



American Association of Bovine Practitioners

- About
- Press Room
- Conference
- Store
- Jobs
- Resources
- Students
- Members

- Home
- About AABP
- Officers
- Committees
- Current Events
- Grants/Awards
- Pay Dues
- Membership
- Contact AABP

AABP News

AABP responds to the videotaping of scenes of animal abuse at a California slaughterhouse

Mission Statement

The American Association of Bovine Practitioners is an international association of veterinarians organized to enhance the professional lives of its members through relevant continuing education that will improve the well-being of cattle and the economic success of their owners, increase awareness and promote leadership for issues critical to cattle industries, and improve opportunities for careers in bovine medicine.

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Presidents Corner

Our parent organization, the AVMA, is our only voice in Washington and also represents about 72,000 of our veterinary brethren that pursue careers other than bovine medicine.

At the helm of AVMA is someone that has a deep understanding of the food animal perspective, the zoonotic and foreign animal disease perspective (as past head of APHIS), and a sense of where we need to go as a profession to maintain our relevance. So, Dr. DeHaven has graciously agreed to offer his thoughts on a pertinent issue. Thanks for your attention.

MB



The Time for Evolution is Now

Teddy Roosevelt once said, "In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing."

I believe the veterinary profession has been far too reluctant to take a position on animal welfare issues and, as a result, we have lost relevance with the public, the media, Congress and with those actively engaged with the science of animal welfare. In the Teddy Roosevelt context, we have done "nothing".



This reluctance is not without reason; the issues are complex, they are emotional, and we have many divergent perspectives within the profession. But our inability to take a well-founded position while an issue is still being debated in the court of public opinion has, all too often, resulted in our profession being marginalized and ignored. We have lost credibility with the public, public policy makers, other scientists and even with segments of our membership.

It's time for us to position ourselves squarely in the center of the animal welfare arena. We must work to become the focal point for animal welfare information and the first point of contact for scientists, the media, Congress and others when these issues surface.

Animal welfare is one of the American Veterinary Medical Association's highest priorities. Our Executive Board affirmed this position last summer when it approved five strategic planning goals that will guide our decision-making and the use of our resources. These goals range from addressing critical shortages in the veterinary workforce to ensuring the profession's economic viability.

Our animal welfare strategic goal states that the AVMA is to be a "leading advocate for, and an authoritative, science-based resource". This is more than a few written words that look good on paper. I am committed to making sure that we achieve this goal – and I invite the more than 5,000 members of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners to join us in this endeavor.

The situation that recently unfolded at the Hallmark/Westland slaughter plant in Chino,

Calif., underscores the fact that concern for the welfare of animals ... especially those used as a food source ... is prominent in the minds of the American public, and that the economic consequences of ignoring the welfare of animals can be devastating.

At the same time, I understand the economic realities of animal agriculture. I firmly believe that our animal welfare recommendations not only need to be consistent with science, but also practical and affordable. Sometimes this simply means having an implementation horizon that allows adequate time for making necessary changes. We can't eliminate veal crates overnight, but we can eliminate them over a period of a few years. Typically efficiency and welfare have to be balanced. But our positions not only need to be practical, they must also pass the "smell test" with the public. We should have realized, years ago, that veal crates have to go; the practice is simply not defensible in the court of public opinion. During the years that it took us to finally accept this inevitable conclusion, we lost an opportunity to provide leadership and were perceived as part of the problem, even within segments of the profession.

Another current topic is the use of pain-relieving medications and alternative approaches for castration and dehorning of cattle – something that many of you feel very strongly about, I'm sure. We must acknowledge that these procedures are painful and that we have the wherewithal to reduce or eliminate that pain. Can we continue to defend – to an increasingly interested, informed and sophisticated public – the practice of not using readily available pain-relieving medications or better approaches? If one agrees that such a position is not defensible and the outcome inevitable, then let's go ahead and take a proactive stance, rather than having others take us there, while we drag our heels every inch of the way. We will eventually end up at the same place. We can either be seen as providing leadership or as being an impediment to humane animal care.

Improving our policy development process is just part of the solution. We also must improve our public education process. It is unfortunate that we have at times abdicated this role and are now feeling the consequences of having the public "learn" about animal welfare through headlines, 30-second sound bites, video clips and Internet blogs. These issues are complex, and a solid position starts with considering all relevant perspectives, incorporation of the science and evaluating all of the consequences.

I think we can learn a lot from a recent example – the unwanted horse issue. Our first mistake was to allow this issue to be framed as "horse slaughter". In fact, the real issue is how to deal with some 90,000 to 100,000 unwanted horses every year. I believe we can explain to the public how humane slaughter is a preferred outcome to an unwanted horse being abandoned, left to die on its own or being shipped to Mexico for slaughter, but this is a far more difficult educational process than the 30-second sound bite that simply suggests we need to oppose the "slaughter" of horses. We're not pro-horse slaughter – we're pro-humane treatment of horses.

Even as we work to educate the urban and suburban public on animal production practices, we must recognize and educate producers that what was an acceptable practice 30 years ago may not be acceptable today. And in today's climate, as levels of social conscience increase because of incidents like that at Hallmark/Westland, the public is paying more and more attention. And as the public becomes more engaged, so too do our decision makers in state capitals and in Washington, D.C. The fact that many of these politicians are also disconnected from the realities of rural and farm life also complicates matters. We need to educate them, as well.

At the end of the day, I'm suggesting it's time for animal welfare evolution, not revolution. If we want to be relevant and a leader in the animal welfare arena, we need to proactively move forward in a very visible and timely manner. I am counting on our members, our allied organizations and our partners to join us in that process. Together, we will resume our rightful position as the acknowledged authorities on and stewards of animal welfare.

**Ron DeHaven, D.V.M.
Executive Vice President
American Veterinary Medical Association**

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