

HEALTH & HUSBANDRY

Is your veterinarian indispensable?

by Lacey Robinson, Kansas State University



I hope your answer is yes, and not because misery loves company when that calf is hip-locked at

midnight, but because their expertise and problem-solving abilities brings real value to your operation.

“Becoming indispensable” was the theme of the recent American Association of Bovine Practitioners (AABP) meeting in Phoenix, with the goal of challenging cow veterinarians across the nation to be the ultimate source of information and service for you.

In order to be successful in today’s beef business, I would argue that no one can do it alone. It requires a team approach with a vision for the long game.

You should view your veterinarian as a key player who earns his or her spot on your team day in and day out by helping you reach your goals (even those beyond the animal health arena). If that’s not the case, perhaps it’s time to examine your expectations of what a veterinarian’s role is in your operation and explore the possibilities of how that relationship could be taken to the next level.

More than treatment

Historically, the veterinarian’s main job was to diagnose and treat sick animals — certainly a noble endeavor and a needed service still today. However, as with any profession, you must adapt to stay relevant. The role of today’s beef veterinarian should be minimizing those health risks before they occur while providing

innovative solutions to increase profit, decrease costs and ultimately help keep you in business. This is a paradigm shift that requires effort and communication from both sides to achieve.

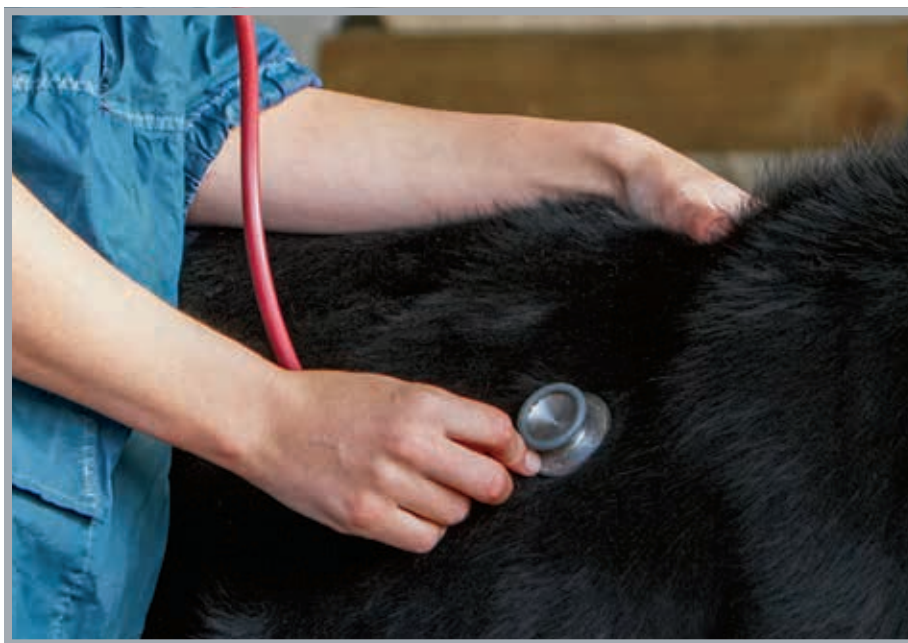
The foundation for any successful relationship is simple — everyone needs to be on the same page. Once a year take the time to sit down with your veterinarian and discuss the operation’s goals, both short- and long-term. This might not sound like a necessary activity. I mean, “Doc already knows what I need.” Right?

I think you’ll find that making a concerted effort to do this each year aligns expectations for both parties. Identifying the biggest and most pressing challenges to achieving these goals enables your veterinarian to seek out specific solutions and provide the best service possible for your particular program.

Different perspective

Another less-conventional way a veterinarian can bring value to your operation is by providing a fresh perspective to identify issues and opportunities that you might not even realize exist. No amount of telecommunication can replace the value of getting their boots on your place to truly assess the situation.

Don’t wait for the next disaster to have them out; utilize their skills to assess body condition, evaluate nutrition, develop better facility designs and educate employees. Having a more intimate knowledge



of how your operation functions will allow them to develop more-effective health protocols. That extra set of eyes may discover inefficiencies in your system or bring new ideas to the table for improvement, as well.

Veterinarians are by nature an inquisitive bunch — some might even say a bit nerdy. Let them put those skills to use as a watchdog for your investment by providing data and monitoring capabilities to investigate herd issues and detect a problem before it gets out of hand. For example, don’t just have them simply sleeve cows to call them pregnant or open. Use their knowledge to evaluate pregnancy distribution in a herd, determine what’s causing it and consider how to impact it moving forward.

Digging deeper

Utilizing and sharing the information gleaned from a solid herd records system can be hugely beneficial in recognizing and, more importantly, investigating herd health issues. Keeping a close eye on things like treatment rates, culling rates/reasons, death loss and

causes (necropsy anyone?), as well as disease prevalence is crucial in order to avert a crisis that your business may not be able to recover from.

Having a veterinarian on your team who is willing and able to pursue the reasons for these trends and work with you to change the outcomes is a game changer for minimizing the damage and getting you back on track.

Find a veterinarian that is committed to your operation’s success, and don’t be afraid to expect more from them. Once those lines of communication are open, you may realize they’ve just been waiting for the signal from you to take their services to the next level.

Gathering a more comprehensive understanding of your business and how they can help will benefit everyone involved. As an industry and as individuals, we will undoubtedly face challenges that seem insurmountable at times. Make sure you’ve created a team of indispensable people you can rely on to overcome them. |

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Editor’s note: “Health & Husbandry” is a regular column in the *Angus Beef Bulletin* devoted to the care and well-being of the herd.