

Efforts Under Way To Build Animal Disease Fighting Ability

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to find out what was really going on with animal health.

According to the Card, getting funding is always a problem, but since there is so much at stake commercially and economically, there is some support.

"Federal funding is always difficult to come by," Card said, adding that commercial interests and producer-associations are being sought to help keep the system developing.

"Just today, (a professor) from Penn State called," Card said. "He and a faculty member from New Bolton are going to apply for funds from the National Pork Producers Council, applying for funding to look at problems they think are present in hogs."

According to Card, the animal health scientists are seeking money so it can be matched with government funds and devote them toward the health of the swine industry.

"That's how we need to go about this thing," Card said. "We need to identify those areas, have some funding available so that we can provide a match."

The most expensive portion of

the entire program are attracting well-trained, reliable people into the system and that requires consistent adequate funding, according to Card.

He said that the colleges are planning to employ students, graduate and some outstanding undergraduate students, who would be willing to work for less money than would be required in the private sector, in exchange for the opportunity to build expertise under a program and people who are recognized throughout the industry.

This portion of the program is necessary to bring perspective to whatever animal health problem that happens to be detected through the laboratory.

"The diagnostic lab may give us an indication of what the problem is out there — the pathogen, things of that nature," Card said. "But the investigation group will be out there looking at problems that exist, and how many problems have been a cause for this animal health problem. And finally, we may find some things in there, where we need to do some research. It may be some basic research, it may be applied.

"But then we have the option of going back, again with our group of people and developing programs between (University of Pennsylvania and Penn State) to solve these problems in whatever the disease situation may be," he said.

The choice for Pennsylvania to adopt such a program is little. Agriculture is the leading industry in the state and one that is still growing. Even though animal health issues have long been allowed to sit on the sideline in favor of more popular political issues of the day, there is an apparent turning point, where Pennsylvania is put at risk.

"The cost, the worth of animals today is becoming so increasingly high that you really can't afford to lose too very many, or you're out of the ballgame," Card said.

"And what we need to do is to intercede and control rather than move in, on a reactive basis, to treat the disease," Card said. "We're talking about a health maintenance system using those components."

Level of Expertise

According to Card, Pennsylvania is not alone in its inability to combat some serious animal health

problems, but the new cooperative system, once in full operation, will help fight some of these problems which actually pose serious threats to human health.

As an example, Card said that John's Disease, a difficult, widespread disease in ruminants across the nation, can be battled better under a coordinated effort.

"John's is similar to T.B.," Card said. "They are bacterial organisms. The diagnosis of TB, and John's is becoming increasingly difficult," he said.

"We get false positives, and we get false negatives. We can follow cows and culture them, periodically culture their fecal material, and in many cases they'll be negative. But all of a sudden down here, on the fourth or fifth culture, it's positive. And we may not get a positive blood sample on that cow either," he said.

"So, there is a need to develop a more sophisticated diagnostic capability for T.B. and John's Disease," he said.

"In the southwestern part of the country, in what they call the El Paso milkshed, there's a huge number of dairy cows that provide milk. Some goes to Mexico, a lot

of it comes into Texas.

"They have a huge problem with T.B. down there, and one of the problems is ... they can pick out some very overt reactions, but it's these subtle ones. If you're going to clean up and you don't get the subtle ones, you're not going to clean up.

"And that's the problem we have with John's, so, they're looking at different types of immune responses and the measurement of those immune responses as more sophisticated diagnostic tools for some of these diseases," Card said.

It may seem hard to believe, that in this day with all the technology available, that a state agriculture department is still using facilities built in the 1950s. But the problem is deeper than political expedience.

According to Card, there is adequate knowledge and technology — it's just that profit-motive is not strong enough to develop these technologies.

Ability of the consumer (farmer) to pay, as well as prevalence of diseases, can dissuade animal health companies from fully developing a product or technique that may be greatly needed, but that won't provide a large profit, over the cost of research.

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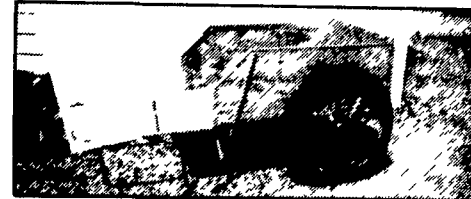
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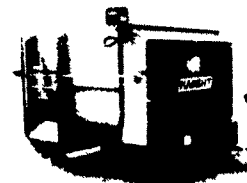
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