

# Prearranged Herd Health Programs (Dairy)

Dr. Lee Allenstein, Chairman



## The Purpose

**R. V. Jessup, D.V.M.**  
*Glendale, California*

I appreciate being here and I certainly enjoyed the meeting.

Herd health programs are really a matter of economics. That is what you are selling and if the dairymen cannot afford us, we have a former client or member of that community who sold out and he is just farming—he is not there any more. I might say that in our area we have dairymen. About 90% of the men are in the dairy business solely and completely. They have one source of income. About 98% of their income is from milk cows and the milk that is produced. The other 2% is derived from calves and maybe they go to the races occasionally but that is a non-profit type of work! The purpose of bovine health programs is to improve the operating efficiency of the dairy. That is what they better do, because if any program that you set up is selfishly inclined, forget it! That man is out there every day, all day, and you better improve his operating efficiency and you had better have him get his CPA on your side. The figures had better balance out to show that you are improving his profit potential, otherwise you are not going to be there. Now, you are going to do this in a variety of ways. First, you have to improve the conception rate because that is what the dairy business is all about. If you do not get the calves and they are not pregnant, then somebody is in trouble pretty shortly. You want to shorten the calving interval as close to a year as you can get it. This will improve the herd milk production and also reduce the investment of herd inventory—he will not have to carry as many cows

in his dry lot. He will be producing more cows that are milking more so that will improve his profit picture. You want to increase his calf raising percentage or cut his calf death losses. This has a very strong benefit in that it will improve the selection abilities of the heifers that he raises and he will keep better cows—milk better cows, get better milk.

You will want to reduce or eliminate mastitis and all I can do is to encourage everybody to learn what he possibly can about milking installations and their operation. We had a fine school here the last two days and a lot of people really found out how the milking machine effects mastitis. You should learn everything you possibly can about the operation of milking equipment and their effect on mastitis incidence. This will all help to reduce the herd culling rate. How often have you been in a man's herd where he has had an open cow—and it is one of his better cows—a member of the top 10 of his herd? She is open and has been fresh nine or ten months. That man spent a lot of money on semen; he spent a lot of money on treatment. The cow is still open and she may have been a 20-23,000 lb. cow but she is just another cow as of that date. Consequently, this really hurts this man's income potential. You need to get this cow in calf as early as possible—55-60 days after parturition and that is what keeps these cows in a herd working and milking. You can improve the cash income for this client by helping him sell more milk or surplus heifers and that is probably the most overlooked source of income on a dairy.

It has a very good side benefit. It is all capital gains and so most dairymen like that very much!

If we can do all this, I think that we will be a success as practitioners because we will have a very

successful and profitable client and that ought to make everybody happy. So, that is the purpose for doing it. The dollar seems to get more attention than anything I know of from most people.

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## The Implementation

David A. Morrow, D.V.M., Ph.D.  
Veterinary Clinic  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, Michigan 48823

The implementation of a successful herd health program is dependent upon client education, a record system which permits periodic evaluation of results and disease prevention based on controlled research.

### *Client Education*

Client education provides the foundation for a successful program. It should begin before the actual program and be used to plant the seeds of preventive medicine. Formal education can be provided by holding periodic meetings for all clients to discuss topics pertaining to the science of veterinary medicine (Figure 1). The outstanding clients who are selected for herd health programs can be given informal training in selected veterinary skills on an individual basis.

Client education has the following beneficial effects on practice:

1. Clients are taught the benefits of preventive medicine. As a result they regard herd health as an investment rather than a cost.
2. Clients will utilize higher levels of veterinary skills with the end result being a higher net income for both parties.
3. Practice growth largely depends on client education. Growth will occur in the direction desired by the local veterinarian with client education.
4. Clients are more appreciative of what has been done for their livestock when details of the condition are understood.
5. Educated clients are capable of providing better care for their livestock, which as a result have longer, more productive lives. Clients are also able to do a better job of follow-up on sick animals.
6. Clients use better judgment in making calls for veterinary service. They call earlier for

sick animals and make fewer unnecessary calls.

7. Client-veterinary relationships are improved. Clients frequently call for advice on problems that formerly might have gone unattended.
8. Client education programs save the veterinarians time answering questions on the farm since many areas have already been discussed at meetings.
9. The local veterinarian is identified as a resource person interested in community continuing education and the welfare of his clients.

Many clients realize for the first time that the veterinarian who organizes these education meetings is interested in his problems. They become better acquainted, communications are improved, and the veterinarian is able to empathize with the client on common problems. The client realizes that the veterinarian is an equal who is his partner in profit. The net effect is enthusiastic, better educated clients in a more profitable, enjoyable practice. Can you think of a better way to improve your practice?

### *Records and Evaluation*

Good records are essential to document the economic benefits of herd health programs. Clients should be introduced to records as part of the educational process which precedes the initiation of a program. Only those clients who do a reasonable job of record keeping are qualified for herd health programs.

- I. Health Records—The system described here consists of a temporary Barn Sheet and a permanent Individual Cow Lifetime Health Record (ICLHR). Although intended to supplement each other, they are quite flexible and may be used either separately or together