
Food for thought for Food animal veterinarians

Movers and shakers

Just a few years ago, many veterinarians, including myself, were concerned about too many veterinarians and the compensation that graduates in veterinary medicine were receiving upon graduation—in some states, below \$20,000 after 7 years of education. This translated to a perception that a degree in veterinary medicine was a poor investment for most students. At the same time, there was evidence of need for more food animal practitioners. A hue and cry were heard in the profession. Many asked, "What has happened? Who has been asleep?" Fingers pointed everywhere, particularly at the colleges of veterinary medicine. The staff and administration in many cases had been asleep. Some, even today, are arguing about trivial curricular changes rather than the real needs of the future.

Around all of us the world is changing. There have been so many social, economic, and technologic changes that we haven't recognized them, so we have "sat" on our merits and secure seats of the past. We haven't focused our attention to the future. Then, in 1987, out of bewilderment within the profession, came the PEW National Veterinary Education Program. This 5-year program is designed to assist US and Canadian veterinary colleges to become aware

of changes in the world—specifically on food animal medicine. For review, there are 4 phases of the program: 1) a national strategic analysis of veterinary medicine and veterinary education; 2) training in initiating and managing the change for the "movers and shakers" within veterinary education; 3) a period in which the colleges of veterinary medicine looked at themselves and developed strategic plans to meet the needs of the future; and 4) funding for innovative projects designed to make needed educational changes.

I guess it is best to remind the reader that change is a slow process. "What's the matter with the old?" and "How will the new affect me?" seemed to be the thoughts in the minds of many academicians. Nevertheless, we are seeing changes—slow, but positive. One change that certainly needs recognition and praise is the Food Animal Production Medicine Consortium—a product of the PEW report that is underway. The colleges of veterinary medicine in California, Michigan, Illinois, Florida, and Kansas in association with the University of Nebraska, plus Minnesota to provide data management expertise, have joined together to provide high-quality, in-depth, species-specific education in food animal production medicine to veterinary students.

Revitalized education in food animal medicine is quite a challenge when one views the economic management deci-

sions that must be faced in food animal medicine today. When one considers the size of some livestock operations and the cost-effectiveness that must prevail, one can readily see that an interdisciplinary approach is needed to balance the educational program for veterinary students. Producers' reception to the "good old boy" approach and the "veterinary mechanic" is gone. We have a new horizon to envision and conquer—if we can only see it. So, hats off to those colleges of veterinary medicine that are attempting to meet the needs of food animal production. They will succeed, and let us hope that all other colleges of veterinary medicine will follow in this pursuit.

The purpose of this commentary is to arouse the movers and shakers within our profession. We need them! There aren't enough of them within academia, but there are private practitioners, government employees, and industrial veterinarians who are farsighted, alert, and actively engaged in changing the course of our profession. They should become involved and give their knowledge and suggestions. We need to combine forces with other disciplines instead of fighting them and becoming isolationists. I know of one veterinary college that wouldn't allow a PhD in animal science teach nutrition to the veterinary students because he wasn't a veterinarian. All of this must rapidly change.

It may be difficult to moti-

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vate for change among tenured staff members who have no conception of present day animal agriculture. But no stone should be left unturned in our efforts to help them see that the needs of the livestock industries have changed dramatically in recent years, and will continue to change in the future.

I have reviewed the programs of many state veterinary meetings. There is a lack of coordination of programs directed toward food animal medicine. This is why the species-specific groups such as the AABP and the

AASP have gained in popularity and have served food animal practitioners so well. The movers and shakers within our profession must come forth and assist academia. All veterinarians in food animal medicine should be "called to arms" to guide and direct education to meet the challenges in production medicine today.

I particularly like the objective of the Food Animal Production Medicine Consortium. "In modern food animal agriculture environment, veterinarians must have and use expertise associ-

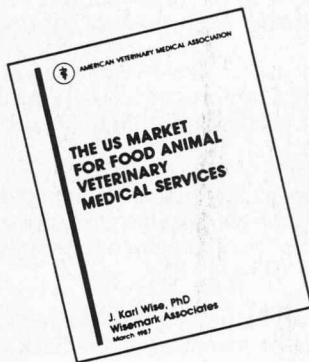
ated with traditional modes of health maintenance and treatment of disease; however, these competencies must be significantly supplemented with knowledge in computer usage, information management, economics of production, animal health maintenance, farm and personnel management, epidemiology, environmental maintenance, and food safety."

This is a big order—but veterinary medicine can meet this goal. We need the movers and shakers. You know who you are, so get in and help.

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