



Vet Call

by Bob Larson, Kansas State University

Shared heritage of veterinary medicine and the U.S. cattle industry

Veterinary medicine and cattle production have a long, shared heritage. I imagine as people first started domesticating cattle to provide meat and milk, certain individuals had a particular interest in their health and well-being. Historical artifacts from as early as the Bronze Age indicate that there have long been people who were called upon to provide their expertise in the care and health of animals.

Protecting growth

The first known veterinary college was established in Lyon, France, in 1761 and the first schools that focused on veterinary medicine in the United States were started in the middle to late 1800s.

Since the beginnings of veterinary medicine, the profession has been influenced by the contemporary theories and practices of human medicine and livestock production, and has a unique position at the intersection

of medicine, animal health and food production.

Both in the past and currently, veterinarians have been responsible for identifying and treating individual cattle that become ill or injured. In addition, because cattle are often grouped into large herds, the health and well-being of herds and even multiple herds within a region has also been emphasized.

The important role cattle play in human

health is based on the part cattle play in providing meat and milk as sources of high-quality protein and other essential nutrients. Cattle health also impacts human health because of some shared diseases such as brucellosis and tuberculosis.

Veterinary medicine has played important roles in the establishment, growth and maintenance of the U.S. cattle industry. Shortly after the Civil War, the early cattle drives from Texas to railheads where cattle could be shipped to the cities of the eastern United States almost came to an early end because of Texas Cattle Fever, a disease carried by ticks that could pass from the resistant Longhorn cattle to the susceptible cattle farther north and east.

By establishing an early form of quarantine that effectively separated tick-carrying cattle from other cattle, railheads were established in Kansas towns such as Abilene, Ellsworth, Wichita and Dodge City largely because they were located away from established herds and farms.

Because of the importance of Texas Cattle Fever, in 1893 the Texas Legislature created the Livestock Sanitary Commission with the goal to eradicate the Texas cattle-fever tick. Other state and federal programs to target and eliminate important diseases of cattle

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followed, with an official program of the federal government to eradicate bovine tuberculosis starting in 1917 and the federal brucellosis program starting in 1934. These successful federal efforts built upon the work started by cooperating veterinarians and cattle producers at local and state levels.

Because of their training and experience dealing with diseases that cause illness, death, abortion and production inefficiency, veterinarians have long been looked upon to diagnose and treat cattle that are noticeably ill. In addition, veterinarians focus on preventing disease and injury through animal management, nutrition, vaccination, quarantine and parasite control.

Veterinarians are also actively involved in

optimizing reproductive efficiency through skills and services focused on heifer development, breeding-season management, reproductive examinations of bulls, and prevention and treatment of calving difficulty.

Developing roles

While many of the roles veterinarians play today are exactly the same as the roles of animal health providers through the centuries, new roles are appearing. Veterinarians have increasingly important responsibilities for Beef Quality Assurance (BQA), antimicrobial stewardship and cattle welfare.

Because of the close relationships veterinarians have with cattle producers, as well as their responsibilities for animal health and public health, veterinarians continue to have a unique position in society to serve the interests of cattle producers, the cattle

themselves, food consumers and the wider public.

It is important to occasionally look back in time to appreciate the heritage that we all share in the cattle business, and the extraordinary people and situations that worked together to create the beef industry we have today. In addition, we look for lessons in the past as we address new problems and opportunities in cattle production and veterinary medicine as we plan for the future.



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