

Production Management Series Moves Veterinarians to New Role in Beef Cattle Operations

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Veterinarians have long been considered a strong influence in maintaining the survival line in beef cattle operations. This role can increase, however, thanks to a new program offered by the University of Nebraska Great Plains Veterinary Educational Center.

Twenty veterinarians from nine states recently became the first certified graduates of the Beef Cattle Production Management Series conducted facility, near Clay Center, NE. Certification is the final step in a year-long program that brought these livestock professionals to the forefront of the movement to expand Integrated Resource Management (IRM) into cow-calf and feedlot operations across the nation. The goal is to extend their skills beyond traditional veterinary technical service to working as part of a team effort toward the success of beef cattle programs.

Rather than a review of veterinary skills, the program provides intensive training in 11 key areas: record keeping, nutrition, range management, communication, breeding animal selection, accounting and finances, time management, feedlot and packing house procedures, marketing and risk management, media issues and the computer skills necessary to maintain all of these operations. The result is a united effort for producer profitability.

"Our role is really to ensure the survivability and sustainability of our production clients, because our livelihood depends on that," pointed out Dr. Eddie Hamilton of the Great Plains Veterinary Educational Center and one of several leaders in the program.

"Veterinary education at the undergraduate and professional schools really focuses on diagnosing and treating illness and disease in the individual animal. If that's your focus in a production setting, you've missed the boat."

Hamilton maintains that the emphasis should be expanded, looking at the group rather than the individual. He says the overview should focus on the entire herd -- putting it into a financial box and looking at the costs and revenues of the entire system. He wants veterinarians to be managers of information, and he emphasizes "really critical, quality information."

Dr. Gary Rupp, director of the Great Plains Veterinary Educational Center, stressed that this initial

group of 20 veterinarians has an average of more than 10 years in practice and they made financial and time commitment for a full year when they enrolled in this program. This commitment ties them to modules at the Clay Center, NE, facility that takes three to four days every two months. The modules are taught in the Center's computer classroom by staff with an impressive list of guest speakers providing additional input.

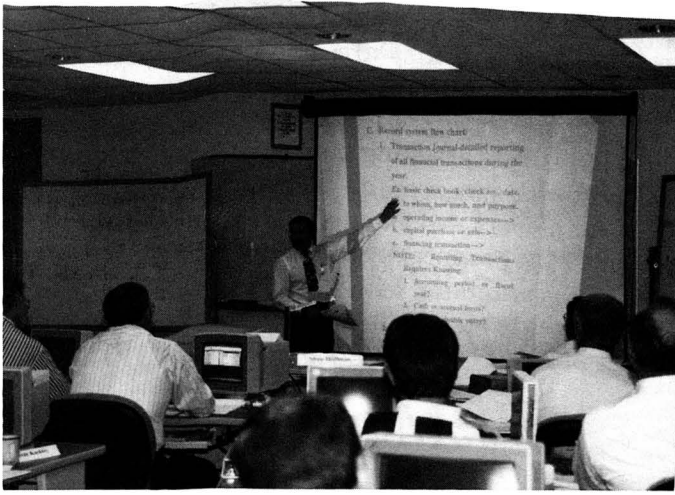
Participants spend a long day in the classroom, usually followed by additional studies in the evening. Work is virtually non-stop. For some this situation might sound like drudgery, but veterinarians participating in the first series insist that it's worth the effort. They like the fact that they can take full advantage of the situation.

Additionally dormitories within the facility allow participating veterinarians to remain close to their work, and most meals are served at the Center.

Each veterinarian is assigned "homework" that includes establishing a record-keeping program and initiating a Standardized Performance Analysis or SPA for clients in their own practice. There's also an assignment to follow a pen of cattle through the feedlot from the day of purchase through to carcasses on the rail, including costs, performance and revenue. And, an extensive supply of literature keeps the "students" busy with reading assignments in preparation for their next trip to the teaching facility in Clay Center.

"These are professionals who are actually out there hitting the roads and working with producers, and they've never given up the idea that they want to do a better job," Rupp explained. "They come from busy practices, and the time they spend here places a heavy burden on the partners left behind. In addition, most of them are involved in family, social and community activities. It's a tough commitment."

This premier class was the result of more than five years of planning, Rupp stated. He added that, while the Center has hosted numerous training seminars on nutrition, selection, records and other subjects, these programs were all unrelated sessions. Rupp claims that these earlier seminars tended to be disassociated. On the other hand, he praises the new program for its continuity and ability to tie the classroom with the everyday situation.



Speakers like Dr. Paul Guttierrez of Colorado State University's Agricultural Economics Department have worked with veterinarians participating in the Beef Cattle Production Management Series. Twenty veterinarians participated in the program at the Great Plains Veterinary Education Center every two months to increase their knowledge of beef cattle selection, nutrition, feedlot and packing house procedures, range management, accounting and financial planning, media and communication skills, and record-keeping. These certified livestock professionals will take the information learned from specialists like Guttierrez home to their cow-calf and feedlot clients, with the goal of applying the benefits of Integrated Resource Management to their programs in a team approach.

The Beef Cattle Production Management Series starts with communication and computer skills, and proceeds to evaluate progress through the actual application of the lessons throughout the year. It's an information-handling process designed to assist these professionals in a continuing education process for the rest of their lives.

"One of our goals is to provide a very high quality education without making a person close down his practice and leave his community to get it. He doesn't have to sell out to increase his knowledge base," Rupp said. "The focus here is to keep them in the community and still provide the education."

"What we're giving them here, in my opinion, is much broader than most masters programs. But the important part is what's really happening when the veterinarian goes back home and works with the producers."

Dr. Kevan Albertson already knows how the Beef Cattle Production Management Series can pay off for his clients. With a partner, Albertson operates a full-service cow-calf veterinary clinic in North Platte, NE, that serves some of the largest beef herds in the Sandhills. He said his decision to participate in the series came from his need to provide more than technical service to those cattlemen in the future.

"We're in an information society where, down the road, we're not going to get paid according to how physically fit we are, but how much valuable information we can provide to the cow-calf producers," Albertson testified.

"I felt a need to become involved not only from the production standpoint, but from the financial standpoint, to help my cow-calf producers become more profitable. I also felt it was necessary to develop a team approach to solving a lot of problems for these producers. That means becoming involved not only with the producer and his banker, but with his accountant, nutritionist, feed dealer and everyone else who works with that operation."

Albertson has actively applied his new skills to several herds within his practice through the establishment of individual record systems and incorporation of the SPA program into their yearly routine.

"I've found that it gives producers more information to make their decisions and, in turn, it helps me to better understand their goals and how they can arrive at those goals," he added.

Interest in the Beef Cattle Production Management Series has been impressive, Rupp stated. With room for only 20 participants in each annual series of modules, the first class filled immediately. A second group of veterinarians is scheduled to begin in June, and a third class is well on its way to filling for next year.

Like their production clients, these progressive veterinarians realize the effort devoted to learning more about IRM will pay off with continuing profitability for their businesses, as well as those of their customers.

"We're trying to stress that every time the veterinarians make a recommendation, they need to have a feel for the cost/benefit ratio. The question to ask is 'what will it cost?' and 'what will I get in return?' That's what has such a tremendous impact on a producer's survivability," Hamilton said. "The success of their producers depends on them being involved in management decisions rather than just technical service."

For more information on the Beef Cattle Production Management Series, contact the University of Nebraska, Great Plains Veterinary Educational Center at P.O. Box 187, Clay Center, NE 68933, telephone (402) 762-4502 and fax (402) 762-4509. To learn more about IRM, contact your local veterinarian or state extension specialist, or Dan Kniffen of the National Cattlemen's Association, 5420 S. Quebec Street, Englewood, CO 80111, telephone (303) 694-0305, fax (303) 694-2831.

Sidebar -- What is IRM/SPA?

IRM, or Integrated Resource Management, is a team management approach available to cattle producers so they can analyze their operation, make decisions and take action to ensure maximum profitability.

Using the IRM concept, a team of specialists pool their expertise and technology to solve producer problems on the farm or ranch. This team of specialists can include, but is not limited to, a practicing veterinarian,

an agricultural lender, extension agent or livestock consultant, fellow producer, research specialist and an allied industry representative such as an animal health or nutrition supplier. An integrated approach is taken by all team members.

SPA, or Standardized Performance Analysis, is an integrated analysis that links both financial and production performance and strengthens the IRM approach. SPA enables producers to measure performance for reproduction, production, grazing and raised feed, marketing, financial and economic performance.

The program's detailed summary helps producers identify areas for improvement to help control unit cost

of production. The SPA database enables producers to evaluate how well they are doing by comparing their results to other producers.

Because IRM/SPA is advantageous to producers, allied industry is assisting the National Cattlemen's Association with sponsorship: Merck and Moormans.

"All players -- team members and sponsors -- are looking at the producer's bottom line," Dr. Dan Kniffen, IRM/SPA coordinator with NCA, states. "We all want the producer to stay in business and to be as profitable as possible."

Induction of parturition in dairy cows with dexamethasone.

A. R. Peters, D. A. Poole.

Veterinary Record (1992) 131, 576-578.

Sixty Holstein cows were paired by parity and sire, and one of each pair was allocated at random to treatment or control; 17 cows were injected with 7.5mg/100kg dexamethasone trioxa undecanoate 14 days before the predicted date of calving, 13 cows received the same dose five days before term and 30 cows were left untreated. The treatment significantly advanced parturition and 29 of the 30 induced cows calved within 72 hours of the injection. Induction at day 14 before term was safe for calf and dam, the calves were 3.2kg lighter than control calves and there was a high incidence of retained pla-

centa. Treatment for this condition resulted in increased veterinary costs of £14.50 per cow exclusive of dexamethasone treatment. Treatment at this stage was also associated with low pregnancy rates in the next breeding season. Calves born after induction at five days before term were not significantly lighter than calves from control cows, the problem of retained placenta was less marked and there were no subsequent effects on fertility. There were no significant effects of induction on milk yield or milk quality up to 200 days of lactation.

Effect of intracervical administration of a prostaglandin E2 gel in pregnant and non-pregnant heifers.

M. Duchens, G. Fredriksson, H. Kindahl, S. Aiumlamai.

Veterinary Record (1993) 133, 546-549.

The effects of prostaglandin E2 (PGE2) on cervical opening in non-pregnant and pregnant heifers was studied, and in the pregnant animals the effect on the embryo was studied by means of ultrasonography. In four consecutive experiments, 5ml of saline, a gel containing 2mg or 6mg PGE2 was administered intracervically to four non-pregnant heifers, and 2mg of PGE2 was administered to heifers pregnant 33 to 40 days. All the groups treated with PGE2 experienced an increase in the concentrations of prostaglandin metabolite in plasma ($P < 0.05$) shortly after administration, which reached a

peak 15 to 30 minutes after administration. An increase in cervical opening was evident in all the PGE2-treated heifers ($p < 0.05$) from three hours after treatment. There was no difference between the effect of the two doses. The heifers which received saline did not show any significant changes. In addition, the treated heifers showed cervical softening, congestion and mucus secretion which were more pronounced in the pregnant heifers. The embryos were not affected. Plasma progesterone concentrations remained unchanged in all the experiments.