



► Charles Mogck, Olivet, S.D., his son Chase, and veterinarian Dave Barz inspect part of the herd at Mogck and Sons Angus. The Mogcks and Barz have been working together for more than 10 years and have developed a relationship that goes beyond just standard animal medicine.

Good Medicine

As an Angus producer, forming a good relationship with a veterinarian takes communication, understanding.

Story & photos by *Crystal Albers*

Establishing a good working relationship with a veterinarian is essential in the cattle business, where good communication skills can mean the difference between a healthy animal and one that's persistently sick — and persistently costly.

A solid relationship with a veterinarian is needed to produce healthy animals and a healthy bottom line.

Charles Mogck, emulates that philosophy on his Olivet, S.D., ranch. Mogck, in partnership with his wife, LeAndra, is the third generation to run the family-owned Mogck and Sons Angus — home to

approximately 75 purebred replacement heifers and almost 300 cow-calf pairs on rolling plains in the southeastern corner of the state. He has worked to develop a beneficial relationship with his longtime veterinarian, Dave Barz, who owns and operates Northwest Veterinary Clinic in Parkston, S.D. Barz semen-tests and preg-checks the herd on a regular basis, also measuring pelvic area and performing some vaccinations. Barz and Mogck have been working together for more than 10 years and have developed a relationship that goes beyond just standard animal medicine.

“As a purebred breeder, it's really important to have a veterinarian that you have a good relationship with,” Mogck says. “For us, he does have a say in what profit we're going to have.”

Central to the ranch is its long-standing guarantee — to provide fertile bulls and females that will continue to breed back. Behind that promise, Mogck explains, lies the importance of his relationship with Barz.

“He is the first step in our guarantee,” he says. “Our guarantee doesn't have the power it should have if we have a poor vet or a vet that doesn't do a good job in these critical steps.”

While Mogck performs the majority of the herd's routine vaccinations, he leaves more complicated tasks to Barz. Although he admits that, with effort and time, he could possibly be trained to semen-test and preg-check the herd himself, he feels more comfortable leaving such responsibilities to a professional.

“He does this for a living,” Mogck says. “He's able to do a better job than what we would do, and we trust that he's going to do the best job that he can since he's doing it on a daily basis.”

Barz is part of a team of four veterinarians serving clients within about a 40-mile radius from Parkston. With a larger-scale clinic like Barz's, access to a veterinarian is rarely a problem, and veterinary assistance for weekend or emergency calls becomes more convenient, Mogck says.

“There's always somebody on call so that in the middle of the night, if we are having problems, we can get ahold of somebody to get out here,” he says. “That is an important

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► Both Mogck (pictured above) and Barz share a similar viewpoint when it comes to management strategies — to adopt new technologies and procedures while remaining economically sound.

Valued Partners

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► Barz says cattlemen should demand more from their veterinarians. “Utilize the veterinarian as best you can for what he does best, and then challenge him to make himself, and you, better in other areas,” he says.

part of it, having someone available 24 hours a day in those situations.”

The size of the clinic also gives Mogck access to a wide variety of products and services. “[Barz] basically has about every service or product that we want,” he says. “If we do need something that he doesn’t have, he’s really accommodating, and he’ll get it for us.”

Plus, Barz often recommends vaccines that are most effective against illnesses specific to the area.

“Our strains of diseases, like our pneumonias and our pinkeye, for example, are completely different than probably 200-300 miles from here,” Mogck says. “We rely on our veterinarian to know how to treat them and what antibiotics are working for different strains, and that’s important.”

Beyond medicine

Besides contributing to the overall health of the herd, Barz also attends the operation’s annual bull and heifer sale in early April. While there, the veterinarian answers questions regarding Mogck’s herd health program and the 90 bulls and 35 replacement heifers offered for sale.

“We like to have him there, because if a



► Barz preg-checks and semen-tests Mogck’s herd regularly. His work is critical to the ranch’s guarantee — to provide fertile bulls and females that will continue to breed back. “He is the first step in our guarantee,” Mogck says.

person has a question on our vaccination program or has a question on the procedure of how they were semen-tested, they can go directly to him,” Mogck says. “It’s best if the question can be answered directly from the person who is primarily responsible for our health programs.”

In addition to simply answering questions, Barz also serves as a source of industry knowledge for his customers — a resource for cattlemen challenged by complicated interstate health requirements. After Mogck’s sale, Barz completes the necessary paperwork for animals being shipped across state lines or into other countries.

“You rely on your vet to make sure what shots and what tests need to be done to export bulls into different places,” Mogck says. “He’s our first resource for that, and if he doesn’t know, he can call the state laboratory and they can get the information to him. He’s the one who gets that going and makes sure that gets done right.”

Barz is a firm believer in staying well-informed in an ever-changing industry, where national animal identification (ID) procedures and technological advancements edge closer to changing production agriculture, and in effect, the way he practices veterinary medicine. And with some uncertainty lingering in the fine-tuning of a national animal ID plan, Mogck finds his veterinarian’s way of thinking rather comforting.

“No one really knows what’s going to happen or what the regulations are going to be exactly, but I believe that veterinarians are going to have a major role in that,” Mogck says. “The people buying my livestock are going to want to know what kind of history they’ve had for shots, and the veterinarian is going to be one who can verify their health program.”

Barz says he reads magazine articles, attends educational meetings and reviews some research via the Internet to stay informed of not only current policies, but

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Relating to your veterinarian

A relationship between a veterinarian and a client can be likened to a marriage — where everything hinges on good communication, understanding and patience.

Beth Sondgeroth, a veterinarian at the Bureau Valley Veterinary Service in Princeton, Ill., has been practicing animal medicine for three years since graduating from Michigan State University (MSU) in 2001. Sondgeroth works with purebred clients, commercial operations and feedlots, and offers the following advice to breeders hoping to form stronger, more solid working relationships with their veterinarians.

1. Ask more questions.

Sondgeroth suggests breeders question their veterinarians more frequently. “Asking more questions is a good start,” she says. “Showing that you’re interested and that you want to know more will usually make most vets slow down and explain things.”

By questioning their veterinarians, producers can get better, more detailed advice tailored to meet the needs of their individual operations.

“If [breeders] provide veterinarians with more information and better dialogue, [veterinarians] will maybe come up with more suggestions or more solutions that are slightly different than the standard recommendation, but a little better for them,” Sondgeroth says.

Also, problems within the herd are more likely to elude animal owners if they fail to communicate with their veterinarians. “If you don’t tell us what’s going on, we’re going to assume that everything is OK because we can’t call every week and say, ‘Hey, how are things going?’” Sondgeroth continues. “The better clients are at asking questions, saying ‘Can we do this or that?’ the more they will stimulate the veterinarian to think about different opportunities.”

2. Be prepared.

Before veterinarians make ranch visits, Sondgeroth suggests

breeders have their cattle prepared and in the pen. “We appreciate going to a farm and having cattle ready to go,” she says. “It’s just a lot more effective use of our time, and yours.”

Having cattle-handling facilities in proper working order is also important.

“We do appreciate good facilities. They don’t have to be the latest and greatest, but if you just have a place to work your cattle and a place to catch them to pull calves, for example, it will certainly make our job a little easier.”

3. Be flexible.

Understand that, just like physicians, veterinarians can be called away by emergencies and a busy schedule.

“Being flexible is helpful,” Sondgeroth says. “It’s a little easier to work with people who are understanding of our schedule if we have an emergency and who are able to reschedule.”

4. Think modern.

Producers who keep up with changing technologies and new management techniques often have more meaningful conversations with their veterinarians and animal health-care suppliers. They are able to discuss a wider variety of techniques and modern equipment options. “It’s encouraging if the producer shows evidence that he or she is trying to keep up with technology and not necessarily doing things the way they were done 20 years ago,” Sondgeroth notes.

5. Stay informed.

Most importantly, animal owners should stay informed of new developments, good or bad, in an ever-changing industry. “As a producer, being well-informed and doing your homework will probably go the furthest in terms of communicating with your veterinarian,” Sondgeroth says. “Just by doing that, you encourage your veterinarian — you push the veterinarian toward better medicine. The better the producer is, the better the veterinarian will become.”

developments in management techniques, new products and procedures, and the latest research.

"If you don't read those types of periodicals, someone will ask you a question about something that they have read; you need to know and understand it," he says. "For me to just sit in my office and wait for new techniques and new products to come to me won't work. You usually read about it, or people ask you about it first."

Seeing eye-to-eye

Throughout the last decade the two men have built their working relationship through good communication and a mutual mind-set. Both Mogck and Barz share similar viewpoints when it comes to management strategies — to adopt new technologies and procedures while remaining economically sound.

"In life, you can either be proactive or reactive," Barz says. "Proactive people are willing to change their programs. They're willing to change their mind-sets, and they're willing to move on and try to do better things. Once they reach a goal they set, they'll set a new goal and raise the bar a little higher. Charles knows where he's at, and he knows where his breeding goal is set."

Mogck is considered a pioneer in the area, as one of the first breeders to adopt ultrasounding as a way to measure carcass traits. Now, Barz is following in his client's footsteps, with plans to offer the service to his customers sometime next year.

Although Barz says he'll use such technologies when working with any client, he enjoys working with proactive customers like Charles who are unafraid of change — as long as it makes good business sense.



"You have to weigh what it's going to cost you. You have to be educated and open-minded and make meaningful, economic decisions that will benefit you in the future," he says. "You can be as progressive as you want, but if you're not making money, it doesn't matter."

Proactive customers tend to demand more from their veterinarians, too, Barz notes.

"People like Charles tend to be more educated in their own herds. They question you and make you be more educated, make you give them better ideas and more help," he says, recommending more breeders do the same. "Most people need to challenge their veterinarians more to make them do the things that they need to make their operations better. A veterinarian that is well-educated can be an untapped source of knowledge."

He suggests producers ask more questions of their veterinarians and participate more in herd checkups. The time for communication, he says, is during preventative stages; by the time an ill animal needs therapy, it's too late.

► Mogck and Barz discuss advancements within the industry. The two men challenge each other to continually improve their programs, to consider change and to adopt new technologies.

"Utilize the veterinarian as best you can for what he does best, and then challenge him to make himself, and you, better in other areas," he says. By improving their herds, producers can get more bang for their buck when it comes to interacting with their veterinarians.

"Most people underchallenge their cattle," Barz says. "The genetics are there to do better. They can challenge those cattle a lot better if they really wanted to."

"If you challenge yourself to do better with your herd, you'll also challenge the people who work for you — your veterinarian, your nutritionist, everyone else — to do a better job. It all adds together. When all of you are challenging each other and working together toward the same goal, then you can reach it."

Practice doesn't make perfect

Regardless of the relationship breeders may currently have with their veterinarians, every ranch visit may not be a pleasant one, Mogck says.

"It's just like anybody you do business with. There's some things you may not like that he does or has done in the past, but you always work them out with him and be honest with him and hope he's honest with you," he suggests. "Normally, you'll work out any problems you have. But, if you don't trust him, you shouldn't be doing business with him."

Choosing a veterinarian, Mogck says, is like choosing a doctor — find the best doctor available, someone with experience who specializes in the field and keeps up with all the latest vaccines. And, he cautions, it's also important to remember that a veterinarian isn't a cure-all to animal sickness and disease. Preventing and treating illness takes practice and understanding.

"Veterinary medicine is just like the medical field. They call their operations 'practices,' and that's what they're actually doing; they're practicing. Nothing is ever 100%. He can give his best advice on how to treat something, and with animals, or even humans, there's always going to be death," he says. "A veterinarian can't perform miracles, and you have to realize he can't. You just hope he's trying to do his best and keep up with all the newest technologies to help your herd — to tell you what you need to do to change, to avoid having disasters and to prevent having sick cattle."

VCPR regulations

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has defined a proper working relationship between a veterinarian, his or her clients, and patients. Veterinarians are required to establish the Veterinary-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR), as designated and enforced by state law, in order to practice animal medicine and dispense medications or other drugs. According to the requirements, a VCPR exists when all the following conditions have been met:

- The veterinarian has assumed the responsibility for making clinical judgments regarding the health of the animal(s) and the need for medical treatment, and the client has agreed to follow the veterinarian's instructions.
- The veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the animal(s) to initiate at least a general or preliminary diagnosis of the medical condition of the animal(s). This means that the veterinarian has recently seen and is personally acquainted with the keeping and care of the animal(s) by virtue of an examination of the animal(s) or by medically appropriate and timely visits to the premises where the animal(s) are kept.
- The veterinarian is readily available for follow-up evaluation, or has arranged for emergency coverage, in the event of adverse reactions or failure of the treatment regimen.

Source: www.avma.org