

Communicating and advocating the economic and socio-political dimensions of animal health measures to the stakeholders

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The purpose of national animal health programs is to protect livestock herd populations from disease incursion. The confidence in a country's systems to effectively deliver these programs is essential for continuance of trade.

Successful animal health intervention strategies; such as, stamping out and vaccinations can have a profound effect on livestock producers and consumers, and are designed to benefit all stakeholders. However despite our best efforts, these strategies may have a limited effect if not communicated properly.

The critical challenge in communicating regulatory disease control measures is to turn the focus from short-term economic impact on industry stakeholders and the general public, and impress upon them the long-term benefits of these measures. Key to all this is a regular and consistent communication approach whereby the animal health intervention message is ongoing, and not simply as a result of disease outbreaks or animal health emergencies.

Veterinary educational institutions (VEIs) have an important role to play in the education of our future veterinarians. They must provide up-to-date information on the regulatory, socio-political, economic, and social license aspects of animal health interventions. After all, graduates from these institutions will play an important role in communicating these messages to stakeholders and the general public. This is why the focus of veterinary education needs to be on more than just about preparing veterinarians to be good clinicians; they must also educate them on the regulatory dimensions of animal health.

To achieve this, the curriculum of VEIs should provide a greater understanding of animal health regulations and legislation of the country, veterinary infrastructure (both public and private), international disease control strategies, the role of international organizations in developing international guidelines that address preparedness, prevention, response and recovery for animal health events and, most importantly, the tools to effectively communicate the impact of animal disease control measures.

VEIs are ideally placed to expose their students to all aspects of the broader economic impacts animal health measures can have, and in turn, prepare the veterinarians of tomorrow to act as ambassadors by communicating the risk management principles through the economic and socio-political lens to stakeholders and the public.

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