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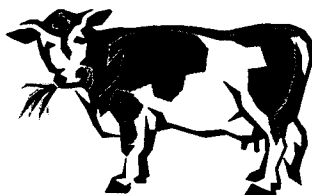
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College of Veterinary Medicine

VETERINARY CONTINUING EDUCATION



ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA  
UNITED STATES OF MINNESOTA



## WILL ULTRASOUND WORK FOR OUR PRACTICE?

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### ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

**Our practice is small. We could never afford an ultrasound unit.**

County Center Animal Hospital/Bovine Service is a two-veterinarian practice employing one part-time technician and one full time receptionist. A little over 50% of the practice income is from small animals, so the dairy portion of the practice is just one veterinarian. We were able to pay for our ultrasound unit in one year and profits grew quickly (see chart 1).

**We don't want to work any harder.**

We rarely work more than 40 hours per week, including emergencies. Ultrasound actually allows us to make more income on fewer farm transactions (see chart 2).

**Our clients won't spend extra for ultrasound and aren't interested in changing the way they do things.**

Our area of Wisconsin is jokingly referred to as the "traditional and tight sector". Yet our clients were very interested in the technology from the start and were easily convinced it would be profitable for them. Of our 32 herdcheck clients, 21 use ultrasound for almost all reproductive exams. Better yet, this translates into 82% of total herdcheck cows (1,663 of 2,015). These numbers do not include several herds that call us less regularly for reproductive ultrasound and sexing.

**Our clients aren't progressive enough to benefit from ultrasound.**

We were surprised that some of our most "backwards" clients were the most interested. Bull-bred herds like knowing that the age of the fetus is accurately predicted.

**We don't have time to learn how to use it.**

Learning the basics of ultrasound is easy for an experienced palpator, especially if you can get individual help for a day or two. Chart one should convince you that spending a little time learning this technology can be very profitable.

**Ultrasound will reduce our income from palpation.**

This is true, but remember that you are replacing a relatively low-income service with a higher income service. We charge about 25% more for ultrasound than for palpation. Chart one shows that our non-ultrasound herdcheck income (this includes palpations, as well as any other work done on herdcheck day) decreased about \$6,500 per year since purchasing the ultrasound unit. However, ultrasound added \$30,000 per year to our income. This large increase is also due to the fact that we gained several new clients who called us primarily for ultrasound services.

**We're not convinced that ultrasound is better than palpation.**

Slaughter studies have shown that experienced veterinarians diagnose ovarian structures correctly by palpation only 80% of the time. Ultrasound diagnosis is well over 90% accurate. This added accuracy will save your clients money on drugs and also achieve fewer days open because appropriate treatments will be given. Diagnosing open cows as early as 25 days after breeding can also reduce days open, as can accurately diagnosing a dead fetus. Ultrasound is also able to pick up mild metritis cases that would be missed by palpation. And, of course, ultrasound is our only tool for fetal sexing.

The following charts summarize what happened for our practice when we added ultrasound. Chart one shows our income from services starting before we had the technology in 1995 through 1999. This chart includes only on-farm services, not drugs, lab, or trip charges. Trip charges have stayed about the same each year and drug sales have gone up, mostly due to the sale of reproductive drugs. Remember, these numbers reflect the work of just one veterinarian.

Chart two shows that we are working better, not harder. The number of on-farm transactions has decreased a bit, but the income per transaction has increased considerably.