

Information Sources for Cow-calf Producers

Veterinarians are a key information source for beef producers. Nearly two-thirds (60.8 percent) of cow-calf producers cited the veterinarian as a “very important” source of information for their cow-calf operation which may include health, nutritional, or production management information (Figure 1 below and Table 1 on the next page).

The USDA’s National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) Beef ‘97 study collected data to determine who cow-calf producers turned to for information they needed to run their operation. The NAHMS study was carried out in 23 of the largest cow-calf states¹ by gathering data from 2,713 producers with one or more beef cows.

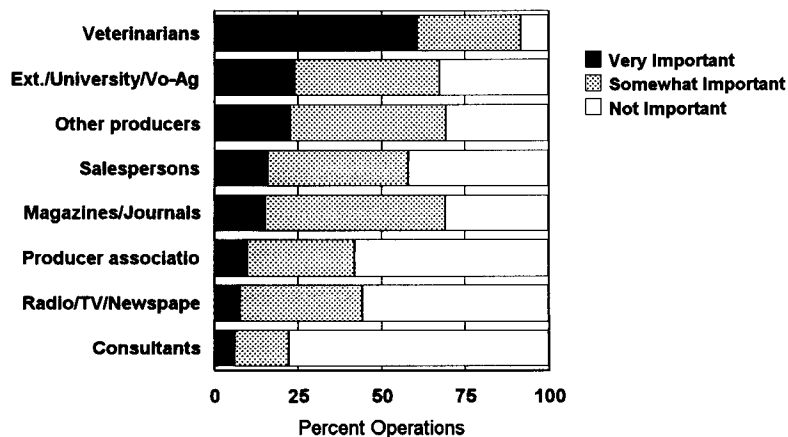
Extension service/universities/vocational agriculture instructors as a group were the second most commonly cited (24.1 percent of producers) as “very important” sources of information.

Producers apparently feel that they can learn a lot from each other, since 22.7 percent of producers cited “other producers” as a very important source. Less than one in five producers cited any of the other sources as “very important.”

Consultants were most frequently (77.5 percent) cited as being “not important” as a source of information, followed by producer associations at 58.0 percent. It may be that producer associations are looked to for leadership in areas other than production management. In the past, producer organizations have served as strong lobbying forces to ensure that the best interests of beef producers are protected. In addition, producer organizations have served as conduits for transfer of

Figure 1

Percent of Operations Rating Information Sources by Perceived Importance for Operating the Cow-calf Operation



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¹Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Wyoming, and Virginia.

Table 1

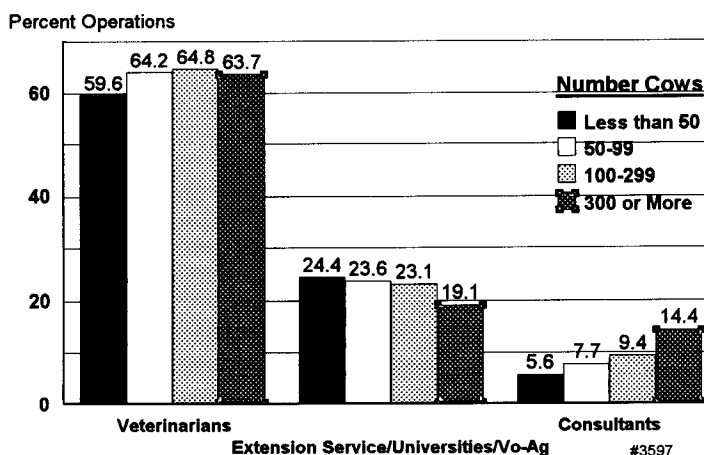
Percent of Operations by Importance of Information Sources for Operating the Cow-calf Operation

Source	Percent Operations		
	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
Extension Service/universities/vo-ag instructors	32.4	43.5	24.1
Veterinarians	8.2	31.0	60.8
Beef magazines or agricultural journals	30.7	53.9	15.4
Producer associations	58.0	32.2	9.8
Other producers	30.4	46.9	22.7
Salespersons	41.7	42.3	16.0
Consultants	77.5	16.1	6.4
Radio, television, or newspapers	55.5	36.5	8.0

Some differences in importance of various information sources can be seen when Beef '97 data are shown by size of the cow herd (Figure 2). Across all herd sizes, the veterinarian figured prominently as a source, as did other producers. The percentage of producers that felt that Extension Service/universities/vocational-agriculture instructors are "very important" declined slightly with increasing herd size. In contrast, the importance of consultants as an information source increased with herd size. It is likely that producers with smaller herds do not feel they can afford the input of hired consultants. On the other hand, anyone can access the Extension Service and universities as resources. Since veterinarians are a key information source for producers, they represent a ready channel of communication to deliver information to enhance production efficiency, product quality, and health of animals for the cow-calf industry.

Figure 2

Percent of Operations Rating Information Sources as Very Important for Operating the Cow-calf Operation by Herd Size



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