



FROM A DAIRY PRACTITIONER

# thoughts about animal well-being

The traditional role of the large-animal veterinary practitioner is largely an example of romantic impression. Cows had names and personalities, their own stanchions and the same neighbors. Some would say that cows lived a pampered life, in those “good ol’ days,” when cow stables were warm and barn gutters collected their deposits. Production was very different back then. The ration consisted of bedding-grade hay and two scoops of cow grain (if she was thought to be a good milker!). Maintaining cow health could be a challenge as well. For example, the warm barn air was moist and stale, harboring virus and bacteria. Producers typically thought of the veterinarian as an expense. He was invited onto a farm to deal with an individual animal or two, typically suffering from a prolonged illness.

Today, the role of the veterinary practitioner has necessarily evolved into the most valued consultant on the dairy management team. This position affords the veterinarian opportunities in all aspects of production medicine and farm management. Farm viability is directly tied to issues of animal well-being, whether it be housing/cow comfort and social issues, balanced rations, milk quality programs, reproductive efficiency protocols, hoof care, immunology, fly and parasite control, and calf health and growth programs. Analysis of production records assures us that our proactive involvement in the animal well-being arena (prevention medicine programming) insures a contented and productive animal.

Is the “evolution” from the James Herriot to the modern dairy practitioner model really a huge shift? The *science* part of veterinary medicine is vastly different from those “good ol’ days.” Our increased knowledge and understanding of disease and pathology, medicine and surgery, and population and production medicine has promoted the veterinarian’s relevance to today’s dairy industry. The *art* of practice, which is based more in one’s personality and philosophy, has changed far less. Large-animal veterinarians fully appreciate the contribution animals make to the provision of human existence. That appreciation remains constant.

The veterinarian has a stewardship responsibility towards his/her patients which cannot be minimized, especially as it relates to morality concerns and ethics of practice. The veterinarian is the animal’s first and greatest advocate! She/he must provide and promote compassionate, quality healthcare in word and deed. The timeless wisdom of Solomon in Proverbs 27:23, advises, “Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds . . .”

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