

We Are Experts on All Things Animal, Right??

I am sure that we all know that veterinarians are one of the most respected and trusted professions. We are also known to be the experts on animal health, physiology, welfare and care. We do get some exposure to all animals during our years in veterinary school, but for those of us that specialize in a particular area, we quickly become disconnected with facets of veterinary medicine unrelated to our particular field. For instance, since I have worked in the swine veterinary profession my entire career, I really don't keep abreast of the main issues affecting dogs and cats. However, I still have clients, friends, family, etc. that ask me about their pets and expect me to have some expertise. Conversely, I know that small animal veterinarians get similar questions about the latest food animal issues that surface in the media – whether it is farm production practices, welfare, antibiotic use or zoonotic diseases such as influenza.

With the vast wealth of information and the speed of scientific and technological advances in the field of veterinary medicine and animal production, it is impossible for us to stay up to date on all things animal related. But we want to remain somewhat knowledgeable about animal related topics outside of our realm of daily practice since our clients will continue to ask us about all animal topics and greatly value our opinion. How do we do this though? This is one area that the American Association of Swine Veterinarians (AASV) in conjunction with the National Pork Board (NPB) is trying to address in the Operation Main Street (OMS) program. There are nearly 50 AASV members who volunteer their time to speak to veterinary students, community groups and fellow veterinary colleagues about the swine industry. We believe that there is great value in providing our small animal colleagues, who do not have the opportunity to experience the livestock industry firsthand, factual information about today's livestock industry as well as the food animal veterinary profession. For example, did you know some of the following information regarding the swine industry?

- There is a huge debate on the proper way to house pregnant sows. A majority of farms house sows in individual gestation stalls in order to provide individualized care, feeding and attention. Sows put together in a pen fight terribly, resulting in many injuries including lameness, bitten vulvas, etc, sometimes even resulting in death. Consider mixing many strange dogs of various breeds and sizes together for the first time...
- Most swine barns are equipped with complex, computerized environmental controls. If there is a power outage or other malfunction that results in a suboptimal environment for the pigs, an alarm system automatically calls the caretaker to alert them of a problem. Producers may get these calls in the middle of the night, during family activities, etc, but immediately respond and go check on the barn to ensure that the pigs do not suffer environmental stress. Many barns

also have automatic generators that kick on if the power goes out so that the pigs are kept comfortable in the time that it takes the caretaker to get to the barn. How many of our homes or clinics have such systems in place?

- Growth hormones have become a hot topic in the food industry. Many consumers prefer to eat meat that is grown without the use of any artificial growth hormones. But many do not realize that all growth hormones are banned from use in the pig and poultry industries, so *all* pork and chicken that is consumed has never had any growth hormones. So why do we see labels promoting their “hormone-free” products? Deceptive marketing isn’t it?
- Just as we rely on technological advances in our daily lives and our practices, the livestock industry keeps up with technological advances too. Farms use sophisticated computerized record keeping systems to monitor their animal’s production and health. Ultrasound technology is routinely used by farm personnel for pregnancy detection. GPS guidance systems are used for manure application to apply the correct amount of nutrients to fields based off of manure and soil testing. These are just a couple of examples – farmers use technology in every aspect of their operations, just like the rest of us.
- Veterinarians are an integral part of the farm team. Producers rely on their veterinarian to help make herd health, vaccination, medication and production decisions. Food animal veterinarians are on their client’s farms regularly – not just a once a year vaccination/exam appointment or when an animal is sick as is the case with small animal clients.

These are just a few of the points discussed in the OMS presentations that aim to bridge the experience gap in our profession. We recognize that it is impossible for veterinarians to have firsthand experience in all aspects of animal care. That is why we are trying to bring the next best thing to our colleagues. We would love to know of any venues where attendees would like to hear what their food animal colleagues work with on a daily basis. If you would like a volunteer speaker to come talk to your local group, please let us know. Contact either Dr. Amy Woods (amy.woods@animalhealthinternational.com) or Mrs. Adrienne Parr (adrienne@eidsonandpartners.com or 800-711-0747 Ext. 239) and we can get a speaker scheduled.