

What Can Your Vet Do For You?

Dr. Jessica Gordon
November 2018

What can your vet do for you? The question is really what can't your vet do for you? There was a time when vets ran around the countryside putting out fires. There are still vets that do mostly this and all vets still do this to some extent. We have extensive training in diseases and treatments to help you when you have a sick animal or a calving. But the days where the vet comes out, gives some special concoction, probably colored based on the disease being treated, and shakes your hand until the next emergency have passed. And this is good for everyone.

Somewhere along the way, veterinarians realized a few things, that most producers can do the mechanical pieces of treating sick animals just as well as we can and that to really help producers, we need to understand their full operation. I tell veterinary students this all the time. I can come out and look at a cow and prescribe a treatment. This treatment may be quite labor intensive depending on the disease. The treatment may work. But if I don't understand what else is required of the you in a day and the financial aspects of your operation, I have not done my job and recommended the appropriate treatment for the situation. And though we as vets and you as producers care about the animals, it is also a business and this must factor in. We are all in this together because if producers don't stay in business, we don't have clients to serve. We want you to succeed as much as you do.

Veterinary students today are trained in many things. Yes, we still take plenty of time training them in diseases and treatments, but interested students also learn about the business of producing food. They learn to look at records. They learn to write disease treatment protocols. We teach them about the supply chain. We teach them about nutrition. We try to help them understand the complicated web that is a farm. This is especially important as fewer and fewer of them grew up in agriculture. And though they may not walk a pen to look for respiratory disease or calve out cows on a daily basis, they need to understand the process to be able to make relevant recommendations to their clients.

What is all this rambling about? I promise there is a point. As of December 1, all antibiotics that are important to human medicine will be prescription only. This means that you will no longer be able to purchase penicillin or tetracycline, among others, over-the-counter at Livestock Medicine Outlets. Purchasing an antibiotic will require you have a relationship with a veterinarian, have a veterinary prescription, and obtain the medication from a veterinarian or a pharmacist. A lot of people feel like this a crock! Many producers have valid concerns over veterinary access. If there is no veterinarian nearby or willing to come to the farm, what are producers to do?

First off, let me state that this regulation is being put in place to help people, not just to frustrate you. We have had the luxury of access to antibiotics without a prescription for a long time. This is not a luxury seen in human medicine. During this time, the number of

antibiotic resistant organisms has drastically increased. Do not take that to mean I feel the increase of antibiotic resistance can be placed solely on the shoulders of food animals. Quite the contrary. I think a heaping helping should be shared with human medical professionals and small animal veterinarians. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't be cleaning up our act too. And research has shown that we are all to "blame". Though "blame" is loosely applied here. Bacteria are organisms too and every organism is just trying to stay alive. It was really only a matter of time before bacteria figured out how to survive our attack on their life. Development of antimicrobial resistance is a given, but we can affect how quickly it occurs and spreads.

Judicious use of antibiotics is critical for our continued ability to use them at all. In the long run, human health is paramount. For a while in the United States, it appeared that all cephalosporin use in food animals would be banned. Instead, they were able to negotiate tighter controls on the use of cephalosporins, but it could easily be on the chopping block again. Unfortunately, most antibiotics used in food animals are considered to be important for human medicine. If enough evidence is present to show that use of antibiotics in food animals is contributing to antimicrobial resistance in people, we will lose the ability to use these medications at all, with or without veterinary prescriptions.

So what can you do to help? Get in contact with your veterinarian today. Don't have one, find one. There are lots of options for veterinary care today, including telemedicine. There are many farms whose veterinarian lives in a different province or a different country all together. Veterinary oversight does not mean that we have to see every single sick animal or give every single injection. It means we have to understand your operation, to help develop guidelines for determining an animal has specific illness, to make sure you understand these guidelines, and when it is necessary for us to see an animal that doesn't fit into common diseases or isn't responding to treatment. By visiting the farm and writing protocols, veterinarians better understand how antibiotics are being used on farms and can work to decrease unnecessary use or improper use. Just like your kids getting antibiotics for a cold, an antibiotic given to a food animal will only work if it is a disease that is responsive to antibiotics and the appropriate antibiotic is used at the proper dose, for the correct length of time, and the given the proper way (i.e. IM versus under the skin). Veterinarians can help you determine when and how medications should be used, to decrease the risk of antimicrobial resistance and improve your bottom line by decreasing purchase of antibiotics. While the vet is there, find out what else they can do for you. This varies greatly by your operation and the skill set of the veterinarian, but you may be surprised at the areas they can assist you to make your operation more successful.

If you want to learn more about the changes in the way you purchase antibiotics, please consider signing up for the Beef Cattle Research webinar on November 14 <http://www.beefresearch.ca/blog/the-way-you-purchase-antibiotics-is-changing-webinar-november-14/>.