

VETERINARY CALL

by Bob Larson, Kansas State University

Partnering With Your Veterinarian

Although being self-reliant and independent are helpful traits for cattle producers, success in this very complex industry also requires forming effective relationships. This should be with a diverse group of experts, including a local veterinarian.

I have the privilege to see many types of partnerships between beef producers and their local veterinarians that result in working together to reach common goals. They involve much more than a straight-forward business relationship between a service provider and a customer.

The best producer-veterinarian relationships I've observed involve someone passionate about the cattle business. This vet should want to see the producer have a successful business over many years, possess the skills needed by the producer and want to work with the producer's other partners (such as lenders, nutritionists, extension specialists, risk-management, marketing, etc.)

In addition, the producer sees his/her local veterinarian as a source of expert services and advice who can increase production efficiency and reduce disease risk.

The veterinary advantage

Ranch income is primarily derived from the sale of calves or breeding bulls and heifers. Seedstock operations can improve their profitability by increasing the number of marketable breeding animals by

increasing the reproductive efficiency of the herd. Veterinarians can provide advice and services to monitor and evaluate heifers, cows and bulls so that a high percentage of the herd is able to successfully mate at the start of each breeding season.

The value of the land used to provide forage, as well as the cost of locally available supplements, dictate much of the cost aspect of cow-calf production. By using body condition scores (BCS) collected at several key points in the production cycle, your veterinarian can help fine-tune herd management based on the ranch forage base, the availability of cost-effective supplements or grazing alternatives and the optimum cow size and milking ability for the herd.

In addition to services and advice that address production efficiency goals, your local veterinarian has the important job of identifying the best strategies to cost-effectively managing disease risk. They can provide valuable information about the likelihood that your herd could suffer losses from various diseases and the expected magnitude of those losses should your herd be exposed.

By considering the likelihood of a disease, the magnitude of losses

associated with that disease, and the effectiveness control strategies, your veterinarian can work with you to optimize the disease risk management of your ranching business.

Health records are key

Marketing cattle increasingly includes information about health status. You must think of your downstream customers as you work with your veterinarian to plan a health program that not only meets the needs of your herd but also provides a cost-effective marketing advantage.

A successful cattle business requires a combination of cattle and business expertise. Many successful ranchers count on a trusted team of advisors and suppliers to help them improve the profitability and sustainability of their ranching businesses.

Finding and working with a local veterinarian who can provide assistance to increase income, control costs and manage risks should be a goal of every cattle producer. **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.