

# Rural Relationships

Do you have a working relationship with a veterinarian?



By Tony Nye

I've raised livestock all my life, and no matter how well I care for my animals, I have encountered instances where I have had to provide medical care due to illness or disease. I have a good understanding of illness and disease in the species I raise (swine and goats), but I still look to my veterinarian for advice to treat my animals effectively.

In my extension career, I am amazed at how many times I get calls asking for advice in the treatment of livestock, even though I am not a veterinarian and my experience as a livestock producer does not give me license to provide medical advice. In these types of conversations, I usually quickly suggest that the person on the other end of the conversation work with a veterinarian for the proper diagnosis and treatment of a sick animal. I'm also quick to point out that since people wouldn't ask a mechanic for medical advice, why not just go to the expert?

I get many excuses as to "why not," but more often than not, it boils down to people wanting to "self-medicate," or treat their animals themselves, to save money or the time needed to find a veterinarian. In some cases here in Ohio, another reason is that the nearest large animal veterinarian is a county or more over.



### The problem with self-medicating

In one report I read, the FDA reported 70 percent of residue problems result when a veterinarian is not involved in the treatment decision. In many cases, these problems are a result of the use of over-the-counter drugs that are readily available through places like farm supply stores.

If you have been following the livestock industry, you should be aware there are changes coming from the FDA in 2017 relating to the way we will use antibiotics in the near future. These changes will impact the availability of medications, and in many cases, will require a prescription to purchase the medication or a written feed directive from a veterinarian. That means you will need to have a working relationship with a veterinarian to use antibiotics.

The key is to provide proper care for your livestock. This is best accomplished when one has a working relationship with a knowledgeable veterinarian. There may be times when an antibiotic is necessary for the treatment of an illness or disease to protect the wellbeing of an animal and the rest of the herd or flock.

Up to this point I have tried pointing out that producers vary greatly in the extent to which they work with a veterinarian. In some cases, few large animal veterinarians are available in a geographic area to service producers. In other cases, producers

have begun doing more routine veterinary work themselves. However, in all cases, using a veterinarian as the herd-health specialist is a critical part of raising food animals.

I read a statement recently in a Michigan State University article that I thought said it best: "The most valuable aspect of the veterinarian is not the physical service they can perform on the animals, whether it is pregnancy diagnosis or even surgery, it is the knowledge they bring." Having a valid Veterinarian-Client-Patient-Relationship (or VCPR) safeguards the food supply and helps producers be better managers of the health and wellness of herds and flocks.

### Defining a valid VCPR

*A VCPR is defined by the American Veterinary Medical Association as the basis for interaction among veterinarians, their clients, and their patients. It is also critical to the health of your animal.*



A VCPR exists if your veterinarian knows your animals well enough to diagnose and treat any medical conditions your animal(s) develop. Your part of this relationship is to allow your veterinarian to make responsible decisions about your animal's health, working with you so you understand, and for you to follow your veterinarian's instructions. Your veterinarian's role in a VCPR is making medical judgments regarding the health of your animals, providing responsible medical care of your animals, and giving you advice about the benefits and risks associated with treatment options.

A VCPR can exist only when the veterinarian has recently seen and is personally acquainted with the keeping and care of the animal(s) by virtue of examination of the animal(s), and/or by medically appropriate and timely visits to the premises where the animal(s) are kept. In our family operation, we have our veterinarian on the farm every three months at minimum. Keep in mind that a VCPR is only valid if your veterinarian routinely visits the farm and sees the livestock—it's not anything that can be done virtually through a smartphone or tablet.

Having a VCPR allows your veterinarian to be in a positive position with greater responsibility in the stewardship of antibiotic use in livestock on your farm.

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A VCPR explained



Look here for how to choose a farm DVM



## A word to the wise when establishing a VCPR

Work with a veterinarian that has expertise with the types of livestock on your farm. This sounds easier than it is. As I have stated earlier, in areas of Ohio we have shortages of large animal veterinarians and we have some veterinarians that are specialized in only one or two species. If at all possible, work with a veterinarian that has the knowledge to be effective for your farm's overall needs.



Once you have found that person to work with for your livestock health needs, there are critical components your VCPR should contain and maintain. The first part is to work with your veterinarian to get your VCPR in writing.

### What is required in maintaining a valid VCPR

In a recent Ohio State University Extension Veterinarian Newsletter, Jeff Workman, OSU Extension Program Coordinator within the College of Veterinarian Medicine, explained what is required in a valid VCPR:

- 1** The veterinarian has assumed the responsibility for making clinical judgments regarding the health of the patient and the client has agreed to follow the veterinarians' instructions.
- 2** The veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the livestock within the operation to initiate at least a general or preliminary diagnosis of the



contact for all veterinary services and is familiar with you, your livestock/animals, and your farm operation. This veterinarian is referred to as your Veterinarian of Record (VoR), and both the VoR and the client should sign a form to document this relationship.

Think of this like having a “family doctor” where that individual is the one whom you consult with regarding prescription needs, changes in health status, or specialized services. Because the VoR somewhat regularly provides veterinary

services to you, they may be able to approve prescriptions and provide consultation over the telephone. Having an established VCPR is important to help protect consumers and avoid residues in meat and milk.

Remember, the most valuable aspect the veterinarian provides is not always the physical service they can perform on the animals, it is the knowledge they bring. Having a valid VCPR safeguards the food supply and helps producers be better managers of the health and wellness of herds and flocks. **AL**

### About the author

Tony Nye is the state coordinator for the Ohio State University Extension Small Farm Program and has been an OSU Extension Educator for agriculture and natural resources for 29 years, currently serving Clinton County and the Miami Valley EERA. Tony and his family also own and operate a small livestock farm in Washington Court House, Ohio, raising purebred swine and meat goats.

medical condition of the patient. This means that the veterinarian is personally acquainted with the keeping and care of the livestock on the farm, and through timely herd visits, can provide well-timed examinations of the animals within the operation where the patient is managed.

**3** The veterinarian is readily available for follow-up evaluation or has arranged for the following: veterinary emergency coverage, continuing care, and treatment.

**4** The veterinarian provides oversight of treatment, compliance, and outcome.

**5** Patient records are maintained. The practical explanation is that this is a formal relationship that you have with a veterinarian who serves as your primary



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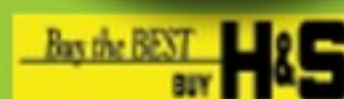
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