Veterinarian and His Profession

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As expected by a farmer

Scott Ellis*

LET me say to start with, I appreciate being asked to bring you the ideas of a farmer in regard to what we expect of the veterinary profession.

I am a farmer by choice and I love my profession. I live on a good 480 acre Dallas County farm. I feed cattle, raise hogs and dairy, feeding all the grain I raise. My livestock and livestock equipment invoiced January 1, at one-third the value of my farm.

You boys, equipped to practice, will, according to my figures, have invested about $12,000. Your biggest asset is your ability. Here is where we get together. I need your greatest asset to protect my greatest asset. With your ability I am expecting you to keep my losses from sickness and death at the minimum.

Your Value to Me

We will produce this year over 480,000 pounds of milk, 150,000 pounds of beef, and 100,000 pounds of pork. My farm is a level type and every acre is tillable. Grain farming would be much safer but would not produce the food units or keep up the fertility of my soil. The other reason is I like livestock. Liking what you do will help you boys too.

My greatest hazard in this type of farming is disease. Here’s where you and I get together again. Every few years a new disease comes along and makes my chosen vocation more of a hazard. I am going to expect you to study as hard after you leave here as you are studying now. You will have to keep yourself posted on diagnosis and treatment of these new diseases. Otherwise my losses in any outbreak of these new diseases might run into thousands of dollars.

I want you to spend lots of time on diagnosis. I don’t like the blunder bus or Gatling gun type of 3 or 4 shots in the neck and a heavy physic so as to hit one of 3 or 4 ailments.

Effect on Production

Remember, such drastic treatment stops gains on cattle and hogs as well as production on milk cows. I am employing you not only to avoid a death loss but to keep production loss at a minimum. If you don’t know, say so.

Another thing that impresses me is that a lot of vets are short on training in animal nutrition and care. Medicine is only half, nursing back to health and production is of equal importance.

Another virtue that seems to me to go along with ability is resourcefulness. When a bunch of feeders fresh in from the range get foot rot or a horse gets a nail in his hind foot, we don’t have any operating table that works like a barber chair. You and I are both in trouble and we have to handle them until they are well. We farmers are used to being resourceful and we expect you to help us out with the minimum of equipment.

Don’t be afraid to counsel with the farmer. He may have learned something in 30 or 40 years of experience that might help you.

As I see it, personality comes next to ability. Maybe a cow can’t tell you from a moron, but she is not hiring you. A haughty or too dignified an air doesn’t go down good with a farmer in trouble.

* A reprint from an article presented to the Junior chapter of the A.V.M.A. at Ames, Iowa.
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Tell us all you can; we appreciate a thorough explanation. We don’t want to steal your trade. Listen to what we have to say, you might by accident learn something. Cooperation may save us both some embarrassment. You’ll have to have our cooperation before you’re through.

Give some special attention to the caretaker so he may better understand his part in recovery. Answer the kid’s questions, it will pay big dividends. 4-H boys will be your future customers.

**Give Good Economical Service**

We have a right to expect you as a professional man to be one of the leaders in your community. School boards, churches, and town councils need you and you need them.

Conscientiousness comes next in the list of virtues we expect you to have. Be conscientious about a call. Ordinarily we don’t call before we need you. Be conscientious about recovery. A telephone call inquiring about how the old cow feels by now is appreciated more than you know. Be conscientious about being humane. A twitch on a horse’s ear or a rough handling of a “snooter” on a cow leaves us with a mean critter to handle and may be the cause of getting someone hurt later. We are glad to pay for a little anesthetic where a big incision has to be made. The less pain, the less loss in gain. Be conscientious about the fee in case the animal dies. Also with deserving poor people be considerate of the value of the animal.

Industriousness comes next as a virtue. We don’t like a lazy veterinarian any more than you like a lazy farmer. We like an early riser. A lot of things happen through the night and as quick as we find trouble we like to find you up—not in bed. Don’t be afraid to put in the hours. Don’t stop cleaning a cow when you have most of it out and then put in a box of capsules to do the rest. In my opinion that makes a lot of good cows “shy breeders” and you can’t get production while that condition exists. When there is vaccination to be done, it sure makes a difference whether it’s done in the cool of the morning or the heat of the day. And, by the way, there is something you can tell them I said. It isn’t fair to ask a veterinarian to clean your cow and not give him your vaccination.

Honesty comes next. If you don’t know, say so. Keep good books. Keep collections up. A big bill of long standing isn’t appreciated. Don’t let a man spend money with you when it’s no use. If you can’t make a living without handling minerals or stock feed on the side, better tear down your sign. Don’t disgrace it.

Morals come next, or maybe first. “Booze” gets more veterinarians than anything else. You veterinarians don’t know any too much when you are sober, much less when drunk. When we need you, we need you with all your faculties. Thousands of dollars of loss may be averted if you are keen on your toes. By the time you have sobered up it may be too late. My advice to you is if you have to have “booze” get out of the veterinary business if you can find another business where it doesn’t make any difference. We want you at your best, not your worst.

**Pernicious Use of Drugs**

Now a word about the period we are fast approaching—the postwar period. This increased production has brought its toll in diseases. With lower prices, more careless methods will spread diseases. Chemical companies and drug stores are going to attempt to render a service direct to the farmer. Ignorance in diagnosis as well as in administration will spread more disease.

We will need you more than ever; you will need us also. Let’s keep a united front and fight some of this illegitimate advertising and editorials, for we both have a lot at stake in this menace. Let us help you hold science high and tramp ignorance and graft out.

In closing, let me say again, I am a farmer because I love it and really feel it a privilege to serve in that capacity. As veterinarians you should feel it a privilege and not a task to serve.

Oats and wheat and some sorghums contain fairly large quantities of $\text{KNO}_3$. Those having over $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent are dangerous for use as food.