

Benefits of using LVTs/assistants in food animal medicine

Blake Aiton, DVM
Mandan, ND 58554

Abstract

The use of veterinary technicians or veterinary assistants in food animal medicine, especially cow-calf medicine, is highly underutilized, and is an area that should be more thoroughly explored. Often, bovine veterinarians bring no help for chute side activities such as bangs vaccinating, pregnancy diagnosis, ultrasound, breeding soundness exams, and routine vaccination of cattle. A very obvious benefit to bringing a technician to the field is increased efficiency of work, as most procedures at the chute are often where activities take place that ultimately decrease pace. That being said, many other benefits of bringing trained help often go unrecognized, such as quality of chute side activities, increased client/clinic relationship, and most importantly, value-added services. With the rise in lay people diagnosing pregnancies and conducting breeding soundness exams, adding perceived value is crucial in maintaining high-value services in your clinic, as well as separating ourselves from the lay person.

Key words: technician, value-added, efficiency

During busy seasons of the year, we, as veterinarians, have full schedules and feel there are not enough minutes in the day to complete the jobs laid before us. A very common time of year for cow-calf veterinarians to feel this pinch is during our preg checking season. During the peak of my personal season, our clinic may preg check upward of 1,500 head per week. Knowing that, we have found ways to become as efficient as possible. We have implemented many strategies to help with efficiency, one of which is employing the help of technicians. Once a technician is trained, I have enjoyed having my set up and tear down of equipment time cut in half. We typically set up a hydraulic chute, organize vaccines and pour-on products, and have record keeping systems in place for the clients to keep. Utilizing a technician has made this process go more quickly and smoothly. While processing cattle, my technicians handle vaccine, pour-ons, or handle chute side paperwork for record keeping. During the 2022 ultrasound, I found that having a single technician immensely increased the speed in which I completed a very similar task. Day 1 (no technician), we ultrasounded 168 hd in 200 minutes, or 0.93 hd/min. Day 2, with 1 technician, we ultrasounded 111 hd in 85 minutes, or 1.3 hd/min. While obvious differences existed in the ranches and all variables could not be accounted for, the efficiency with having a technician chute side rose nearly 40%. The technician was responsible for vaccine handling and pour-on application. If we could gain that 40% efficiency throughout the whole year, we are able to gain much more time during our precious days.

Along with efficiency, another area where technicians greatly improve cow-calf work is the quality of the work they do. Because they are trained and strictly monitored, all of my employees are excellent at handling vaccines, efficient at changing pour-on, they record cow numbers with appropriate information, and communicate well chute side. Too often when vaccines are left to producers, they will use dirty syringe guns, bent and dull needles, dirty needles in clean bottles, store vaccine in direct sunlight, waste enormous amounts of vaccine and pour-on, and be all around inefficient at handling chute side processes. I would stake my reputation on the quality of the job that my employees do while chute side.

Clients also enjoy seeing friendly familiar faces during cattle work. Many times when we are very busy behind the cow, chute side communication with the client can be difficult. Many of my technicians have garnished good reputations with clients, and that benefits our clinic in the long run.

Arguably the most important factor of utilizing veterinary technicians during bovine work is the perceived value added. In my area, there are currently many lay persons pregnancy testing, ultrasounding and performing breeding soundness exams on bulls, often times at lower prices than we can offer. So how do we as veterinarians combat this issue? I would contend that giving the highest value for their dollar is the best way to go about that. Aside from having good equipment, my clients can count on me to bring knowledgeable, professional, efficient, friendly help. My clients enjoy cattle processing that is quick, quiet and of the highest quality when they employ me and my staff. I would challenge any lay person to bring to the table what we do as a clinic.

Technicians who wish to join veterinarians in the field need to be well trained for the tasks at hand. Often, the best way to train technicians is to bring them afield and have them perform duties. While slow at first, practice will eventually yield high-quality work. Vaccine handling, proper cattle handling, data management and client communication are all skills that need to be honed by the technician to offer high-quality assistance chute side.

Conclusion

Bringing technicians to the field will greatly improve efficiency chute side, and add perceived value to your work. I would encourage all veterinarians to look into employing the help of technicians for differentiating ourselves from lay people who perform similar tasks.

