

Animal, plant programs reviewed by USDA

WASHINGTON, D.C. — When Congress appropriated \$15 million in September 1978 for food animal health and disease research, it may have been making one of its best inflation-fighting investments ever for the long-range good of the people, says the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Payoff on the investment will come with successful eradication, prevention or control of diseases, which will reduce losses to producers, and in turn lower prices the consumer must pay at the marketplace.

The funds will primarily support research to alleviate infectious, noninfectious, parasitic, and toxicological diseases of livestock, poultry, other food animals, and horses, according to USDA spokesman. USDA's Science and Education Administration, Cooperative Research, is the office responsible for administering the program. Funds will be allocated to colleges of veterinary medicine and State agricultural experiment stations around the country to do the actual research. Allocation will be by formula — taking into account the relative importance of livestock in each state, and the capacity of the scientific organizations to conduct animal health and disease research.

Disease and parasites cause losses estimated at about \$4 billion annually, equivalent to more than 10

per cent of the farm income from livestock and poultry. Such losses result from deaths of animals, reduced productivity, cost of treatment and immunizations, cost of regulatory programs, and condemnations of meat at the slaughter house.

Losses through disease are necessarily reflected in the price of meat, milk, eggs and wool. For example, the price of pork is influenced by the young pigs which die before reaching marketable age. Bovine mastitis reduces milk production and increases the market price of milk. Disease losses are part of the cost of production. The prices of livestock and animal products on the market are geared to cover disease losses. The lower the losses, the less the pressure on these prices.

In addition to relieving these continuing losses, more effective animal disease control is also urgent because many of these diseases are transmissible between animals and man — salmonellosis, brucellosis and leptospirosis, for example. The presence of these diseases in U.S. animals also limits the export demand for livestock and poultry products, and may even limit interstate movement of the products.

The State agricultural experiment stations, from their beginning over 100 years ago, conducted research to improve the efficiency of farmers and to

make food available to the consumer at an affordable price. Experiment stations receive both Federal and state funds to carry out these objectives.

Along those lines, experiment stations conduct research on animal production (husbandry, management, nutrition and genetics). But many stations did not take significant responsibility for research on diseases. The apparent assumption was that since much of the expertise for

in the schools and colleges of veterinary medicine, they should be responsible for that research. However, no provisions were made for the schools and colleges of veterinary medicine to receive appropriated funds to support research.

In spite of the lack of adequate funding and the relatively high level of losses to disease, significant gains have been made in research on animal diseases. In April 1978, Agriculture Secretary Bob Bergland announced that hog cholera had been

eradicated from the U.S. This was accomplished with the help of a rapid and highly accurate test for identifying the presence of the virus in infected swine. The successful eradication is resulting in annual savings of about \$50 million.

Cooperative USDA and experiment station research to control Marek's disease led to a highly effective preventive vaccine now widely used by the poultry industry. During the 10 years leading to the development of the vaccine, USDA costs

for this research came to about \$10 million and the cost to states was about \$6.4 million. Before this breakthrough, Marek's disease took a toll estimated at \$200 million per year. With the vaccine now in use, annual savings amount to about \$170 million.

These are examples of what can be done with adequate funding. Public Law 95-113, passed by Congress in 1977, provides

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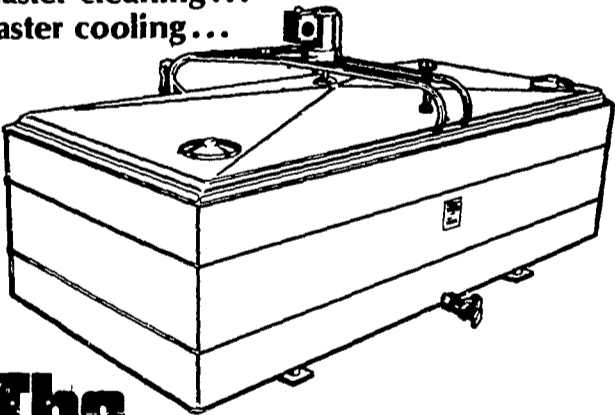
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