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Interaction Lacking Between Vets, Organic Producers

Surveys of veterinarians and organic livestock producers performed at Iowa State University show that veterinarians need to be more involved in organic herd health.

January 20, 2012

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Although sales of organic meat are low, according to the USDA's Economic Research Service, it is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the [organic-food industry](#). Organic livestock producers want to respond to market demand, but one of the challenges they've expressed has been gaining access to alternative veterinary care. Antibiotics and a variety of other conventional treatments are excluded by [National Organic Program standards](#).

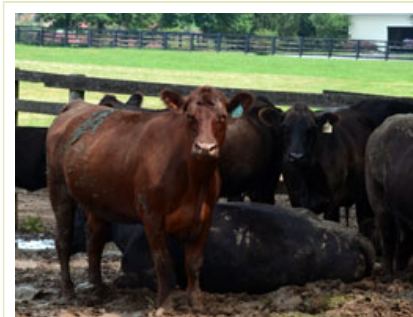


Photo by Rachael Brugger
A variety of conventional veterinary treatments for livestock are excluded by National Organic Program standards.

conventional treatments are excluded by [National Organic Program standards](#).

Jenny O'Neill, an Iowa State University graduate student in sustainable agriculture, looked at this issue by surveying all USDA-

certified organic livestock producers in Iowa as well as members of the Iowa Veterinary Medical Association who work with food animals. Her study was funded by a Leopold Center competitive grant awarded to her advisor, Betty Wells, professor of sociology.

With a 60-percent response rate from veterinarians (296 of 493 IVMA members returned surveys) and a nearly 50 percent response rate from organic producers (75 of 160 producers returned surveys), O'Neill says she found a surprising amount of support and interest in organic-livestock agriculture.

In the survey, organic producers said they handled most routine herd health needs without veterinary consultation. However, the most-cited reason for this self-reliance was lack of herd health problems; the organic producers indicated that herd health was not a significant challenge for their operations.

Veterinarians, on the other hand, perceived a number of health challenges within organic systems and stressed the importance of veterinary involvement.

As a veterinarian, you have a lot more information for farmers than

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AS veterinarians, we have a lot more information for farmers from a production standpoint," says Dr. Annette O'Connor, DVM, an associate professor in Veterinary Diagnostic and Production Animal Medicine at the Iowa State College of Veterinary Medicine. "Organic producers probably think we're there only to help with medical issues so we do not get called in to help, that is, until health really becomes an issue."

The veterinarians surveyed showed a high degree of misunderstanding regarding the definition and rules of organic production, existence of national organic standards, and where to access authoritative information. O'Neill says these factors indicate that information related to organic standards and options is not always making it into the hands of veterinary professionals.

But while most veterinarians expressed some reservations about organic production, the majority indicated interest in it and recognized consumer demand for organic products. Most said they believe information related to organic systems is difficult to access and favored increased educational options, such as continuing-education credits and increased information within veterinary-medicine programs.

While Europe allows emergency antibiotic treatments for organic livestock under certain conditions, it is not allowable in the United States for an animal marketed as organic. Ron Rosmann, an organic livestock producer from Harlan, Iowa, says he relies on various vaccinations allowable under NOP standards and treatments other than antibiotics to manage his herd's health. He said he would like to see research on alternative treatments for common problems, such as pinkeye in cattle, which would provide him with more options as an organic producer.

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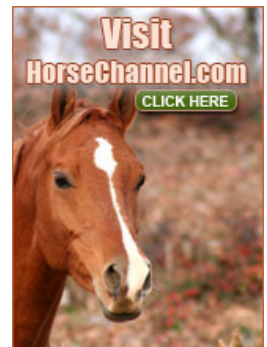
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Posted: 1/23/2012 10:53:48 PM

Not only is this a problem, but trying to find a local large animal vet that works on swine is like a drop in the bucket.

Christy, Mt. Hermon, LA

Posted: 1/23/2012 1:16:29 PM

interesting

i, i, ID

Posted: 1/22/2012 11:41:43 PM

I'm very pleased to see the vets who responded to the survey indicated there is a need for vets in organic operations and a real need for education insofar as what an organic operation really is. Now, we need to expand on this and begin offering educational classes and seminars.

Frederick, Ocala, FL

Posted: 1/22/2012 7:12:42 PM

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