

'Horse Doctors' and the Tuberculosis Testing Program in Iowa

by Ross C. Baily

Editor's Note: We would like to acknowledge Dr. William J. Owen for his editorial assistance.

Dr. Ross C. Baily began his professional career at Iowa State College in 1914. He was among the first freshman class to start a four-year term in the new Veterinary Quadrangle. In 1914, Iowa State had the largest and newest collegiate gymnasium west of the Mississippi River. An interurban electric trolley system connected Des Moines, Ames, Boone and the Iowa State campus with hourly service. The campus had just been landscaped the year before with shrubs, bushes and trees. Lake Laverne had also been stocked with swans that year. In 1918, graduates of veterinary medicine were referred to as 'horse doctors'.

Since 1918, Brucellosis has been controlled in Iowa (except imports from other states), tuberculosis has nearly been eradicated and hog cholera is extinct in Iowa. Small-animal practices have flourished and grown to major proportions.

The history of tuberculosis (TB) testing bears some elaboration by one of the ISU alumni instrumental in its success in IA. The TB eradication program was initiated in 1920 after successful pilot programs, one of which was in the District of Columbia (1917) where five percent of the 2500 dairy cattle tested were positive reactors for TB. This percentage was indicative of the magnitude of the problem throughout the U.S. Bovine TB in swine was also common. The disease caused more economic loss than all the other bacterial diseases combined. Bovine TB accounted for 33 percent of human TB infections. Children were particularly susceptible and many were left with deformities of the spine and hip joint. The main exposure was be-

lieved to be through the consumption of raw milk and hence, the pasteurization of milk was initiated largely to control this mode of transmission to humans.

During the Iowa State legislature of 1922, at the request of the United States Bureau of Animal Industry, a law was passed requiring the TB testing of all dairy and breeding cattle. Dr. H. A. Johnston, a federal veterinarian, was in charge of TB testing in Iowa.

Dr. Ross C. Baily (Bancroft), Dr. Archie Whitlow (Lakota) and Dr. L. C. Ball (Tiptonka) were three local veterinarians of Kosuth County who spent one week of testing accompanied by Dr. Johnston, learning the technique of the skin test and record keeping of all results. The test was the caudal fold test except the tuberculin used was Koch's old tuberculin which has been replaced by the purified protein derivative used today. The testing was systematic, township by township, and after the first week each local vet was given a township to test. All cattle were tested and poultry flocks were inspected as well. At least three birds from each flock were necropsied for lesions of TB. The veterinarians had the cooperation of farmers in the area. Neighbors helped handle the cattle on one farm, and when work was finished there, the help moved on to the next farm. Adherence to the systematic approach and thoroughness contributed to the success of the TB testing program.

An account of TB in Iowa would not be complete without mentioning the infamous "Cow War" in which uncooperative farmers in several counties resisted the testing of their cattle. Their opposition stemmed from rumors that the test was unreliable and some suspected that the veterinarians and packing plants were conspiring to lower the price of cattle by falsifying reports. The most notable resistance occurred in Tipton, Cedar County

where a number of farmers resorted to violence to prevent the state veterinarian and law officers from carrying out the mandatory testing. The governor sent three regiments of Iowa National Guard to the Tipton area to restore order. This action quelled the protestors and teams of veterinarians, protected by guardsmen, tested 10,000 head within a week. Ironically, of the cattle tested that week, only 24 were positive reactors.

In 1940 The U.S. was declared Modified Accredited Free of Tuberculosis which meant that less than 0.5 percent of cattle tested were infected, and the infection rate dropped to 0.03 percent by 1978. The decline of swine infected with bovine TB coincided with the reduction of TB in cattle.

Today, the lake, Campanile, Veterinary Quadrangle, and Agriculture Hall, among

others, have matured and serve as reminders of the illustrious past. The landscape and majestic architecture at Iowa State are considered among the most beautiful in the country. Graduates of veterinary medicine are scientists, continuing their education regularly in the course of their practice. Their dedication to service is necessary to maintain the standards set by earlier graduates. The goal of bovine TB eradication has not been achieved. There are very few infected herds in the U.S. but the importance of complete records, thorough testing and follow-up cannot be stressed too much.

REFERENCE

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