

## Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

# Are Production Animal Jobs Improving for 2014 Veterinary Graduates?

By Dr. Donald F. Smith  
May 5, 2014

Over the past decade, several veterinary colleges have instituted specialized recruiting and educational programs for students interested in become rural or food animal veterinarians. This was for many years considered a growth area of the profession. However a few years ago, some professional organizations have expressed concern that we may have an excess of capacity for food animal veterinary services nationally, including in states like Kansas, Wisconsin and California.<sup>1</sup>

My interest was recently piqued when I talked to one of our graduating students from Cornell who had just accepted a job as a farm veterinarian on a dairy operation in Wisconsin.<sup>2</sup> One of his mentors, Dr. Daryl Nydam, said most of the graduating bovine-oriented students at Cornell have been able to get very good jobs in the dairy industry, but with the important caveat that they be willing to move.<sup>3</sup>

*My sense is that anyone who has been a bit geographically flexible has got a nice production animal job recently. There will be near record milk prices this year with relatively moderate feed prices and that improves opportunities. The growing marketability of our products in foreign countries also contributes to the improving strength of the job market for young production animal veterinarians.*

With the help of the head office of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners (AABP),<sup>4</sup> I contacted two graduating students from Midwestern colleges and asked them to share their experiences.

Travis Vlietstra from Iowa State University agrees that the job market for bovine jobs has been strong this year. He visited practices in Iowa, Michigan and California that he felt would be great places to work, though none of them actually were advertising for a new associate. His decision to visit practices not planning to hire may prove instructive to other students or young veterinarians.<sup>5</sup>

*Well-run, progressive practices are constantly on the lookout for someone who fits their practice dynamics. While none of the practices I visited were advertising the need for another veterinarian, I received job offers from each of the three I visited for externships. They believe that if someone comes along whom they feel they*

*can't pass on they will make an effort to hire that person knowing that work will come.*

Similarly, one of Travis' classmates spent time at six or seven beef practices—most of them were also not advertising for new associates—and he ended up with several offers. “Those practices, whether they were planning to hire someone or not, realized that they had better try and hire this kid because he would be a good fit.”<sup>6</sup>



*Tera Rooney Barnhardt. Kansas State University, 2014*  
(Photo provided by Tera Rooney Barnhardt, 2014)

Tera Rooney Barnhardt, who will be graduating this spring from Kansas State University, also reported that the job market for food animal veterinarians is very good. “You have to be willing to do some small animal work as well, but in rural Kansas, general practitioners are hiring this year.”<sup>7</sup> Tera prefers to stay in state, but she observed that as long as she is geographically flexible within Kansas, her job options are what she described as *numerous*. She will be working in the southwest corner of the state, two hours west of Dodge City. “It is a progressive mixed animal practice with a high potential for gaining more cattle clients because of the strong agriculture industry in the area.”<sup>8</sup>

Both graduates feel that compensation packages are similar to what they've been in past years, perhaps marginally higher. Tera cited some differences in the specifics of the health insurance components of the offers because of the uncertainties associated with implementation of the Affordable Care Act.



Travis Vlietstra, Iowa State University 2014, and his wife Colby  
(Photo provided by Travis Vlietstra, 2014)

Despite being far from their homes in the Midwest, Travis and his wife, Colby, decided to move to the San Joaquin Valley of California, where he will join a large dairy practice.<sup>9</sup>

*My wife and I prayed regularly and often about the decision. When the time came the decision was surprisingly easy. We knew that California is what felt right, that if we turned down that opportunity we would always wonder “what if”. California provided a 100% dairy-focused career opportunity. Leaving home will be hard, but we are determined not to be scared and to branch out and do something we never thought we would do.*

Interviewing for a job can be challenging, but it also provides many opportunities to show unity and respect for our profession. Tera has some wise and helpful advice to other students approaching the job market,<sup>10</sup>

*Never burn a bridge while interviewing for a job. Always be gracious and keep in contact with practitioners that you hit it off with. This is such a small community, our profession, and keeping doors open will improve your chances of getting exactly where you want to be in the future.*

*Also, keep your classmates in mind while interviewing for jobs. There were several clinics that were not perfect for me, but I thought of a classmate who would love to work in that practice. It really makes turning down job offers a little easier if you can suggest a great person for them to interview. At the same time, be careful with whom you recommend. Your reputation is at stake any time you give a recommendation.*



*Tera Rooney Barnhardt, Kansas State University 2014, and her husband, Sheldon Barnhardt*  
(Photo provided by Tera Rooney Barnhardt, 2014)

If the experiences of soon to be graduates from Kansas State, Iowa State, and Cornell are any indication, perhaps the job market in production animal medicine is improving. One year does not make a trend, and it is important not to broadly interpret a few anecdotal stories; however, these reports from the field are encouraging.

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<sup>1</sup> The Center for Health Workforce Studies, [2013 U.S. Veterinary Workforce Study: Modeling Capacity Utilization](#) P 17

<sup>2</sup> Cully, Tom (DVM candidate, Cornell University Class of 2014). Personal communication with Donald Smith (Cornell University). Apr 13, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Nydam, Daryl, DVM, PhD (Associate Professor, Cornell University), email to Donald Smith (Cornell University). Apr 14, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Wren, Geni (American Association of Bovine Practitioners), email to Donald Smith (Cornell University), April 17, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Vlietstra, Travis (DVM candidate, Iowa State University Class of 2014), email to Donald Smith (Cornell University). April 19, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Barnhardt, Tera Rooney (DVM Candidate, Kansas State University Class of 2014), email to Donald Smith (Cornell University). April 22 and May 1, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Barnhardt, Tera Rooney, Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Vlietstra, Travis, Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Barnhardt, Tera Rooney, Ibid

#### KEYWORDS:

History of Veterinary Medicine

Daryl Nydam

American Association of Bovine Practitioners (AABP)

American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)

Veterinary Workforce

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Travis Vlietstra  
Iowa State University  
Tera Rooney Barnhardt  
Kansas State University  
Cornell University  
Veterinary Workforce  
Food Animal Practice  
Bovine Practice  
Large Animal Practice

TOPIC:

Bovine Practice  
Careers in Veterinary Medicine

LEADING QUESTION:

Is Bovine Practice expanding?

ABSTRACT:

Graduating food-animal veterinarians are finding jobs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

*Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine* is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.