

Few U.S. Veterinarians Trained To Treat Organic Livestock

Number Of Organic Farms Growing, But Medical Servicing Has Not Kept Up

BY MICHAEL J. CRUMB
Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — The lack of chemicals used in organic production has created a challenge for farmers in caring for their animals: Few veterinarians are trained to treat livestock without antibiotics or other modern drugs.

The shortage of veterinarians trained in organic practices has become more noticeable as the industry has boomed.

There were about 3,350 organic livestock farms in 2007, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which counted segments of the organic industry for the first time that year and plans another count this year. The U.S. had 14,540 organic farms of all kinds in 2007, up more than 20 percent from 2002.

While no one tracks the number of veterinarians who treat organic livestock, experts agree it's a relatively small number nationwide. That's partly because organic agriculture, despite its growth, still accounts for relatively few farms.

"Unless you live in certain parts of the country, it is very much a niche market," said Gatz Riddell, a veterinarian and executive vice president of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners based in Auburn, Ala. "Only a minority of members have the mindset to work with organic producers because the vast majority is conventional production."

Riddell, whose group is comprised of veterinarians who specialize in treating cattle, said most vets probably encounter only one or two organic farms and "it's asking a lot of them to know actually two different ways of treating something."

It's also difficult to get subjects added to "already overflowing" veterinary curriculums, Riddell said. Iowa State University and some other schools now offer courses on alternative therapies, but the focus tends to be more on herbal and Chinese therapies, not necessarily organics, said Jim McKean, a veterinary professor at Iowa State University.

Mike Chaddock, deputy director of the Association of American Veterinary Colleges, said it's unlikely schools would offer a course just about organic treatments. Most veterinary schools in the U.S. have a "one-health" curriculum in which students

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GATZ RIDDELL

are taught "how their decisions affect the health of the animal, the health of human beings as recipients of food produced by the animal and impact nature and the environment."

There's also an issue of money. Few veterinarians focus on organic medicine because it's seen as difficult area for earning a living, McKean said.

"Organic producers talk to each other about things they have had success with and they develop a community of users that may or may not include veterinarians," he said.

Tony Azevedo, 60, who has about 800 dairy cows near Stevinson, Calif., said while it would be nice to have more veterinarians who practice organic medicine, there's less demand for their services because animals raised organically tend to be healthier.

"You have to understand, once you put animals back in their natural state or pasturing, you've eliminated 98 percent of ailments conventional farmers have," Azevedo said.

One example he cited is a displaced abdomen, which Azevedo said results from being overfed. Organic animals tend to eat less than those raised conventionally, he said.

Animals raised outside also have fewer stress-related ailments than those kept on concrete or hooked up to machines, he said.

But McKean said organic practices have their own health risks. For example, animals kept in a pasture are more likely to encounter disease-carrying wildlife and can be more at risk for parasitic diseases, such as trichinosis or toxoplasma, he said.

"Both of those have largely been removed by moving swine indoors into confinement operations," McKean said.

He also criticized what he described as reluctance among organic farmers to seek medical treatment.

Organic regulations bar farmers from withholding antibiotics from sick animals just to retain their organic certification. But once animals receive antibiotics or hormones, they must be removed from the organic herd. Meat from a cow, for example, could then be sold as conventional beef, but at a much lower price.

"One of my issues with the organic livestock movement is that because of the increased value of the organic animal versus those that have been treated for diseases, is they put off treatment of diseases for an extended period of time," McKean said, adding that he believes the delay can cause unnecessary suffering.

Pennsylvania veterinarian Hubert Karremman, who mainly treats organic dairy cows, said when he began looking for ways to help them without antibiotics, he found many answers in veterinary textbooks used before the advent of antibiotics, which were first prescribed in the 1930s.

"What they were using back there were biologics and botanicals," he said. Biologics are made from human and animal proteins and designed to treat and prevent diseases like arthritis and psoriasis, among others. Botanical treatments are made from plants.

"I just think veterinarians aren't aware of some of the alternatives out there," Karremman said.

But he also agreed with Azevedo that organic farms tend to need fewer vet services.

"Calves that are on nursed cows, running with their moms, they are the picture of health compared to calves being fed bottles of milk replacer and on an accelerated weaning process," Karremman said.

Opinion

Farming To The Economic Rescue

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

President Barack Obama may not be getting much in the way of positive feedback as it relates to the national economy, but the agricultural industry is.

Forbes magazine recently named the Agricultural Heartland as one of five U.S. regions to watch in

2012 — other key regions are: The Energy Belt, the New Foundry, the Technosphere, and the Pacific Northwest — highlighting them as poised to flourish economically.

Apparently, demand from developing countries has the potential to increase the nation's farm income to a record \$341 billion, and mostly from soybeans, corn, barley, rice and cotton.

Indeed, as the rest of the national economy was crumbling in the wake of the bursting housing market bubble a few years back, agriculture on the whole was booming. Corn and soybean prices were doubling, tripling, even quadrupling in some cases. Animal agriculture was smarting a bit from the exploding feed prices, but cattle and sheep at least have caught up.

And with the increased market prices, producers were spending more, agribusinesses have been expanding, and communities have benefited. In fact, as Forbes pointed out, many agricultural areas have rather low unemployment rates, such as Omaha's 5 percent. It's been a good year for many in agriculture, despite the recession.

It's good that economists outside of agriculture recognize the importance of agriculture to the economy. Too many people don't give agriculture the credit it deserves.

While no one wishes for a recession, this may be exactly what the agricultural industry needs to get enough clout to get Congress to leave agriculture's federal funding alone, especially in a time when lawmakers are looking to of-flood what they perceive as unnecessary spending.

Or, it could mean that lawmakers will decide farmers are "wealthy" enough to start paying more taxes ...



Rita
BRHEL

South Dakota Pork Congress In S.F. Jan. 12-13

SIOUX FALLS — The South Dakota Pork Producers Council (SDPPC) announces its 43rd annual Pork Congress to be held at the Sioux Falls Ramkota Hotel and Exhibit Hall on Jan. 12-13.

The two-day trade show will run from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 12, and 9 a.m.-3 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 13. Exhibitors will display the latest in technology, equipment, feeds, and vet supplies. Admission to the trade show is free and a pork loin feed is available to all in attendance Thursday beginning at 11:30 a.m. in the Ramkota Exhibit Hall Annex.

SDPPC also holds its Non-Checkoff and Checkoff Annual Meeting of the Members during the Pork Congress and the election of the 2013 Pork Act Delegates and 2012 NPPC Delegates.

During the annual Awards Luncheon on Friday, the SDPPC will present several awards to industry leaders, including a pork environmental steward award to a McCook County pork farmer, Ferlyn and Karen Hofer of Canistota, whose concern for the environment is evident through their daily farm practices.

A full schedule of events is available at www.sdpork.org.

SDSU Lamb Bonanza Jan. 14 In Frost Arena

BROOKINGS — The 20th annual South Dakota State University Lamb Bonanza begins at 4 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 14, in Frost Arena on the SDSU campus.

The event showcases SDSU's support of lamb and wool production in South Dakota during State men's and women's basketball games.

The South Dakota Sheep Growers' Association will serve leg of lamb sandwiches and lamb spread starting at 4 p.m. on the track on the north side of the arena.

The Jackrabbits face the University of Missouri-Kansas City Kangaroos with the women's game starting at 5 p.m. and the men's game tipoff at 7:30 p.m. During halftime of the men's game, six lamb pelts will be auctioned. Four pelts are emblazoned with "SDSU," and two of the pelts feature the Jackrabbit emblem. Proceeds from the sales provide scholarships to undergraduates in the SDSU Department of Animal and Range Sciences and the SDSU Athletic Department.

The departments of athletics and animal and range sciences, along with the South Dakota Sheep Growers' Association sponsor the 2012 Lamb Bonanza.

New Winter Wheat Variety Released

BROOKINGS — South Dakota wheat growers will soon have access to a new hard red winter wheat variety. After more than 10 years in development, the SDSU Agricultural Experiment Station recently released the new variety — "Ideal."

Selected for its yield, disease resistance, and standability, Ideal has a lot to offer growers, says Bill Berzonsky, associate professor of winter wheat breeding at South Dakota State University.

"In regional trials, Ideal was a top ranked variety in yield as well as disease resistance," said Berzonsky of the variety's resistance to leaf and stem rust, tan spot and fusarium head blight.

Named for Ideal, S.D., a small farming community in central South Dakota where many acres of wheat are produced each year, Berzonsky says the variety, was many years in the making.

"It's a long process. Genetically speaking, developing a new wheat variety is like playing a card game. We shuffle the genetic deck and select the best traits to end up with the best hand possible," Berzonsky said of the winter wheat variety, which is the first to be released from the SDSU Agricultural Experiment Station since 2008. "This research and development would not be possible without the support of the South Dakota Wheat Commission through wheat checkoff dollars. This support plays an

important role in the wheat breeding efforts of the South Dakota Agriculture Experiment Station."

With more than a 20-year career in wheat breeding, Berzonsky says it is very gratifying to see his, and the efforts of breeders before him, come to fruition in the release of Ideal.

"I tell people this is why I like what I do. There are scientists who work their entire career in the lab and never see the end result of what they do," said Berzonsky, who began working on Ideal during its last three years in development.

Along with good yield and disease resistance scores, testing showed Ideal expresses good milling and baking characteristics.

"Growers may not realize this immediately because they are directly involved in production, however, once a variety gets a good reputation from millers and bakers, it's less likely producers will be encouraged to move away from growing that variety," Berzonsky said. "It is always nice when a variety that is good from an agronomic and production standpoint, also receives the seal of approval of sorts from millers and bakers."

Before Ideal could be released,

a Variety Release Committee at SDSU scrutinized its performance. Upon their recommendation,

Daniel Scholl, director and associate dean, of the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station, approved its release.

Now that Ideal has been released into the South Dakota Crop Improvement Association seed certification program, and is currently in foundation seed increase program, it will ultimately be made available as certified seed through the efforts of the South Dakota Crop Improvement Association.

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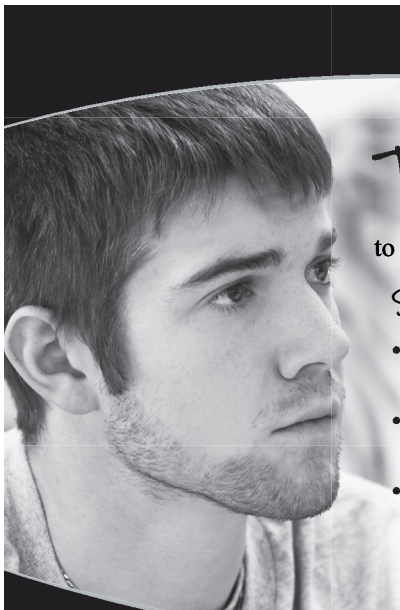
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