

ANIMAL HEALTH

Preface by Nancy Shepherd: While perusing the shelves of a used bookstore, I stumbled across a book entitled *1984 Yearbook of Agriculture, Animal Health, Livestock and Pets, LC 84-601135, U.S. Government Printing Office: 1984-451-784*. Even though it was issued in 1984, this book is filled with timeless and practical information on animal care and good health practices. It will indeed be a useful resource to add to my library.

The introduction to this book makes many fine points about how we, as animal caretakers and managers, along with our veterinarians and Government officials, all work together to maintain our animals--be they sugar gliders, emus, potbellied pigs, or geckos--at the highest levels of good health. Animal care is not a responsibility to be taken lightly. Our animals depend upon us for their food, shelter, and health care. Besides these necessities, I believe that animals have the right to live in a pleasant and healthy environment and to be treated with compassion and respect.

Presented here is a summary of this introduction. I hope you will glean some beneficial information from it. I certainly did and do operate within these parameters.

ANIMAL HEALTH: OUR ROLES IN ACHIEVING IT by John K. Atwell

Regardless of the number of animals or your purpose in raising them, you are concerned with their health and welfare. Animal health means more than taking the necessary care, and calling the veterinarian when an animal is sick or injured. There are three important areas of responsibility. **First:** is your responsibility as owner or caretaker. **Second:** is the responsibility of the veterinarian. And **Third:** the Government has a distinct and important role in assuring the health of animals.

You as the owner or caretaker, have the most immediate responsibility. There's an old saying, "The eye of the master fattens the calf," which is to say that you are the one who best can provide the feed, water, shelter, sanitation and health care for your animal(s). You are in the best position to know when "something goes wrong."

There is no substitute for personal commitment, and with it you can do a great deal. Armed with information you have obtained from various resources (extension service, State university, feed suppliers, associations and literature), you can learn about the need for preventive health care. But at some point, you need to call in the expert--your veterinarian. The veterinary practitioner is the animal health professional. His or her education has been long and rigorous, demanding a high commitment to scientific and professional discipline.

Good Ties Help: When you call the veterinarian is up to you, but an early and continuing relationship is best. This expert is able to diagnose and treat diseases that threaten your animals. More importantly, he or she can recommend and take preventive measures against diseases, parasites and pests as well as develop overall health management plans. Veterinarians are not there just to help when things go wrong. They can help make sure that things don't go wrong.

They also have another responsibility of which most people are unaware-- reporting certain diseases to the Government animal health programs. In addition, they may examine animals, conduct tests, and sign vaccination and health certificates. Most practicing veterinarians not only are licensed by veterinary medical boards of the various States, but they are also accredited by Federal and State Governments to participate in these animal's health programs.

This is where Government responsibility comes in. The Government is mandated to prevent, control and eradicate several types of diseases. These include animal diseases that can be transmitted to man, such as rabies, brucellosis (undulant fever), psittacosis (parrot fever), and tuberculosis.



PET potbellied pig being shipped via PET AIR, a special service for transporting live animals via airline.

Control Capabilities: To appreciate the role of the Government, we need to look at the disease control capabilities, respectively, of owners, the veterinary practitioner, and the animal health official.

Owners can do a great deal to keep pets and livestock free of disease, especially through good preventive measures. They can limit contact with potential sources of infection. But such measures provide no complete guarantee, especially when new animals are added to a herd or flock, pets or livestock travel to and from shows, or neighboring herds and flocks become infected.

The veterinarian can treat individual animals, or all the animals in a herd, and may succeed in eliminating individual cases of a particular disease, or through vaccination may provide protection against exposure to some diseases.

But the practitioner may have little power, as one individual, to stop some highly contagious diseases that spread from herd to herd, or wherever animals are bought or sold. Practitioners can advise farmers and pet owners on sanitation and disease precautions, but some disease organisms still may move to new sites in dirt or manure on vehicles, equipment, boots and clothing. Practitioners can prescribe treatments against disease-causing ticks and mites but may have little power to stop their overall spread.

So, it falls to the Government to stop the spread of highly contagious diseases, and to eliminate them where practical means exist. It's the Government's job because these diseases can be controlled only when animal's movements are regulated, and the Government alone has the authority to impose such regulations. It's not until such regulations are in force that the owner and practitioner can feel secure in the care and treatment of individual animals and herds.

The Government's primary job is to stop or severely restrict movement of infected and exposed animals. Examinations are required and specific tests prescribed to locate infected flocks. Health tests and certification assure that animals are free of those diseases when they are sold or shipped. The government also can specify conditions and limits for vaccinations and may require identification of animals moving in marketing channels.

Foreign Diseases: This kind of protection also must include foreign animal diseases. This means strictly regulating the importation of livestock, poultry and their products.

Some foreign diseases are so contagious and so destructive that all susceptible livestock from affected countries are barred from entry into the United States. For virtually all other livestock and poultry, foreign Government veterinarians must inspect, test and certify that they are free of communicable diseases. Our own animal health officials check the animals again at the ports of entry. Most shipments also must pass port-of-entry quarantines.

It is also the Government's job to regulate the manufacture and distribution of veterinarian pharmaceuticals and biologics. This assures users that products do what they are supposed to do and have no harmful side effects or residues and are free of contamination. This is added protection for our animals.

Humane Care: Beyond disease-preventing activities, Government is responsible for the humane care of certain animals that are marketed wholesale, used for research, exhibited in shows and zoos, or transported on common carriers.

The three levels of responsibility: Owner, Veterinarian and Government -- effectively complement one another. Without each of these, we would not enjoy the outstanding animal health that we have today.



It turns out pigs really DO fly ☺