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Veterinary Medicine in Guatemala

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Guatemala is the Central American country nearest the United States. It is bounded on the north and west by Mexico, on the southeast by Honduras and El Salvador. It has a seventy mile Atlantic coast line and a two hundred mile Pacific coast line. The national territory comprises 42,000 square miles, not including the 8,605 of Belice (British Honduras) claimed by Guatemala.

Guatemala has two seasons. The rainy season lasts from the middle of May to October and the dry season from November to May. Guatemalans regard their climate with justifiable pride.

The tropical lowlands along the coast are hot and humid but the high altitude of most of the country provides temperatures of an “eternal spring.” In the higher mountains the average temperature is 59 degrees.

The People

The population of Guatemala is estimated at 3,500,000. Of this number approximately 8.5 per cent are Spanish, 38 per cent are ladino or of mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry or from other European nationalities and about 53 per cent are descended from the Mayan race.

Centuries before the discovery of America the Mayan civilization was one of the highest ever attained in pre-Hispanic America.

The capital, Guatemala City, is a modern city with a population of about 400,000. It dates from 1776 when it was founded to replace the earthquake devastated Antigua. It is placed in the Asuncion valley surrounded by green hills and by mountains at 5,000 feet above sea level. At this altitude the climate is excellent the year around with mean temperature ranges from 62 to 65 degrees. The evening air is fresh and crisp.

Agriculture

Guatemala is essentially an agricultural country. Coffee is the leading export, although the contrasting climatic areas within a country only three fourths the size of Iowa, permit the production of an amazing variety of crops including cotton, sugar cane, rubber, corn, beans, rice, wheat, bananas and citronella. Over 70 different varieties of fruits are grown in the fertile valleys. These include coconuts, mangos, papayas, pineapples, pears, plums, apples, grapes, oranges and many more. Orchids are found in abundance.

The livestock industry is growing rapidly. The native cattle are being systematically improved through the use of breeding stock from abroad. There are approximately 1,900,000 head of cattle, 266,000
Corn is a staple of the Indian diet. There is evidence that Guatemala was the “birthplace of corn.”

horses, 820,000 sheep and 450,000 swine. The beef cattle raising area is mainly in the South Coast where large numbers of Santa Gertrudis, Brangus, Brahman and native cattle are found. Dairy cattle are distributed throughout the highlands, particularly around the city of Guatemala. There are excellent Holstein, Jersey, Guernsey and Ayrshire herds.

Most of the horses are native, descendant from Spanish and Arabian horses. Sheep are found mainly in the high mountains and handled by the Indians. Swine are distributed throughout the country. There are only a few well organized, intensive swine farm operations.

University of San Carlos

This university is one of the oldest in the western hemisphere. Founded in Antigua, it was moved to Guatemala City in 1777. The colleges of this tuition free university are Medicine, Law, Dentistry, Humanities, Engineering, Architecture, Chemistry and Pharmacy, Economic Sciences, Agronomy and the College of Veterinary Medicine and Zootechnics which was established in 1957.

Last year a group of the students of Veterinary Medicine and several staff members spent a week visiting the Veterinary College at Iowa State University.

Dr. Francisco Rodas is the Dean of the school. He is a graduate of the College of Veterinary Medicine of Mexico University. The faculty is now composed of 18 full time professors and 4 part time professors. Faculty positions are being expanded. Most faculty members are graduates from Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia and Chile.

Although the first classes accepted were very small, it is planned to increase the beginning class to 45 to 50 students. It is expected that about half of this number will be residents of Guatemala. The balance of the class will be men accepted from the other Central American Republics. In this way the Guatemala school will
Practice calls are frequently made on a team basis. This group is on its way to investigate a problem on a beef cattle ranch on the Pacific coast. From the left, representative of a pharmaceutical company, Mr. Andrino and private practitioner.

serve, and be supported by, all Central America.

Veterinary Practice

At present Guatemala is provided with very limited private veterinary service. There are only four general practitioners and two small animal practices. The rest of the veterinarians work for the Government in the Departments of Agriculture or Public Health. A few are employed by commercial companies or are members of the staff of the Colleges of Veterinary Medicine and Zootechnics.

Those veterinarians employed by the Government are mainly engaged in campaigns for the control of diseases such as tuberculosis, Brucellosis, rabies and in the control of ectoparasites. The few small animal clinics are located in the heart of Guatemala City. These are well equipped and run in a similar manner to small animal clinics in the United States.

The shortage of veterinarians has resulted in considerable empiricism from laymen and farmers. This practice is now decreasing with the increasing number of veterinarians.

Apparently the coastal areas of the country have the high animal disease problem characteristic of tropical regions. However, because of the fragmentary veterinary service the existence and incidence of various diseases has been largely unknown.

Most of the veterinarians live in Guatemala City. The large animal practitioners or general practitioners drive from the city to the outlying cattle operations. This procedure limits most of a day’s work to one or two calls. A professional fee is charged for the visit but the owner purchases most medication independently.

The condition of many roads during the rainy season requires most veterinarians to have 4-wheel drive cars. However, some passenger cars are used in practice.

Most drugs used are produced in North America. A considerable amount is also imported from Europe, particularly from Germany. Except for a few vaccines and some sera, no veterinary products are being manufactured in Guatemala.

To become a member of the Guatemalan Veterinary Medical Association, a veterinarian must first pass an examination which permits him to graduate from the University of San Carlos. This procedure must be followed regardless of the University from which the veterinarian graduates. Only then may they become members of the Veterinary Association and be permitted to practice.

Students Well Prepared

The students admitted to schools of veterinary medicine today are better prepared than ever before according to Dr. Glenn C. Holm, Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Oklahoma State University.

A survey recently completed by Dean Holm shows that most of the students admitted have nearly three years of preprofessional training to easily meet the required two years. Where sixty semester credits are required exclusive of the military and physical education courses, most have ninety semester credits before being admitted to the professional schools.