



## **ANIMAL HEALTH NEEDS OF THE FUTURE**

**Reprinted with Permission**

**International SheepLetter**

**Vol. 18 No.3, May 1998**

The daily chores to maintain animal health in the herd or flock are not likely to change dramatically in the foreseeable future. An animal that is genetically resistant to all disease is not forthcoming. "New" agents of disease may emerge, and some diseases will become less common. New drugs will be discovered, and they will benefit animal health. Unquestionably, general animal health in our herd has improved over years past. However, in the future we will still be treating animals for respiratory disease and diarrhea, though certainly in fewer numbers. In spite of everything we may do, a small portion will continue to be sick.

However, the overall philosophy of animal health is likely to change to a 'life cycle' approach. This approach encompasses elements of health and marketing. The life cycle approach demands that we acknowledge a number of things:

- We know where we are. We know our weaknesses and strengths, and we have quantitative information to defend our conclusions.
- We have commitment to an industry and lifestyle. We are not interested in abandoning our job.
- We have goals - some idea where we're going. We know what our market is, and the kind of operation which will purchase our end product. We know what their needs are and we believe that they know their market as well.
- We communicate our management practices. We ensure that we meet our customer's requirements, or at least communicate what we did, and we demand our suppliers ensure they meet our requirements. We take responsibility for our part of production, and we expect to be rewarded.
- We refine our goals frequently, and inch toward them continually, often in baby step fashion.

Life cycle management is the umbrella under which specific health procedures will be adapted. In this scheme, we practice more primary disease prevention. This includes vaccination, animal movement/flow management, environmental sanitation, housing and nutrition management, and disease incidence monitoring. The optimal life cycle management will result in a herd that is not burdened with clinical or subclinical disease, but has protection against common disease agents of economic significance. Our attention will continue to change from counting the sick and dead to understanding performance as a function of health.

The concept of life cycle management is not something that is easy to adopt. People are resistant. The concept forces us to leave our envelope of comfort and enter an area in which we are not comfortable. However, there are at least four societal demands or technologies that will, in my view, mandate this approach.

Food Safety. The scientific ability to detect and recognize illness in association with food has escalated in the past decade. Society mandates that food be completely and totally safe for all individuals. In years past, the regulatory focus has been exclusively on chemical residues. Today, that focus has broadened to include microbes in food. Ultimately, the public will require accountability from all involved in food production.

Electronic Animal ID. Electronic identification of animals will offer the possibility for automated data capture at any processing point. This would allow positive identification of owners and ownership history.

Trends In Animal Production. A change from the private, family farm to corporate structure is occurring in animal agriculture. This has encouraged private producers to form alliances in an attempt to compete with the large producers. Alliance members are dependent on each other to provide healthy, efficient animals within the network. Such a situation dictates the need for a structured, comprehensive health program. Additionally, there is a clear trend toward the privatization of information. Where once universities controlled information, now private firms (pharmaceutical companies, large production units) generate and control a significant portion of new information.

Importance of health for efficient production (revisited). The concept of multiple site, all-in-allout production, and segregated early weaning have received particular interest in swine production. These programs are instituted early in life to decrease disease and enhance performance throughout life.

They have received widespread acceptance because of the \$2 - \$8 performance benefit/pig simply due to disease reduction. Likewise, programs like the Texas VAC program may provide a way for one market segment (ranchers) to increase value of product for another market segment (feeders).

In summary, new drug products and management techniques to enhance production will be discovered. Diseases will emerge and others will become less important. The only constant will be the need to satisfy

consumers in a cost effective manner. The philosophies included in life cycle management will provide a framework on which to base rational business and health decisions, and will likely serve us well as we move to the future.