

Cattle Practice in the 1980's

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Topicality, with the theme "Aspects of Cattle Practice in the 1980's," formed part of the latest BCVA programme. The Thurlstone Hotel near Kingsbridge in Devon was over-subscribed by the attending members for this spring meeting and this resulted in satellite hotels being brought into action.

Dr. Brian Wicks (Chippenham) discussed his own approach to a routine visit which involved autumn calving dairy herds. He considered the true routine visit was one where the animals seen were under the control of the veterinary surgeon rather than the farmer. The cows examined included those for a post-calving check, pregnancy diagnosis, those with no observed oestrus, repeat examinations, those having three or more services and those for other examinations such as abnormal oestrous cycle periods.

The post-calving check was undertaken at three weeks and involved a vaginal examination to detect any disease and then a rectal to see if there was uterine involution. Where there was purulent discharge, it was treated with 200 ml oxytetracycline dissolved in tap water infused into the uterus. Cows not seen bulling by 42 days were treated with a Kamar or tail paint. If still undetected by 62 days, then prostaglandin was needed or, if no ovarian activity was present, a progesterone intravaginal device was inserted. Cows were pregnancy diagnosed at six weeks. Those with three or more services were examined but usually little was found to be wrong and bursal adhesions were sought. Cattle with a sanguinous discharge after retained placenta were treated with 10 mg oestradiol injection. For other conditions, such as repeated oestrus, metritis and mastitis, mini-profiles were undertaken together with measurement of other blood parameters.

Dr. Bryan Jeffrey (Woodplumpton), veterinary surgeon and farmer, took the audience through the monthly milk statement. There were three parts to it, sales, quality and quota. The hygiene quantification involved the total bacterial count. The monthly average was calculated on the count, usually taken weekly, and this provided a bonus if the content was low. The constituents of the milk, namely butterfat, protein and lactose, were analysed and the price for each constituent was computed. Messages can also be printed in this section. The first part of the statement acts as an invoice from the farmer to the Milk Marketing Board (MMB) and this shows the farmer's income from the milk produced. From this is deducted the capital contribution and co-responsibility levy. The MMB also produce an

invoice for the services supplied to the farmer, such as AI fees, national milk records, etc. The third part of the record deals with milk quantity and shows how the herd has performed on a monthly basis in relation to the quota.

Dr. Gareth Davies (Central Veterinary Laboratory, Weybridge) posed the question of how can research help in preventive medicine. He said that the cattle population was virtually static between 1962 and 1982. However, the size of the individual dairy herd had increased by nearly 1½ times and the beef herd by nearly twice. This meant that the value of output was less. When looking at culling costs, disease accounted for 38%, wear and tear 34% and other reasons 28%. Costs could be applied to disease in cattle such as: infertility—£231m*, mastitis £105m, calf mortality £15m. This amounted to about £430m or about 10% of production. Disease could be thought of as epidemic or endemic and the cost of the former included direct and knock-on effects. Thus the absence of African swine fever in British pigs, the occurrence of only one case of swine fever (hog cholera) in the last four years and the virtual disappearance of Aujeszky's disease (pseudorabies) all helped Britain to compete better in world markets. In the field of zoonoses, the cost of salmonellosis was between £2.5-£10m. This was a low cost but depended on one's consideration of the value of human life. Mr. Davies then asked the audience in which areas disease research was required. The audience responded and pointed out the many problems at present encountered in obtaining support for such research and the need for databases.

Medical problems in agriculture were described by **Dr. Richard Gard** (Animal Medicine Investigations). He had been cooperating with the Centre for Agricultural Strategy and researching on a study of agriculture and human health. Since 1971 there had been a considerable decline in accidents on the farm, particularly those affecting children. The agricultural community, including their wives and families, amounted to 1½ million. The commonest causes of death were problems of the circulatory system, followed by malignant neoplasia. However, the incidence of these was also high in the general population. Some conditions were particularly high in specific groups. **Thus farmers' and agricultural workers' wives were prone to circulatory disease and malignant cancer; the incidence of accidents and, more**

*£1 (one pound sterling = \$1.50 approx.)

especially, suicide being very high in male farmers and agricultural workers.

The diverse problems of the 1980's were emphasised by the talk from **Dr. Alastair Kidd** (Medicines Unit, Weybridge) on residues. Mr. Kidd went through some of the legislation which affected residues, including the Food and Drugs Act, the Medicines Act and EEC legislation. The problem was one of whether the tolerance required was zero, negligible, finite or established. The Medicines Act dealt with medicines according to their safety, quality and efficacy. Safety included that of the animal, environment, operator and consumer. Under the Veterinary Medicines Directive the residue requirements had to include studies on the target species, the withdrawal period, and an adequate safety margin of either no residues, 1/100, or greater or less than 1/100. The discussion following emphasised the problems which, although partly scientific, were also influenced by politics and, in some cases, established evidence was overturned by political considerations.

It has been a continuing tradition that B.C.V.A. meetings should contain a substantial quota of practical sessions. Saturday morning at Thurlestone continued this trend with three hours of practical bovine obstetrics.

In his inimitable "no-nonsense" style, **Dr. J. Hindson** (Hatherleigh) set the scene using a flow-chart of the thought process which should be used when considering obstetrical intervention of any kind. He discussed the various delivery options open to veterinary surgeons called to cases of dystokia and stressed the importance of taking a little time in selecting the most appropriate course of obstetrics action.

On the subject of traction, Mr. Hindson showed some sobering data on the relative forces exerted upon cows by various "traditional" methods of pulling calves. For instance, the normal expulsive force generated by a calving cow is 75 kg; this will be increased by 75 kg for every man pulling on a calving rope, or to 450 kg using a calf puller, or to a frightening 1000 kg using a pulley block.

Continuing the traction theme, **Dr. David Pepper** (Barnstaple); **Dr. Andy Forbes** (Marlborough) and **Dr. Christine Howe** (Uckfield) shared their practical knowledge and diverse experience with the packed audience. Calving an emaciated "wooden" cow, Dr. Pepper demonstrated his modification of a commercial calf pulling device. He believed that in the veterinary surgeon's hands, this equipment represented an indispensable and safe aid to calving cows. Dr. Forbes echoed these sentiments and demonstrated a more elaborate calf puller. He indicated that the safety of any calving aid was directly proportional to the common-sense and skill of the operator.

Speaking from a lady veterinarian's point of view, Dr. Howe recounted her approach to bovine obstetrical cases. Her talk was packed full of useful practical tips which lead into a brisk discussion before coffee.

In the final morning session **Dr. Colin Whitaker** (Ashford) and **Dr. John Wilson** (Marlborough) bravely ventured into the lions' den by describing precisely how they

carried out caesarian section. It was fascinating to hear their contrasting techniques and the lively discussion which followed proved the point.

The last scientific session of the conference on Sunday morning provided a comprehensive update on three important notifiable diseases. In the first paper **Dr. Macleod Barr** (Tolworth) talked about enzootic bovine leucosis and its significance in cattle practice. The second paper, given by **Dr. John Gallagher** (Starcross) in the wake of the Dunnet report, dealt with the controversial subject of tuberculosis in cattle and badgers. Dr. Gallagher reviewed the history of the disease association between the two species and presented data demonstrating the effects that badger control has produced on the occurrence of tuberculosis in cattle. The picture was by no means clear-cut and the "cost/benefits" were difficult to assess.

In the final paper, **Dr. James Scudamore** (Taunton) took a lateral look at brucellosis eradication. He presented some interesting case-histories which traced the geographical passage of "reactors" from farm to farm, via dealers and markets. Here was yet further evidence that tighter controls were required in the movement of cattle within the U.K., a point which the B.C.V.A. has been making for a considerable time.

Highlight of the social activities was a dynamic, entertaining after dinner presentation by Surgeon Commander Rick Jolly. His stark account of dealing with the casualties in the Falklands War contrasted the anguish and the humour which prevailed amongst the Armed Forces at the time and his evocative descriptions moved the audience quite literally from tears of laughter to tears of sadness.

At the annual general meeting, the retiring President, Dr. Mike Vaughan, reviewed his year in office and installed Dr. Ian Hutchinson as his successor. In a brief inaugural speech, Dr. Hutchinson thanked the B.C.V.A. for the honour it had bestowed upon him and reaffirmed his "genuine commitment" to the Association.

Such was the success of this meeting that a similar weekend is being planned for April 24th to 26th 1987 "somewhere on the shores of Lake Windemere."



Dr. Mike Vaughan, left, installing the new President, Dr. Ian Hutchinson.