

# Implementing Production Management Programs In Your Practice

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In today's changing world of veterinary medicine, we find that traditional medicine programs are becoming less successful and that getting involved in the total herd management of a dairy operation has proven to be more successful. Total herd management programs are not only successful for the dairy farmer but also for the veterinarian. Increasing the veterinary services on a dairy farm proves beneficial to both the operator and the veterinarian.

It is important that veterinarians see the need for change. I feel that the practices that do not change will fail. As I travel throughout the USA and Canada, I have seen this change occurring. Practices that have not changed are less busy and complaining about "slow times." Practices that have changed are, instead, reaping the benefits of this change and hiring new help. We can no longer judge our practice's success by the number of calls we make a day, but instead by the length of time we spend on each farm and get paid for that time. I remember that when I graduated from veterinary college we thought the ultimate in success would come when our practice had an 800 phone number. Now, I realize that success is when you can be busy and have an unlisted phone number.

We need to look into the future and determine where our incomes will come from. We need to evaluate these opportunities and determine which have the greatest potential. I like to use a chart that I saw while attending a veterinary conference in North Carolina. You look at all programs as to their market share and their growth potential. The areas with good growth potential and good market share are called "stars." Those areas with good growth potential but questionable market share are called "question marks." Areas with low growth potential and good market share are called "cash cows." Areas with poor market potential and poor growth potential are called "dogs." When evaluating programs, one must determine into which area the program falls. Programs like mastitis control and heifer hustle are "stars." Nutrition and computer herd monitoring would be "question marks." Reproductive programs and drug dispensing are the "cash cows." Cleaning cows, trimming feet and treating milk fever are the "dogs." The best way to summarize this is to develop the "stars," investigate the "question marks," milk the "cash cows" and shoot the "dogs."

Several studies have indicated that the reason veterinary practices don't change is that they are too busy or have too many farms to service. Fortunately, this problem is

very easy to remedy. The practice must either cut back on farm numbers or hire more help. When practices are so busy and do not have the time to change with the times, other people start doing those things for their clients. It is sad, but true, that in many instances the reason for the dairy farmers' lack of success is the veterinarian.

As we decide which programs to implement, it is important to design programs which are useful and needed by clients. It is always important to stop and listen to the needs of your clients. If we don't provide this need, you can be assured that someone else will. People like county agents, independent consultants or Extension people, will be there to provide these needs. You can't expect people to come pounding on your doors to request these programs. After all, we are really salesmen; the only thing we have to sell is ourselves.

Other aspects of agribusiness are going to the farmer to market their programs. The veterinary profession needs to take this "cut," let people know what we have to offer and market it accordingly. We need to change our image and make the farmer realize that we can offer him the most up-to-date information in all areas of his operation independently of having something to sell.

Recent data showed that our reproductive programs, which most of us called herd health, have had little impact on the industry. In the past 30 years, the average days open and the average calving interval of the industry have not changed. Granted, it may have been much worse without our programs, however, our contribution has been limited. Areas such as nutrition, mastitis control, heifer rearing and housing have made significant changes in the dairy industry. These are areas in which we need to focus our attention. Dr. Jim Jarret has often made the comment that veterinary medicine used to be an area of mystery and mystic. Now, the mystery and mystic are gone and we are left in an unusual position if we haven't changed.

When implementing new programs, it is important to remember that not every farmer is going to jump at the chance. If they don't want the program, you can be assured that the program will fail. Take your best clients and start there. Don't think that you are going to take many of the poorest farmers and turn them into something they

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don't want to be. Dr. John Dahl has often stated that we must concentrate our efforts on the dairy farmers that want our help and essentially forget the farmer that isn't going to survive anyway. I like to introduce new ideas by planting a few seeds. I like to suggest several ideas and then leave it alone. The good farmer will often ask for more information immediately while others will often respond by the next visit. I am never afraid to do a small part of a new program free. This often is one of the best ways to get a farmer's reaction. Many successful practices often give a little more than they charge for. This is an excellent way to build a strong practice.

One of the most important concepts that we must "get a handle on" is to identify all problem areas on a farm. We need to prioritize these problems and handle the most important ones first.

Often, the programs we are currently using on a farm are toward the bottom of the priority list. It really doesn't make a great deal of sense to concentrate on somatic cell count when the average age of first calf heifers is over 30 months. You must be able to target the troubles of the entire operation and solve the most important ones first.

The dairy industry has really made our jobs easier the past two years by adding quality premiums to the milk prices. Now instead of utilizing our mastitis control skills on farms that are losing their market due to bad milk, we are instead being asked to help the farmer with somatic cell counts of 200,000 to 300,000 get below the 100,000 level in order to get the highest price for his shipped milk. It is absolutely necessary that someone in every practice be acquainted with mastitis control. At least one person must be able to evaluate milking equipment, evaluate milking procedures and be able to handle the cow, her "bugs" and her environment.

Programs like "heifer hustle" are areas that we need to concentrate on. Heifers are the biggest cause of economic loss in most dairy operations. We can get involved in heifer management and show positive changes on that farm. By getting involved in heifer evaluation, you open the door to environment changes, nutrition, disease control and culling decisions. This is an area that needs our assistance and farmers are indeed interested in utilizing our knowledge.

Many practices have entered the field of nutrition. Many of the diseases we deal with on a daily basis are related

to nutrition. I feel that a practice must get involved in nutrition whether from a role of ration evaluator or as a ration maker. I often start with a dry cow program and this will lead into many other areas of nutrition. Our calf programs have opened the doors for heifer growing programs. Your practice can either sell premixes or sell nothing but your independent point-of-view. Whether you implement a program with the current feeding program or design your own, your involvement is critical.

There are many new areas for us to explore in reproduction. The areas of selenium and vitamin E, milk progesterone testing, controlled prostaglandin programs and other breeding programs are all areas of interest among dairy clientele. We need to be up to date on these areas so we can be an important resource to our dairy client. Often the farmer asks us a question about a recent article and we have to shrug our shoulders and fail to give him the guidance he is seeking.

Record evaluation is another area where we all have to get involved. Whether you use computer programs or hand calculated programs, they are all useful. Records can often be the way to properly show the need for your new programs and at the same time point out losses that are occurring on that farm. Many dairy operations have no idea as to their real losses. I have struggled at trying to get a better handle on this part of my programs. The computer scares me. I feel totally inadequate when punching the keys. The hand method takes longer but you can accomplish the same thing. Sometimes you know the information better when you have done it by hand, but the computer will save time. Programs such as Vetcheck, DairyComp, and the AABP Herd Health Monitor are all designed to assist you in identifying the dairy operation's problems. Each of these programs has strong points and weak points, but each of you will find a particular program that meets your need. The country is headed for a computer revolution and we must be prepared to meet that challenge.

**The veterinary profession cannot forget its need to properly diagnosis and treat disease; however, we also must change to meet the needs of our clients. A changing practice is a surviving practice. I am concerned that practices that wait too long will have others moving into their practice area to do those things that their clients have wanted them to do. I find the future of veterinary medicine to be a bright one, and hope that everyone else will be able to prosper as well.**