

Why Veterinary Consultants? (Feedlot Section)

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What I Believe as a Philosophy of Veterinary Consultant

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A short time ago I saw a little prayer that might apply to what I am about to say about consulting practices. It went something like this: "God, give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Large animal practice could use more change, particularly in the consulting area. During the past few years, veterinary medicine, in relation to livestock operations, has entered a new and rapidly changing era.

Today it is not at all uncommon for a single feedlot to finish out 30,000 head of cattle a year and a feedlot of 60,000 head capacity is not out of the ordinary. We can expect that operations such as these may be startling, or even frightening, to the veterinary practitioner whose thoughts and concepts are geared toward problems of individual animals.

The large animal practitioner being trained in our academic institutions today is inadequately equipped to meet the challenges posed by developments in the livestock industry. A drastic change in traditional concepts and philosophies, which have been perpetuated in the past by large animal practitioners and academic clinicians, must occur if the veterinarian is to occupy an appropriate place as an integral part of the herd management team.

In the past, our veterinary educational

institutions have placed major emphasis on treatment and progress of the individual animal. To a large extent, they have neglected herd health management and preventive medicine. As a consequence, the large animal practitioner who is called upon for professional advice in modern livestock operations often finds himself unprepared to cope with the daily problems of preventive medicine where massive concentrations of animals are involved. He must spend years with trial-and-error methods, trying to acquire the level of professional competence necessary to provide appropriate service to the industry. As a result, owners, managers and investors lose confidence in the ability of the veterinary profession to be an asset to business enterprise.

If veterinary educators and practitioners fail to recognize this situation in time to apply corrective measures, the veterinarian will soon find himself being replaced by technicians supplied by the feed and livestock industries.

If the veterinarian is to serve the livestock industry adequately, he must be a member of the management team. He must have more than a meager knowledge of nutritional principles, husbandry and good management practices, as well as a sufficient knowledge to comprehend and appreciate investment principles and economics of the total operation. With this type of background,

along with a thorough knowledge of preventive medicine practice, he can assume a most important role as a part of the management team.

The veterinarian in this type of practice must be a specialist. The problems are unique, not only because of the massive concentrations of animals involved, but also because the feedlot population is transient. It is constantly changing. New cattle introduced into the lot originate from multitudinous sources and the possibility, or even probability, of disease outbreak is ever present, requiring that a system of rigorous and diligent preventive control measures be constantly in operation. Not only the scientific and technical aspects of the preventive and control programs, but also the mechanics of their operation must be well organized and programmed so that they operate as a well-oiled piece of machinery.

Additionally, these programs and these mechanics of operations must be critically re-evaluated periodically from the standpoint of effectiveness, efficiency and cost of operation. It is essential that the disease prevention and control programs be planned as a coordinated team effort between the veterinarian, the feedlot manager, the nutritionist and other people involved. However, the veterinarian must have authoritative control over the herd health program, just as the feedlot manager and nutritionist must have authoritative control over their own special areas of competence in the overall operation.

The veterinarian in consulting practice needs to be not only an astute clinical diagnostician, but also must be especially well-versed in the recognition and interpretation of gross lesions. He must train himself to be an acute observer and to maintain complete objectivity in the thorough exploration of the underlying associated causal factors of herd problems. He should establish good liaison with competent pathologists, microbiologists and diagnostic centers so that assistance from such specialists can be readily brought to bear

in determining specific diagnoses. Frequent consultations with other veterinary specialists and with specialists in allied professions are also essential.

The mass production methods being instituted in the livestock industry today are not unlike those which were successfully instituted in the poultry industry a few years ago. The veterinary profession failed to encourage development of specialized training programs to service the commercial poultry raising enterprises. Consequently, this segment of the profession has been largely lost and is now serviced by specialized non-veterinary technicians. We are currently seeing developments in the cattle industry which parallel those of poultry. If the veterinary practitioner is to survive as a professional management consultant in this changing field, he must become adequately equipped to do so. And to do this he needs some form of specialized training covering the various aspects of herd health management principles.

Such training can best be provided by our veterinary schools. However, it should be recognized that the veterinary educational institution can only provide certain aspects of the necessary training. The prospective herd health veterinarian must assume individual responsibility and initiative in preparing himself for this type of practice.

The opportunity is here for the profession to perform valuable service for the cattle industry. It can be done in a manner which will be mutually beneficial to both. The big question is, will we, as practitioners and educators, become sufficiently cognizant of our responsibility? Will we provide the necessary specialized training? Or, will we let this segment of veterinary practice slip into less qualified hands? The correct answer is obvious. So, too, is our responsibility in doing what must be done to make that answer a reality.

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