

VETERINARY CALL

by Bob Larson, Kansas State University

What's Next for Veterinarians?

What does the future hold for the next generation of veterinarians?

I don't have an accurate crystal ball with which to provide perfect answers to young veterinarians and students thinking about veterinary medicine as a career. 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, because cattle are often grouped into large herds, the health and well-being of herds and multiple herds within a region has 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. But based on the changes that have taken place in the veterinary profession and in beef cattle production during my career, and based on changes predicted for the near future, I have a few ideas I think are likely to affect livestock veterinarians long after I am retired.

What's coming

I think beef-producing clients and other animal owners will have increasingly higher expectations for service and expertise from the veterinarians who assist them. Although it is a challenge to meet

high expectations, it is also a great opportunity for talented young veterinarians to provide a level of expertise to improve health and production that goes beyond that provided by their predecessors.

Technology will be used to improve the accuracy and speed of diagnosing disease and obstacles to fertility as tools become readily available and veterinarians increase their skill and comfort integrating them into daily use. Communication technology will also continue to advance, which means the speed and clarity of communication demanded by clients will continue to progress.

Societal expectations

In addition to greater demands from livestock-owning clients, society as a whole will have increasing expectations for individual veterinarians and the veterinary profession to assure high standards for animal welfare, appropriate drug and vaccine use, and ultimately to help ensure a safe and abundant food supply. Combining animal husbandry skills with new technology; high-level problem-solving skills; and improved communication with both livestock producers and consumers of livestock products will bring future veterinarians into conversations with a wide variety of people interested in

animal health and production.

My career has been spent helping to prepare students for careers in various aspects of beef production and veterinary medicine. While many of the roles veterinarians will play in the future are exactly the same as the roles of animal health providers through the centuries, the future will look different from the past.

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.

A career in veterinary medicine will provide great opportunities for young people interested in animal agriculture. If you are interested in math and science as well as cattle and other animals, and you have a desire to engage with and support livestock producers in your community, I encourage you to consider a career in veterinary medicine. **AJ**

Editor's note: Robert L. Larson is a professor of production medicine and executive director of Veterinary Medicine Continuing Education at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kan.