Are We Prepared for Change?

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heart failure, although a fulminating "hepatic failure syndrome" may also occur. Diagnosis of heartworm disease is based upon identification of the microfilariae and by radiography. Treatment follows proper

supportive therapy to prepare the dog for the rigors of the heartworm chemotherapeutics. With the recent incursion of heartworm disease into Iowa, veterinarians should be aware of this infection.

Are We Prepared for Change?

By

E. W. Moss, D.V.M.*

The Agribusiness of the future will, through economic necessity, be quite different than it is today. The trend has been established and barring major world upheaval it will continue in the direction of fewer farm units of larger size and more specialized production with the emphasis on efficiency. The less productive areas of North America are moving along this path at faster rates than are the more fertile areas such as the Midwest, U.S.A. where the smaller unit can still survive due to the consistent high productivity of the land.

The services that supply these primary producers will have to change as well. We in the veterinary profession that concern ourselves with the food producing animals are in this category. The question arises;

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are we ready, able and willing to supply this type of service?

To answer this question the first logical step would be to define what services will be demanded of us. It appears that these new units will be looking for a more complete type of health program, one that starts with consultation; on construction in relation to disease control, on waste disposal, on environmental control, genetic potential and on production goals. From here, this type of operator will seek our assistance in setting up a management program that will be based on efficiency and disease prevention. We will have to anticipate disease problems and set up programs to prevent and control these diseases. We will be asked to give advice on the renovation of existing facilities to increase production and reduce the incidence of disease. Finally, we will be asked for an accurate diagnosis upon which to base therapy programs. However, I feel our use in this last mentioned capacity will be an admission of failure in our prevention programs.

Are we prepared to make suggestions that may entail the investment of thousands of dollars of the producers money and say with confidence that this investment will return a profit? Do we have the knowledge and training to give intelligent advice on what environmental controls are necessary to allow maximum expression of genetic potential? For example it has only been recently discovered that a steer on full feed will be in a positive heat balance down to ambient temperature of minus 20°F. during the day. However, that critical temperature when feed will be used for heat and not growth is reached at between 0 and 10°F. at night because the dark night sky acts as a giant blotter for heat. Trials have shown a net increase as high as $2.00 per steer fed when a shed or roof is provided for the winter months. Are we prepared to speak in depth on the effect sub-clinical disease has on efficient production? A Canadian survey estimates the yearly death losses in the food production animals to be about 114 million dollars a year, but, they feel the losses from sub-clinical disease is at least three times this amount. Do we know the cost and value-return of a good herd health program? Or are we going to continue to consider good surgical procedures, individual diagnosis and treatment, and the "complete veterinarian" to be the goal of our educational institutions?

I strongly feel we must make a critical re-evaluation of what Agri-business needs from veterinary science and then have the courage to institute these changes in the colleges. The cry of the student and the practicing veterinarian alike is "how can I be all of these things to all of these people? How can I absorb all there is to know in all the fields of veterinary medicine in the allotted time and call myself competent"? We must consider specialization as a possible answer. The student who is allowed to spend the majority of his time in the field of his interest during the clinical period of his training and has had more exposure to the nutritional and management aspects of livestock production will be better prepared to offer the type of service that will be, and in some cases is being asked for. The poultry industry and some of the larger swine and feedlot units are already excluding our service as being non-essential. You may scoff at their ignorance, but it must make us pause and consider why we are being left out. Their reasons are economic in nature as they are for every decision in these units, once they have a diagnosis from the local diagnostic lab, they can hire laymen to push pills and run the vaccine guns much cheaper then they can get veterinarians and they can purchase drugs at the same price the veterinarians pay. They have come to accept losses from sub-clinical disease and inefficient gain to be the norm, either because they are unaware or cannot get professional advice.

We have an important role to fill in the field of Agribusiness, both in the area of practical application and in basic research, however, we must have the training to allow us to gain the confidence of the industry that employs us. I wonder if we are not over-trained for what we are doing and under-trained for what we should be doing.

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