



# Valued Partner

**Seedstock producers and their veterinarians build strong working partnerships to keep herds healthy.**

*Story and photos by Joann Pipkin, freelancer*

**A**sk Brian Brockman about the relationship he has with his veterinarian, and he'll tell you in two words all about it. Valuable partner.

"He has to trust me, and I have to trust him," Brockman says.

With 200 head of registered-Angus cows at his family's Brockmere Farm in northwest Missouri, Brockman knows he can't afford to cut corners on herd health. His customers depend on it.

The Brockmans are long-time clients of Brookfield Animal Clinic, where they have a 60-year track record with the practice. They have worked alongside their veterinarian, Todd Gordon, for more than 25 years.

From pregnancy diagnosis to semen evaluation to vaccination work and consultation, Brockman says Gordon is a good friend and confidant.

"As a seedstock producer, we have a large capital investment in our cattle, materials and facilities," Brockman says. "We need to do the best job we can at getting the most out of our investment."

The role of the seedstock producer often goes beyond that of supplying cattle, Brockman says. "We often serve as an advisor to our customers. They need assistance with their mineral and forage programs, as well as herd health, and our veterinarian assists us with providing them the information they need."

### **Problem-solving team**

While longevity may be a key component to the veterinary-client relationship, it is not always the standard. Amanda Raitchel, Herbster Angus Farm, Falls City, Neb., has developed what she calls a "super



relationship" with her veterinarian, Danelle Bauman-Cromer, in less than two years.

"We solve problems together," Raitchel says.

Bauman-Cromer, who practices at Animal Health Center in Falls City, started with the clinic in June 2013. With a background in beef production, she realizes the value in helping seedstock producers supply a quality product.

"Herd health is one of the most important aspects of our industry," says Bauman-Cromer.

"Working alongside [his or her] veterinarian gives the seedstock producer added benefit of having someone to consult with and help guide decision-making to ensure a top-quality product," she explains.

In addition to monitoring typical diseases, Bauman-Cromer says, seedstock producers

► **Above:** Preventive care such as diagnosing pregnancy is key for seedstock producers. While today's vaccines are extremely effective, veterinarian Michael Spragg says it's also important to put your cattle in the best possible position for the vaccine to work by providing them proper nutrition and minerals.

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must monitor genetic issues, as they play an increasing role in the overall health of today's cow herd.

"The push today is for both genetic and phenotypic perfection in the bulls produced by seedstock suppliers," she notes. "It's very important in the end that in order to produce a quality herd sire, he has to have good health all the way through. Bulls need to have longevity in the next herd as well. That is what helps build good producer-customer relationships."

A 21-year veteran in large-animal care, veterinarian Michael Spragg, Spragg Veterinary Clinic, Rogersville, Mo., says preventive care is really the No. 1 reason to maintain a good veterinary-client relationship.

"Our vaccines today are very effective, but it's also about putting the animals in the best possible position for the vaccine to work," Spragg explains. "[This includes] getting the minerals right, making sure the herd is free of other diseases, as well."

Testing for bovine viral diarrhea-persistent infection (BVD-PI) is becoming increasingly important to the seedstock supplier, says Spragg. "Getting that virus out of your herd helps lower abortions, pneumonia and other sudden disease outbreaks that you can't explain. You may have only one animal in your herd that tests positive, but it can really rock the apple cart."

In fact, Spragg reports that one of his most progressive seedstock breeders tested his entire herd for BVD-PI. While only a few were identified as positive, the breeder is



► Rogersville, Mo., veterinarian Michael Spragg advises seedstock producers to establish a comprehensive herd health plan.



► Establishing a good relationship with your veterinarian makes dollars and sense for seedstock producers. Being successful in the business, says Spragg, means cattlemen must go above and beyond the bare minimum.

now starting to reap the rewards with overall improved herd health.

"If you are a seedstock producer, flushing cows and putting embryos in, you don't want that recipient aborting an embryo because of the BVD," Spragg says. "Testing does pay off."

Typically, testing for BVD-PI may cost between \$4 and \$5 per head, which Spragg says is pretty inexpensive to what cattle are worth in today's market.

### Trusting the professionals

Harris Penner, who operates Penner Ranch in Mill Creek, Okla., says maintaining a good relationship with his veterinarian doesn't mean his cattle won't get sick, "but it reduces the chance and perhaps the percentage of sickness you have."

For Penner, the expertise alone that his veterinarian provides is worth its weight in gold. "[Veterinarians] are the professionals," he reasons. "We are out checking our cows and calves. They keep up on new vaccines and health protocols."

Raithel agrees. "Veterinarians are always up-to-date on the current state and federal regulations on beef health guidelines for quality assurance and transport."

Yet, the need for keeping the veterinarian on speed dial goes beyond that. "Even if we have been beef producers for years, there is a health issue that [can arise] that is just a 'head scratcher,' and it's nice to have someone you trust to help figure out what is

going on," Raithel says. "If we have a sick calf that is not getting better or a bad (obstetrics case), it's nice to have someone that you trust to call and count on."

Keeping the lines of communication open between veterinarian and client is crucial, according to Bauman-Cromer. "If we can add information, advice and diagnostics — anything to help the seedstock producer in the long run — that helps everyone."

Brockman notes that honesty and communication go hand in hand toward having a successful seedstock operation.

"It's important for the vet to tell me like it is," Penner states.

Whether it is intelligence, grit, problem-solving ability or even experience that you may seek in a good veterinary relationship, Raithel says the ability to listen and work together with the client remains the most valuable trait.

"Having a good relationship that is open and honest," Bauman-Cromer says, "is important so you can work as a team."

Spragg advises seedstock producers to sit down with their veterinarian and establish a comprehensive health plan.

"Don't cut corners, and stick to the plan," he says.

"If you really want to be successful in the seedstock business, you really have to go above and beyond the bare minimum," Spragg explains. "Word of mouth in the industry can kill any future sales."

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**Editor's Note:** Joann Pipkin is a cattlegirl and freelance writer from Republic, Mo.