

A Survey to Determine Relevance of Online Continuing Education for Bovine Practitioners

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Abstract

A survey focused on distance education and online continuing education was completed by 727 bovine practitioners. All study participants were members of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners (AABP). Participants were invited through the AABP listserv. Bovine veterinarians were asked a series of demographic questions, followed by questions specific to developing an online continuing education program. The majority of the respondents (57%) had high speed or DSL internet access readily available to them, and less than 10% had dial-up internet access. Bovine practitioners indicated that they want an online continuing education system that is easy to use, provides quality presentation of relevant information, and is available 24 hours a day. Herd health, animal husbandry, and business management are topics with the highest interest by the dairy and beef-focused AABP members. The survey indicated that 37% of the AABP member respondents have attended more than one AABP annual conference in the last five years. Additionally, the survey indicated that an online system would not affect the decision of AABP members to attend the annual conference. This technology adaptation has the potential to expand member services for AABP, and deliver timely topics to practitioners in rural areas.

Key words: veterinary practitioner, survey, continuing education

Résumé

Un questionnaire sur l'éducation à distance et la formation continue en ligne a été complété par 727 médecins vétérinaires en pratique bovine. Tous les participants à l'étude étaient membres de l'*American Association of Bovine Practitioners* (AABP). Les participants ont été rejoints grâce à la liste des membres de l'AABP. Les vétérinaires en pratique bovine ont répondu en premier à des questions démographiques et par la suite à des questions reliées au développement d'un programme de formation continue en ligne. La majorité des répondants (57%) avaient accès à l'internet haute vitesse ou par ligne d'abonné téléphonique et moins de 10% avait accès à l'internet par ligne commutée. Les praticiens bovins indiquaient qu'ils voulaient un système de formation continue en ligne facile à utiliser, qui offre une bonne qualité de présentation de l'information pertinente et qui est disponible 24 heures par jour. La santé au niveau du troupeau, l'élevage des animaux et la gestion des affaires étaient les thèmes qui intéressaient le plus les membres de l'AABP qui se spécialisent dans les bovins laitiers et de boucherie. Le questionnaire a révélé que 37% des répondants membres de l'AABP avaient participé à plus d'une conférence annuelle de l'AABP au cours des dernières cinq années. De plus, le questionnaire a démontré qu'un système en ligne n'affectera pas la décision des membres de l'AABP d'assister à la conférence annuelle. Cette avancée technologique a le potentiel d'élargir les services offerts aux

membres de l'AABP et de procurer des sujets de l'heure aux praticiens en milieu rural.

Introduction

Since 1965, the American Association of Bovine Practitioners (AABP) has been focused on providing quality continuing education to its member veterinarians. Undoubtedly, the founding members of this organization could not have foreseen the advancements in technology that are commonplace today. Bovine practitioners are busy professionals who generally live in rural areas, which can make travel to and from meetings difficult. Today's digital technology could open a new door for providing continuing education to bovine practitioners. In 2008, the AABP board of directors requested a survey to determine the interest level of AABP members and the logistical concerns related to distance education offered over the internet. Also, the board of directors wanted to determine if online offerings would have a negative impact on the annual conference attendance.

Materials and Methods

Members of AABP were invited to participate in an online survey in the summer of 2008. Invitations and directions to the survey were released through the AABP newsletter, the AABP listserv, and three mass emails to AABP members. Of the nearly 4,600 active AABP members, 727 participated for a response of 15.8% of the AABP membership.

The survey was conducted using online software^a through the Division of Continuing Education at Kansas State University. The survey consisted of 24 questions that covered topics ranging from demographic information about the participants, their practice interests, internet access, information sources for making decisions, online training concerns, topics of interest for online training and time commitment for using an online training center. Data were collected in the Axio software and electronically transferred to Microsoft Excel,^b which was used to summarize and analyze the data.

Results

Demographics

The majority of the participants' practices were based within the United States (88%) and Canada (8%; Figure 1). Over two-thirds (71%) of the participants were males. Participants were graduates from 26 US veterinary schools (85%) and other veterinary schools outside of the US (15%), with year of graduation ranging from 1963 to future 2011. The two major employment types represented were private practice (65.5%) and academia

(16.5%; Figure 2). Of the private practitioners, 80.4% of the respondents work with dairy cattle, and 45% of the respondents indicated that dairy was 50% or more of their practice focus (Figure 3). In this survey, 75.4% of respondents had some form of beef focus in their practices, while 22.0% had 50% or more of their time focused on beef practice (Figure 4).

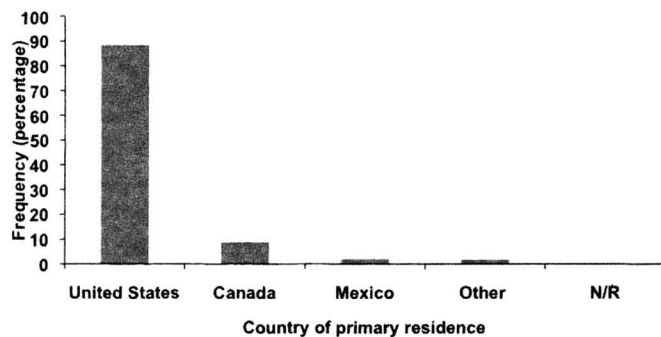


Figure 1. Country of primary residence for the AABP online CE survey.

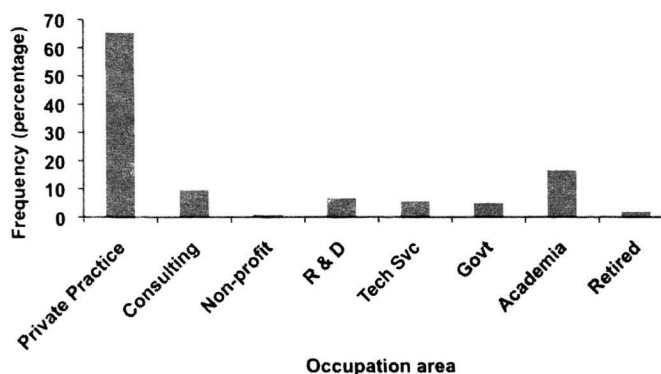


Figure 2. Description occupation area of survey respondents in association with bovine medicine and production.

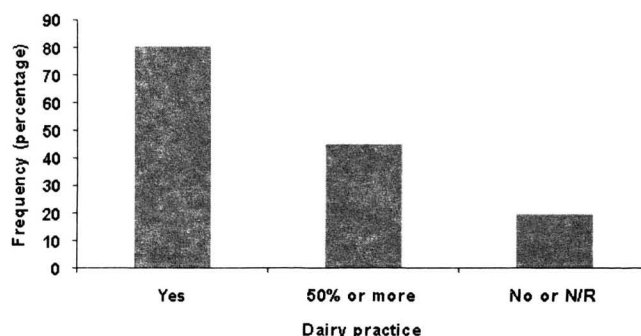


Figure 3. Percent of survey respondents who have dairy practice focus.

Internet Access and Distance Education Interests

The majority of the respondents (57%) had high-speed or DSL internet access readily available to them (Figure 5). Few respondents had dial-up or no internet access available. Similar findings were observed when asked about types of internet service at their place of work. Currently, AABP members who responded to this survey were likely to utilize the AABP-L listserv, online journal publications, and websites to gather information to make evidence-based decisions for their clients. The respondents were less likely to use other listservs, message boards, or blogs to gather evidence-based medicine resources (data not reported).

Respondents were asked a series of questions about the importance of online CE qualities. The four highest priorities for online CE were quality of the presentation, relevance of the information, easy to use format, and availability 24 hours per day (Figure 6). Class contact, contact with a speaker, or fees charged for the online CE were of less concern. Practitioners were asked about their attendance to the AABP annual conference in the last five years. Over 50% of the survey respondents had not attended, or only attended once in the last five years (Figure 7), and less than 25% of respondents had attended three or more times in the last five years. As a result, it was not surprising to see that having online CE

available would not have an impact on people's decision to attend the AABP annual conference (Figure 8). Pre-recorded PowerPoint presentations were the preferred online CE offerings for survey respondents (Figure 9).

Figures 10, 11, and 12 show the results of how bovine practitioners responded to general interest and topic recommendations for online CE offerings. Herd health, animal husbandry, and business management

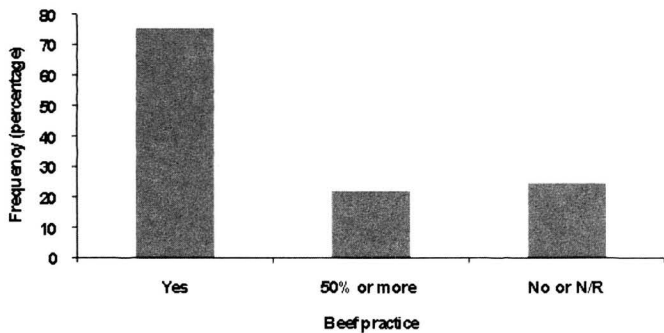


Figure 4. Percent of survey respondents who have beef practice focus.

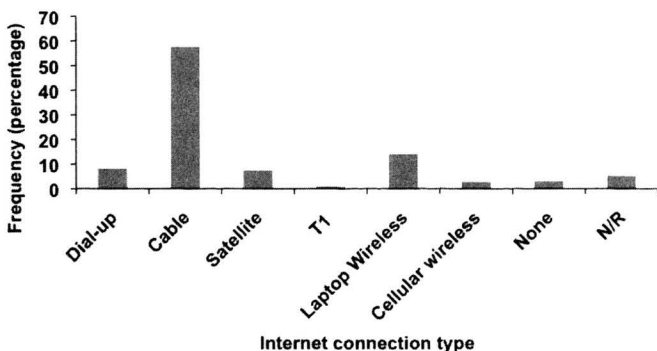


Figure 5. Types of internet connection utilized by bovine practitioner survey respondents.

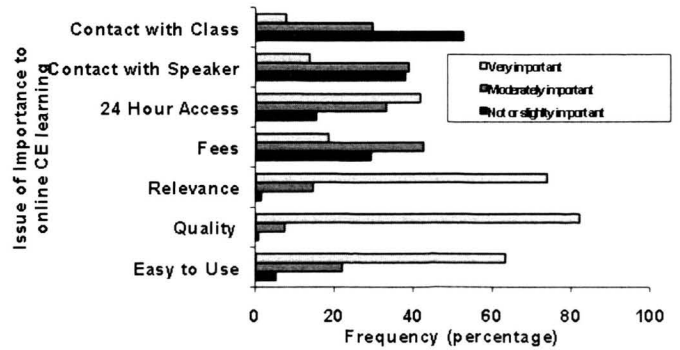


Figure 6. Issues of importance relative to online CE training for bovine practitioners based on survey results.

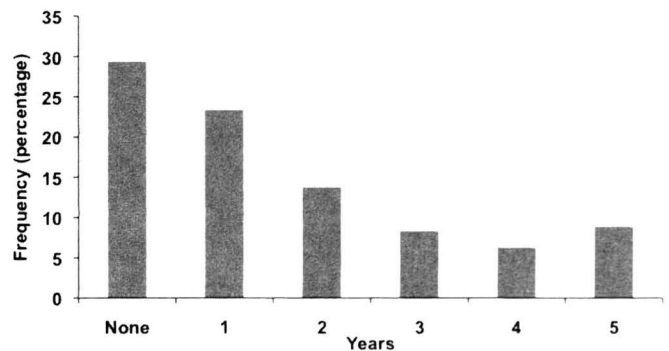


Figure 7. Number of years attendance at the AABP annual conference over the last five years by survey respondents.

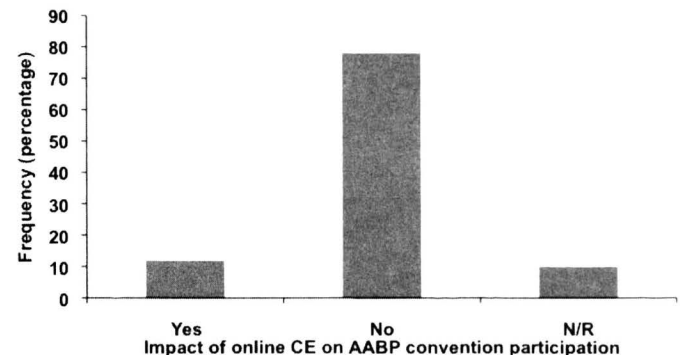


Figure 8. Percent of survey respondents who indicated if online CE was available, "would you be less likely to attend the AABP conference?"

had the highest interest among AABP members (Figure 10). Food safety, environmental issues, employee safety, and animal welfare topics were not of high interest. When analyzed by dairy or beef practice, the data indicate that dairy practitioners had the highest interest in dairy herd health, dairy cattle husbandry, and calf health topics (Figure 11). Likewise, beef practitioners indicated the highest interest in beef herd health and beef cattle husbandry (Figure 12).

Time Dedicated to CE and Cost

The amount of time participants were able to dedicate to CE varied depending on the time of day. Participants were asked to indicate the amount of time they were willing to spend on CE during the early morning, late morning, mid-day, early afternoon, late afternoon and evening. For early morning the mode response was no time, whereas the median time was 15 minutes (Figure 13). The mode response for all times of the day was that participants had no time for CE, except during the evening, where the mode response was two hours

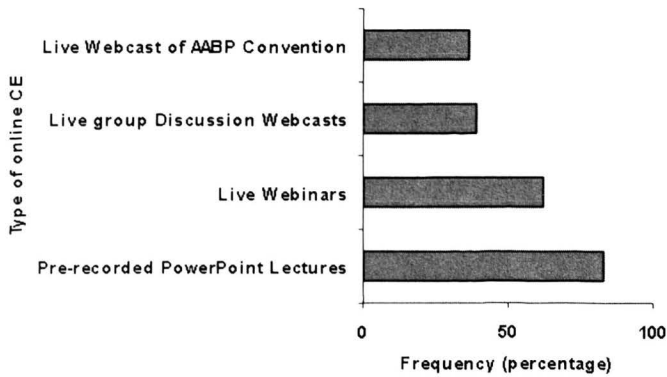


Figure 9. Percentage of survey respondents who indicated they would utilize a type of online CE offering from AABP.

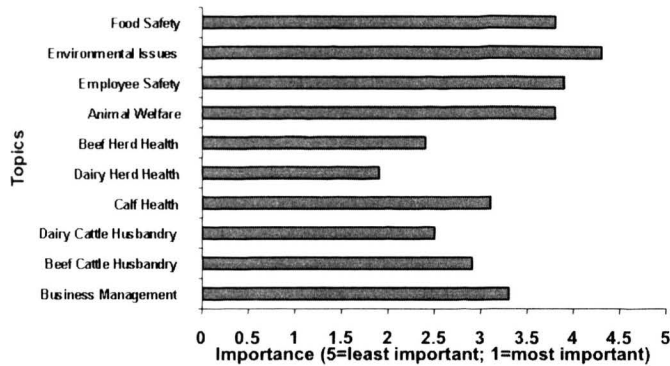


Figure 10. Topics of importance as indicated by all survey respondents regardless of practice focus (5 = least important and 1 = most important).

with a median of one hour and 30 minutes (Figure 14). Participants were then asked to indicate the amount of time they were willing to dedicate to CE for credit, CE for non-credit, on-farm reference, in-clinic reference, reference for personal knowledge, online peer-group

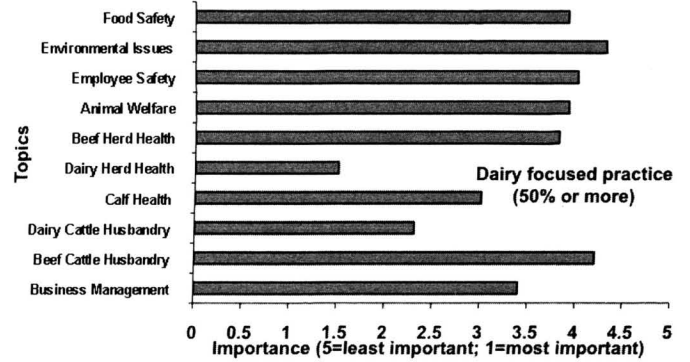


Figure 11. Topics of importance as indicated by survey respondents who indicated that more than 50% of their practice focus is dairy (5 = least important and 1 = most important).

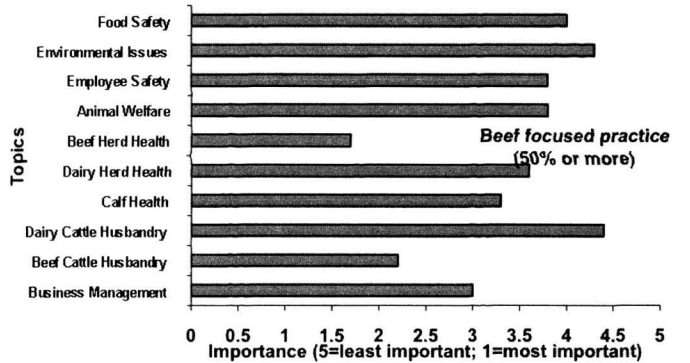


Figure 12. Topics of importance as indicated by survey respondents who indicated that more than 50% of their practice focus is beef (5 = least important and 1 = most important).

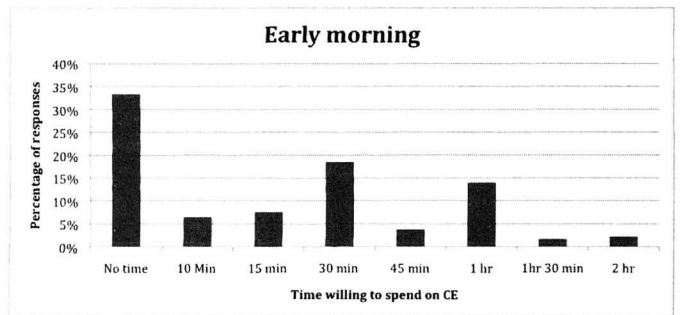


Figure 13. Time participants were willing to spend on CE in the early morning.

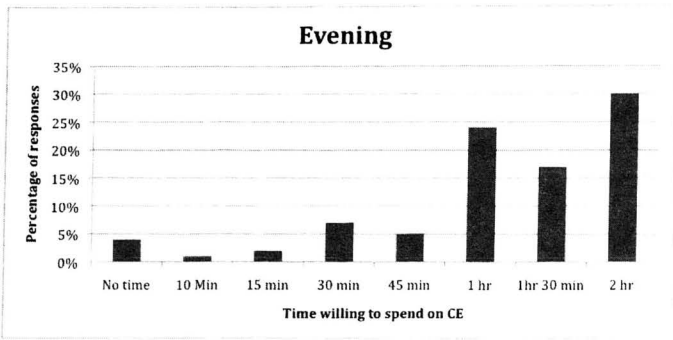


Figure 14. Time participants were willing to spend on CE in the evening.

meetings, and office staff training. The mode response for CE for credit was two hours, with a median of one hour and 30 minutes (Figure 15). The mode response for office staff training was no time, with a median of 30 minutes. The mode response for all other areas was one hour. The majority (75%) of participants stated that as long as the CE was approved by their local veterinary associations, they would be willing to pay for online CE credits (Figure 16). Participants were then asked to give a dollar amount they would be willing to pay for one credit-hour of CE credit/training. There were 323 responses that gave a usable per credit hour dollar amount. If a participant gave a range, i.e., \$50-\$100, then an average dollar amount of \$75 was used to calculate an overall mean. Participants were willing to pay a wide range of fees per CE unit, ranging from \$10 to \$500, with a mean of \$55.60 per credit hour (Figure 17).

Conclusions

The survey results indicate that AABP members would like to have online CE offerings. This system must have quality presentations on relevant topics. It is important to the AABP members that the online CE program be easy to use and available 24 hours per day. Herd health, animal husbandry, and business management are topics of high interest to AABP members. Production of an online system would not affect the decision of AABP members to attend the annual conference, but can provide CE for over 50% of the AABP members who don't regularly attend. Offering this technology has the potential to expand member services for AABP members, and deliver timely topics to practitioners in rural areas.

This survey may be somewhat biased because it may only represent AABP members who have readily adopted new information technologies; however, it still provides valid information for planning and implementing a quality online CE program that is valued by AABP members. Given societal trends, use of advanced information technologies and online education delivery will

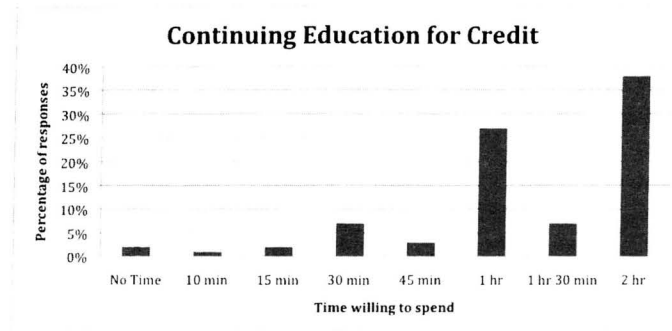


Figure 15. Time participants were willing to spend on CE for credit.

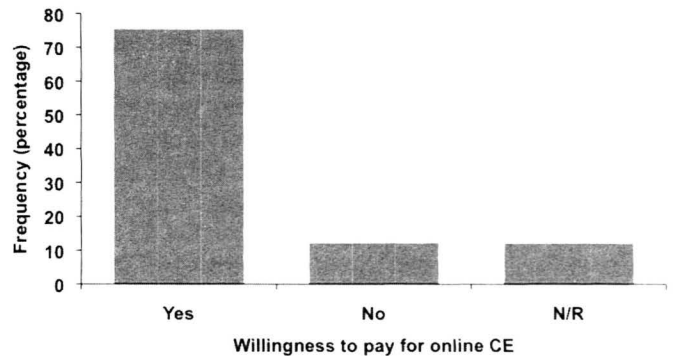


Figure 16. Response by survey participants to the following question, "If online CE was available, would you be willing to pay for it?"

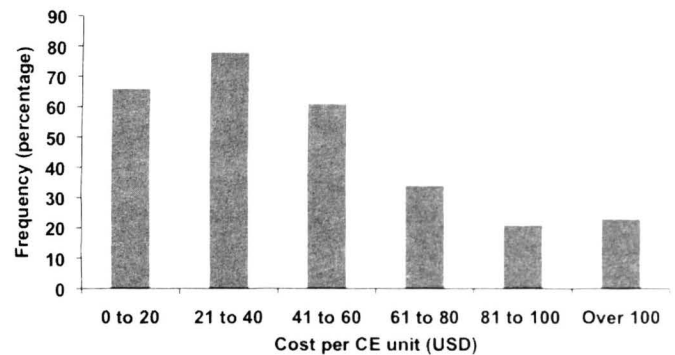


Figure 17. Value that AABP member survey respondents were willing to pay per online CE hour (average value = \$55/CE unit).

continue to grow. Therefore, moving forward to meet these needs is necessary.

Endnotes

^aAxio Online, K-State Survey Services, Manhattan, KS
^bMicrosoft, Redmond, WA