

The Veterinarian's Role in the Last 30 Years of A.I.

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Members of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to appear here today to discuss the veterinarian's role in the last 30 years of A.I. I told my wife that I had been asked to appear on the program and she asked how long it had been since I had appeared on a convention program. I said it had been about two years and she said she supposed it took that long for them to forget.

The experience I have acquired in A.I. in the past 30 years has been mostly in the State of Iowa and it gives me a great deal of pleasure to come back to this part of the United States even with the chill factor as it is today! I first became interested in A.I. in 1941 as an adjunct to my practice. There was quite a bit of discussion among veterinarians at that time and I was asked to appear on several area programs to discuss the A.I. program but not much interest was generated. Most of the veterinarians in Iowa were doing well in their swine practice and were not too anxious to venture into this new field. I was not too well established in my practice and needed some additional income. I was hungry! We started out as a small cooperative but soon changed to a privately owned stock, servicing cooperative members. As we extended into newer areas on a direct basis, we were stopped by the dairy husbandry extension head at Iowa State College who made an arrangement with the pure-bred dairy cattlemen's association that no calves could be registered except those that had been bred through a cooperative. This was a state regulation and not a national one. We soon learned to handle the situation by setting up cooperative boards in each county and contracting to service them. We were going to operate regardless of regulations which they put through—we got along quite well without further hindrance. In fact, the dairy husbandry extension people were of great help in furthering the welfare program. This early period I believe would have been a good time for the veterinary profession to become involved if it had so desired. We had our problems in the early days and fertility was one of them. The dairy men who had used a bull and had not recorded the

times a cow was bred were unhappy in many cases when they saw on their A.I. chart that some of the cows had to be bred two or three times and some even more. The dairyman who had kept records on his cows were generally well satisfied. Problems of reproduction were not as well understood by the veterinarian of 30 years ago as they are by the average practitioner today. There were exceptions, of course, among the veterinarians at that time. Some did acquaint themselves with the problems and did a real fine job. A stock answer by some of the veterinarians, however, who were called to examine or treat a cow that had not been given three inseminations was get a bull or wait until she gets out on grass in the spring and she'll probably settle!

There were some veterinarians who handled the problems in a professional manner but there were not enough. Today, with advanced training in the field of sterility and in the continuing education short courses given in this field, the average practitioner is well-equipped to meet the needs of the herd owner. I believe that this is the role of the veterinarian today in the A.I. field—doing the actual insemination work is a waste of his time and talent. Some veterinarians did enter the A.I. field and trained lay personnel to do the insemination work. Some of them continued in this manner but not many, and looking back over the years, I would say that the veterinary profession should have started prior to 20 years ago if it had desired to be more active in A.I. The picture has changed so rapidly since that time that the professional, without having been pretty well established prior to this time, would not have influenced or changed the course of events. The privately-owned companies and cooperatives in the field have grown rapidly and are doing a relatively good job of taking care of the needs of the industry. The companies, subsidiaries, wealthy corporations and the cooperatives, who are well financed, are very competitive. They compete for the important tools of the business, namely, the sires, and compete for business, the sales. A great deal of wealth is needed to enter the field on a large scale today. I

understand that there are some with unlimited capital that do plan to enter. While most of the insemination work was done by professional technicians until recently, we are now seeing a continuing change in this respect. Although perhaps the majority of the cows are still being inseminated by professionals, an ever increasing number is being inseminated by the herd owner. Generally, they are doing a good job. Sometimes better than the professional whose business often grew too large to handle the work satisfactorily. I think this happened in the more sparsely populated cattle areas. In the more densely populated cattle areas, it is easier to divide or shift areas around so that they can be properly handled by the professional technician. Most A.I. businesses are now conducting "do it yourself" short courses. I am sure most A.I. work will be done in this manner in the future. There may be those in the more densely populated cattle areas that will disagree. In many areas the technicians have become suppliers for their previous customers who have started to inseminate their own cows. As I see it, the veterinarian will continue to have the important role of advising the herd owner and caring for the fertility problems that arise.

To do the best job, the veterinarian should acquaint himself thoroughly with the procedures used in A.I. (in the A.I. program). He should make it his business to be on top of all phases of A.I. and it will take some studying to do this. The most successful dairy operations I am acquainted with have a contract with the veterinarian to call once each month and check their herd. The cows that have been bred are checked for pregnancy; cows that have not been bred are checked to see if they

are in shape to be bred; those that need treatment are treated; calves are vaccinated and everything in the veterinary line is looked after on this trip. Emergency calls between the contract calls are charged for on a per call basis. The veterinarian is well paid for his contract work and the herd owner is well satisfied. One herd owner told me the money he spent for his veterinarian's periodic calls was the best money he spent in his dairy operation. He maintains a good breeding efficiency, his incidence of mastitis is far less than it was previously and his records are in far better shape. He was most enthusiastic about this type of veterinary service. I believe this is the role of the veterinarian in the A.I. program today. I would suggest that interested veterinarians take a short course that is given to laymen, if for no other reason than seeing what the herd owner is being taught. It helps to understand the entire program. He should acquaint himself with the examination of processed semen—it is entirely different from fertility checking and it should be understood in order to advise the herd owner. I know that there are many of you who know all the things I have mentioned but I also know there are many who do not. I have checked semen that looked very good to me that a veterinarian had said was very poor. He had been used to checking only raw semen. It is always easy to blame infertility on semen—in some cases it may be true but it should only be blamed where it is warranted.

In conclusion I would like to say that the veterinarian, although not actually in the A.I. work, is the most important factor in the reproductive efficiency of our cattle industry. It has been a pleasure to appear here.

Veterinarians and the Present Status of Artificial Insemination (AI)

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Some statistical background as to the trends in production of milk and of the dairy and the beef cow populations is essential to an understanding by veterinarians of the present status of AI:

1. **Production of Milk and the Dairy and the Beef Cattle Populations.***—In the U.S.A. in 1971, the total production of milk was approximately

**Detailed statistical data available upon request from the author.*