This listing would then be available to feeding counties via a telephone call modem and their PC. This program I envision could be accomplished nationwide in the future.

Computer based continuing education programs for the practitioner are also on line as well as programs for extension education of beef producers.

Many practitioners as well as myself have questioned how is the veterinarian going to get paid for this computer service? This is a legitimate question, but I believe it all goes back to sales. If I may preach just a little, it is my opinion the food animal-beef practitioner is an agri-businessman as well as a doctor of veterinary medicine. All other segments of agribusiness utilize the powers of sales to move their products. We too, if we desire success in the merchandising preventative medicine, herd health and particularly the computerized versions of these areas of veterinary medicine, must sell our product which is basically professional veterinary service.

