Problems and Solutions During the Growth of the Family-Farm Feedlot of 200 Head to a Unit of 2,000 Head

W. E. Brandt, *D.V.M.*
Hoffmann-La Roche, Inc.,
Nutley, New Jersey

Historically, veterinary service to the small, family-farm feedlot has been one of individual, personal service. The veterinarian supplied the restraint, diagnosis, medications, and biologics. He was the primary source of information but discussions were limited to disease problems. Individual animals received the most consideration, and management philosophy, disease control, feed preparation, antibiotic use and feed additive use were not often discussed. Unit cost of treatment was high, but tolerated in order to have the good will and personal service of a veterinarian.

What obvious changes take place when a 2,000-head feedlot replaces a 200-head feedlot? The feedlot is now visible to salesmen in the cattle industry. Feed salesmen and drug salesmen know the lot exists. It is economical for them to visit this feedlot. The owner who has equipment and restraining gates, plus some veterinary equipment, now has another source of information, yet no way to judge the quality of this information. He has gained experience with medicating cattle and may confuse manual dexterity and knowledge.

Reflecting back to my veterinary practice, I recognized attitude changes towards a traditional veterinary service. During these times, a new philosophy was developed in order to meet the needs and answer the questions of the clients. These changes were subtle, but always in the same direction of emphasizing herd health, general management, and disease prevention. The following areas seemed to work together to improve our knowledge of beef production, stimulate our clients, and meet the current veterinary demands of the larger feedlot.

It is important to have an opportunity to increase your personal knowledge through reading. Client discussions were of sufficient length that the clients could freely express their questions, challenge my recommendations, or just lay out their plans for the next group of cattle, a new barn, or a different feeding system. If my time was to be available, then I had to educate our clients in animal medication and processing. Direct supervision of a medication program with some records can be a substitute for several calls per day. Each client was allowed to progress according to his own ability. In a few instances, I insisted that the client have adequate equipment so that he could handle each animal by himself when the sick animal was first noticed. There does seem to be an inherent desire for clients to do some of their own work; therefore, we used this desire to our advantage and retained a working relationship. I have been fortunate in that my feelings of success and productivity have not been dependent on such physical accomplishments as the number of calls per day. Rather, I aspired to improve a good client, help him enjoy his cattle program, and see him rewarded with financial success.

Since the cattle-feeding industry changed so dramatically from my graduation days in 1955, I enlarged my understanding of the feedlot production by visiting large commercial feedlots, attending beef extension programs, and joining county livestock improvement associatons. Many times, I traveled with my clients to these meetings. This mutual growth developed a relationship of cooperation for the benefit of the clients. The progress and well-being of the clients were always emphasized. It was not a hollow wish.

Even as we developed a good relationship with clients, we maintained and improved our ability as diagnostic veterinarians. The veterinary clinic had facilities for bacteriological work-up, chemical tests, and microscopic examinations. New techniques are currently available to assist in diagnosis, and it was my desire to use those which were adaptable to our large animal practice.

Near the post-mortem table, we had prefolded boxes, two ounce jars, and formalin solution ready for specimens. It was convenient to send material to the diagnostic laboratory for histological examination. These results improved our veterinary proficiency and were appreciated by the clients.

Whenever we encountered a disease or stress situation and wanted to make some immediate nutritional changes, we had only to go to the storage room for a supply of individual vitmains, trace minerals, feed additives, and a hulk carrier (finely ground corn meal). With a pocket calculator, time, and the available knowledge of nutrition, we formulated rations for cattle when needed. In the 300-pound mixer, the ingredients were premixed and packaged to facilitate easy, convenient use on the farm. Results

from this aspect of the practice were most rewarding. Any lesson learned by our clients or ourselves was not forgotten. Therefore, a different, adequate program was planned for the next groups of cattle. An absence of problems was our definition of success.

Feedlot veterinary education has been adequate since my graduation. The emphasis presently placed on feed manufacturing, feed additives and feed processing is again stimulating us to seek more information on a subject closely allied to animal health. The attached list are books which can serve as reference material. One or more should be available to each feedlot veterinarian.

The immediate problems of cross-contamination, tissue residues, and feed assays are present-day problems which conern your clients. You as veterinarians are the best-educated persons the farmer sees on a regular basis. Do you have answers for him so that his production does not endanger public health? The simple techniques of sampling feeds and selecting areas to sample can be a source of confusion. The effect of drug-mixing on a campaign basis rather than alternating drugs and withdrawal feeds can be very pronounced, especially now in the world of low tissue-residue tolerance. When you are on the farm or feedlot, it would benefit you to become familiar with the feed processing system. If questions arise, you would know the basic flow of ingredient, type of ingredients, formulations of premix, etc. A feedlot of 2,000 animals must retain the ability to move cattle to market when they are finished. Animals retained for potential tissue-residue problems would create a difficult situation.

The same responsibility about illegal tissue residues applies to the injectable antibiotics. The large custom feedlots use antibiotics according to their approval. If large feedlots could do an adequate job, I never felt that my problems were so severe that there was required more than the legally allowed products. Also, the risk of involving a large feedlot in retained animals was a big concern, and we did limit the use of drugs to the approved type and dose. If the feedlot operator observes the cattle and treats the sick cattle quickly, then penicillin and sulfa can usually do a very good job. The sustained-release sulfa tablets, such as Albon SR, were an added convenience in treating feedlot cattle which maintained a therapeutic dose of drug over a four-day period.

When a client enlarged his feedlot, we were still interested in the client as an individual, and his success in the cattle business. It was our corn to have the client rewarded for his investment of time and money. The client was important. If you believe this, the client will respond to you in positive ways and that means success to both of you.

Some sources of information:

Feed Manufacturing Technology
Dr. Pfost, KSU
American Feed Manufacturers' Association (Sponsor)
This is an excellent book on mixing, mixability, pelleting, plant layout, design, requirements for feed production, feedstuffs and feed processing. $50.

Feeds and Nutrition
Esminger Publishing Co.
3699 E. Sierra Avenue
Clovis, California 93612. $35.

Digestive Physiology and Nutrition of Ruminants
Church
Volume I - Digestive Physiology - $17
Volume II - Nutrition - $13.70
Volume III - Practical Nutrition - $13.70
OSU Bookstore
P.O. Box 489
Corvallis, Oregon 97330

Journal of Animal Science
Dues $20/yr. for a monthly publication
Business Manager, ASAS
113 N. Neil St.,
311 Illinois Building
Champaign, Illinois 61820

Feedlot Design by Corrall Industries, Arizona
5202 E. Washington St.
Phoenix, Arizona 85034
The science of handling cattle easily can be learned and applied. There are ways to do a good job, and physical restraint must not become the major roadblock to treatment. Accumulate information on equipment and relate it to average costs for each size feedyard. How does it apply to your client?

Feed Additive Compendium, Feedstuffs
Miller Publishing Company
2501 Wayzata Boulevard
P.O. Box 67
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55440
About $80.