



Don't Forget the **Small** Producers

It's hard to identify exactly when small, farrow-to-finish, single-site producers became a small minority of the clients we serve. While there has been a gradual decline of that type of producer for years, there are some specific events that accelerate that process. Disease outbreaks (PRRS, SIV), low market prices (especially the fall of 1998), high grain prices, and market access all limit the profitability of small producers.

Most swine veterinarians generate a majority of their revenue by providing services to larger farms. We can spread our knowledge and expertise over many animals in a short period of time. Small farms represent a small portion of our revenue, but they are an important part of the industry that cannot be ignored. It is our responsibility to see that the remaining small farms get the service they need.

Small producers tend to have limited experience so they need the most management help. Many small producers have to make due with older or minimal facilities. There are welfare issues that these producers need to be made aware of, and they need to understand the pros and cons of outside, natural, and organic production.

Food safety and consumer satisfaction are very important aspects of pig meat production. Finally, health, disease prevention, and bio-security programs tend not to be well defined for many small producers. While most smaller producers mean well, in many respects they need the most help. Veterinarians are the perfect source for this help and information.

How many small farms are there in today's industry? The USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service Report for 2012 indicates that 71% (48,700) of U.S. swine farms have an inventory of less than 100 pigs. Those farms combined sell less than 1% of the pork marketed. 82% (56,000) of U.S. swine farms have an inventory of less than 1,000 pigs. This group sells 4.3% of the pork sold.¹

While 4.3% is a small part of the industry, the meat that comes from those farms is likely to be underserved by veterinarians. It is important that the end product for this 4.3% of the industry is just as safe and nutritious as the other 95.7% that comes from larger farms that are more likely to be well served by veterinarians.

Servicing 56,000 swine farms can be a daunting task, especially when we hear that there is a shortage of rural food animal veterinarians. But is there truly a shortage? Our colleagues at AABP believed this but then learned that new graduates who desired food animal positions had difficulty finding jobs after graduation.

AABP formed a committee to study Rural Veterinary Practice (RVP). They concluded there is *not* a shortage of graduates to fill rural food animal positions.² Their study showed that even though there are enough graduates to fill those openings, positions often go unfilled for a variety of reasons, most of which revolve around the downturn



state veterinarian's bulletin

in the overall economy. A depressed economy is particularly hard on rural towns. As the economy struggles, small farms struggle and they, in turn, use veterinarians less. When small farms go out of business, the remaining farms get spread out farther. This makes it difficult for veterinarians to service those farms effectively and profitably.

Even though a new graduate may love working in a rural area, increasing costs of veterinary education and student debt can preclude them from accepting rural positions. Lifestyle choices such as dual-income families may also limit where a new graduate can work.

The good news is that more awareness of the plight of rural food animal veterinarians is reducing the number of unfilled positions. The AABP study, the ARV (Academy of Rural Veterinarians), and the NFAVI (National Food Animal Veterinary Institute) have enlightened food animal graduates as to what to expect in a rural food animal practice and more positions are being filled.

USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) has a veterinary medical loan repayment program (VMLRP) that pays \$25,000 per year for new graduates to work in an underserved area for three years after graduation. All of these programs are ultimately working towards the goal of providing proper veterinary services to small producers of all species, including swine.

Remember that small farms are still out there. They likely do not generate a large percentage of the revenue for your practice, but they produce meat for consumers. We are responsible to see that the meat they produce is safe and nutritious. Be creative as you work with these clients. Designate a day every other week to work with small producers. Call on several in an area in one day to conserve trip fees. Hold group meetings to train proper production practices. Take their phone calls to answer questions. All of these practices will help ensure that 100% of the pork meat is produced safely, responsibly, and under proper veterinary care.

—James Kober, DVM

1. USDA, National Agriculture Statistics Service. *Farms, Land in Farms, & Livestock Operations*, 2012 summary. February, 2013.
2. Summary Opinion of the American Association of Bovine Practitioner's Ad Hoc Committee on Rural Veterinary Practice. May 2011.

In 2012 over 3,110,065 animals were imported into Michigan with Certificates of Veterinary Inspection (CVIs). Also, in 2012, there were 145 disease investigations concerning animals imported into Michigan. That year, the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) discovered 37 veterinarians that were non-accredited and issuing CVIs illegally.

Certificates of Veterinary Inspection to import or export livestock and pets are extremely sensitive these days. In part, due to the United States Department of Agriculture implemented an animal traceability rule on March 11, 2013, in the Code of Federal Regulations. As a state, we are observing a lack of commitment to completely and properly fill out these certificates. Clients are relying on their veterinarians to understand what is expected and certificates are missing important information such as dates, signatures, even descriptions of the animals.

The end result can be an animal is turned away from a show, or in the event of a disease outbreak, we cannot perform a trace to the source of the disease. The majority of animal health certificate rejections are those for companion animals. When filling out a CVI for any companion animal please ensure that the form is filled out correctly and entirely.

Dog and cat CVIs must be issued by a licensed, accredited veterinarian. Accreditation is also required to vaccinate dogs against rabies, per Michigan law. Name (tag, tattoo, microchip, or other description), breed (or common/scientific name), age, and sex are all *required* fields. Only one species is allowed per CVI. While six dogs may all be included on one CVI, six dogs and one cat are not.

Please check with the receiving state to ensure that all importation requirements are met. Many states have not only mandatory vaccination protocols but also age restrictions on companion animals to be shipped.

Certificates of Veterinary Inspection and animal health certificates play a vital role in safeguarding the public's health. This protection extends from the cat that sleeps on your chest at night to the food on your plate at your next meal.

The often times misinterpreted role of CVIs is not to track *animals* but rather to track *disease*. As such, it is vital that these documents be filled out completely and correctly.

MDARD stands ready to provide information to not only out-of-state veterinarians seeking to move animals into Michigan but also to Michigan veterinarians moving animals out of the state.

It is ultimately the issuing veterinarian's responsibility to ensure that all import and export requirements are met. MDARD's Animal Industry Division (AID) is available to help veterinarians bridge the gap between states to ensure the process is as efficient and effective as possible.

To ensure that you have the most up-to-date information on animal traceability, please visit <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability/>. We will also be sending more detailed information to licensed veterinarians in December 2013.

—James Averill, DVM, State Veterinarian