

# Cow-Calf Session

Dr. Russ Benson, Chairman

## Producer-Veterinarian Relationship

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Thank you very much. This makes the second time today I have been introduced, and I am impressed with what was said. The introduction was not totally accurate. It is my fault. I have been purged. I have been caught in the purge of Washington, D.C., in that when they purged most of the advisory committees, the cattle industry advisory committee no longer exists. We were kicked out last spring and the U.S. Department of Labor Agriculture Advisory Committee was kicked out about a month ago. They decided they didn't need us. I don't think they liked our advice. Especially the Department of Labor. We offered some recommendations that did not quite comply with some of the ideas the OCEA thought was proper. When we suggested it was hard to put a toilet in the Rocky Mountains at 14,000 feet, they did not understand that so they decided the best way to get rid of that was to get rid of us. Which they did, so I am no longer on these two advisory committees. It was a nice experience, and I was a full-fledged bureaucrat. They pay all of your expenses and \$100 a day while you are working, which is not too bad, so I was sorry to see that one go.

I really don't know what I am going to talk about this afternoon. I am supposed to speak about producer-veterinarian relationships. That is one that has been kicked around a long time, as you well know. Some of it is good and some of it bad. We have come from the old "horse doctor" days (anyone without qualifications with the right kind of suave) to where we now have full-fledged, highly-trained people to look after the health of the nation's livestock. I have participated in the survey that the AVMA did, and I was interviewed last spring. I will tell you what I told them relating to this relationship. As you look at the veterinary profession and the need for veterinarians, we in the cattle industry do not see a real shortage of veterinarians. We think there are enough.

The basic problem is distribution. I am not telling you anything you do not already know. Many areas have plenty of veterinarians. Other areas, four or five large county areas in Colorado, for example, do not have any. The problem is one of distribution more than anything else. Of course, the competition comes from small animals related to large animal practice and I don't have to tell you about that.

Many of the veterinarians come from large high schools without any rural background, and they have a communication problem and an adjustment to make as it relates to large animal practice in dealing

with agriculture people. So, these things are more of a problem today than the number of veterinarians. I will not talk about small animal versus large animal practices. My veterinarian and I have worked out a very good relationship. When I need him, he comes and he charges me and I usually pay. Frankly, it is not a good relationship and that is what I want to spend a few minutes talking about. The concept of calling your veterinarian when you need help is a bad practice in my opinion because when I call him it is usually three days too late. I am sure that is the way most of your clients do things.

When the veterinarian gets out there the cow already has rigor mortis, and the owner says, "Well, she was just a little puny last night." That is the way it often happens in the cow-calf segment of the industry.

Veterinarians related to the large animal practice, bovine specifically, will increase in the future regardless of what I have said this morning. Whether we increase our cow herds or not, he will increase. There is a question as to whether we are headed for larger units in the cow-calf industry or smaller units.

It seems to me that you need to develop a very close relationship with professional cattlemen. The fellow that is in it on a full-time basis. That brings me to what I consider the most important point. I am not giving you any new ideas but maybe a little different twist to preventive herd care. The very big answer for the bovine practitioner is to develop a total health care program for cow herds. You do not have to have a large cow herd to make that practical. Right now there are some problems related to it. It is my understanding, especially in the veterinary schools, that there is very little emphasis on health management programs related to a total herd plan, and that seems to be the area that should be emphasized.

There is always a problem related to fees. I was talking with a cattleman this morning who is chairman of the animal health committee for the National Cattle Association, and he and I agree. It is pretty tough for a cowman when he can't go to the bank and pay any interest, to look at your fees and not consider that you should lower your fees when we are having trouble. You know that will not work, and I do, too. Your costs go up as well as ours. Somehow we have to work out a fee arrangement and structure that is both practical for the veterinarian and practical for the cowman to make this kind of a concept work.

Then, the biggest job for the veterinarians and the industry leadership is to develop an education program for cattlemen. Not every cattleman con-

siders a total herd plan as anything that is very viable for him. That is the most important thing from his production viewpoint. Efficiency is the name of the game today. Management is the name of the game. Unless you have a healthy herd of cattle, your efficiency is rather low. So, consequently, we have to work together to educate the cowman that this is a plan for him that will work. With the proper fee structure and the proper arrangement of the fee, I believe it is a practical thing to talk about.

I am told that your ethics are such that you cannot go out and promote this concept, but I think your organizations might. I believe the cattlemen of the country, especially the organizations that support and work for it, would work with you on this kind of an idea to try to develop it with the cattlemen. The feedlot industry has pretty well done it. They have a health care plan with consulting veterinarians that are out there fairly frequently, developing plans and working on their problems. The cow-calf industry needs to move into this.

Unfortunately, most of the veterinarians I know who work in bovine practice are really nothing more than technicians. My own veterinarian, who has a fairly large practice at home, has a two-doctor practice and ought to have four. He still continues to do jobs that any high school kid could do. A lot of people hire him to come out to vaccinate and dehorn or castrate, and that is ridiculous. The answer lies in a paratechnician. Each one of you could spread yourself so much further if you had people who were trained to do this kind of work. They could do a lot of the herd visiting and troubleshooting. You could develop the herd plan, for example, but the fellow you send out to see if the plan is operating properly could be someone a lot less trained than you. You could be the man that takes the specialty problems, the diagnosis, and the actual treatment of problems that do develop and utilize this individual to do a lot of the work you are doing today.

You could enlarge your practices and solve the distribution problems we have today, plus make it practical for a cow-herd operator to afford you. It is so easy an answer and why it has not become a reality I do not understand. That, to me, is the real secret as I look forward to the future of operating with a veterinarian and cattleman, trying to make something work. If all of these government regulations come in like the one they talked about this morning related to prescription use on antibiotics, and that is just a start, we are looking at a total control of all animal health products. It will be impossible for you, as veterinarians, to even start to take care of the problems of the future by yourselves. To give you an example, I buy a lot of these little calves that come out of east Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi—I don't know how many but those that have lived there understand it. People bring in cattle down there to a little auction sale. I have seen them in the back seat of a car, one calf. You will see little pickup trucks and cars with a little two-wheel truck

on the back lined up for blocks in the morning to unload their calves. They finally get to the sale barn and unload. They just put them in pens and cram them together. The little calves will stand there all day and bawl as they were just jerked off their mothers. They will expose themselves to all kinds of things, not considering the stress. They stand there all day long without feed or water and finally go through the auction with a lot of whips popping. Finally, that evening, after they are sold, they are loaded on a diesel truck and they come to Fort Cobb, Okla. When we unload them at our corral, they come off that truck and right across their foreheads you can see the letters "DEAD."

Without the use of antibiotics and other products like this, I am out of business as far as the wheat-grazing program is concerned. If I had a close connection with a veterinarian related to the total health care of my herd, I think I could be a lot more successful. I would like to see my veterinarian involved too in my nutrition program. We were talking today at lunch and it was a surprise to me that veterinarians did not have better nutrition training. I am told that they really do not have much. Just a basic course or so. It seems to me that if you are involved in a total health care plan and a total herd plan, you better know something about nutrition, too. In our veterinary schools, we need to emphasize this because much of health is involved with what they eat, how they eat it, and when they eat it.

It seems to me that the AVMA could promote this concept very easily. Your own organization could promote it. We might try to seek some federal grants to go to veterinary schools to emphasize and develop this herd care plan. I know our organization that I've been involved with would be tickled to death to work with and assist in this manner and try to help get such a program through the bureaucracy or Congress and help in educating the cattle industry of the value of such a plan. The concept of a total herd plan with paratechnicians to do it under your supervision and with a total cooperation with cowmen, I think, can be done. I believe we can improve the health of the nation's cattle herd by untold percentage. It is something that if we don't do it, problems will get worse instead of better. We are seeing and will see less and less emphasis on new products. It is almost impossible to get a new one through FDA now. One example of this is Rumensin. They have used it in feedlots for some time and yet it is almost an impossibility to get it through FDA for forage use. That seems totally ridiculous. It has been proven a safe product and I am not promoting that product. But, why does it take about 7 million dollars to produce one new product for the animal industry? Well, if we are not going to have any more products, and certainly fewer, if they are correct in what they are trying to do in limiting the use of antibiotics because of the transfer process they keep talking about, we will have to do a lot of things in prevention rather than correction.