

PIPESTONE

System



Phone: 800-658-2523 or 507-825-4211 Fax: 507-825-3140

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APRIL 2009

TACKLING WHAT WORRIES YOU MOST: How Pipestone System Veterinarians Are Contributing to PRRS Research

BY DR. SCOTT DEE, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



Here's what makes me the right person to tell you about the veterinarians in Pipestone System: Before coming to the University of Minnesota, I was a swine practitioner in west central Minnesota for 12 years. I've been aware of Pipestone System for over 20 years and worked with Dr. Gordon Spronk, Dr. Luke Minion, and all of the veterinary team.

Once I moved to the university—specifically to understand how the PRRS virus spreads and how air-filtration can change the outcome—I found myself working even more closely with Pipestone vets. Now, I'm putting science to work for their clients as they're field-testing my research.

Don't get the idea that I bring them data and they accept it whole-hog. They're critical thinkers, every one of them. They believe it's vital to their clients' success that they determine whether my data is telling the truth.

THEY ARE ALL DEDICATED SCIENTISTS

It's fun to go to their meetings. There's Dr. Kennedy, firing questions all the time! And Dr. Joel Nerem, I hold him in high regard because of his work in bio-security. When he was with Christensen Farms, we cooperated to develop a very aggressive system for their transportation process—how people should move pigs. He's a very holistic practitioner.

Dr. Spencer Wayne studied up here at the U of M with Peter Davies so I know the way his mind works, too. Dr. Schmitt

is another guy who'll really challenge you. It's because they each have their own data going back years and years.

I welcome these challenging meetings and I like to work with them, especially Gordon who is an extremely critical thinker and sets a tone for exploring problems differently than most vets.

Pipestone clients should be pleased their vets challenge my work. After all, just because something sounds good in the lab doesn't ensure it will prove out in the field. Over the years, I've discovered these high-level vets work with a high-level clientele who are dedicated to top performance and depend on their vets to seek the best solution. It's fun to work with producers who hold us all to high standards.

Quite often, System vets invite us and our students to come to the farms so we can see our ideas in action. I spend one or two days a month with Gordon and we correspond a lot.

Recently, System vets adopted air filtration ideas from our research farms and put those concepts into practice at large operations in very challenging regions of the country. I'd call them pioneers of air-filtration technology. As a result of their cooperation, we're seeing field parallels to our research. I appreciate the confirmation System research provides for all of us.

All of that brings me to the take-home message: As a veterinary client, you can trust that any product or protocol recommended by a Pipestone System vet has gone through a very rigorous evaluation process beforehand. Believe me, I've been in those meetings! ■

SWINE LINE

RESULTS OF THE SHAREHOLDER SURVEY:

Feedback Will Lead to More Conversations With Your Vet

Though there wasn't time to talk with everybody, recently each veterinarian visited with six or eight shareholders. Those conversations yielded over 50 surveys and a solid picture of the pressures clients are facing right now.

ADDRESSING MARKET PRESSURES FIRST

"It is no surprise to us that surviving volatile markets is overwhelmingly the number one worry gnawing on shareholders," says Dr. Luke Minion. Dr. G. F. Kennedy agrees. "In the '80s, we saw livestock operations disappear for lack of good business advice, so we began looking for things we could do to help our clients. From that desire to assist clients make a success of farming, a totally new concept was born: Pipestone System."

So, adding a grain marketing specialist to the System staff didn't seem like much of a stretch. Today's unpredictable commodities markets require full-time attention from a professional, says Luke. "That's why we added Tyrone Bialas to our Pipestone System management team as commodities manager. His knowledge and experience in grain buying, merchandising, and risk management make him a valuable and timely addition."

Tyrone most recently worked in the ethanol industry. "There I learned margin management and commodity-price risk-management," he explains. Having been tested under fire, Tyrone believes what he learned will prove valuable as he takes up his new duties. "I look forward to helping the Pipestone System and its producer-owners achieve the best possible return on investment."

HEALTH ISSUES RANKED SECOND

"Everybody mentioned concerns about PRRS," Luke continues. "A lot of the comments were positive. A fair number of shareholders realize we're leading the way in PRRS filtering and PRRS research thanks in large part to Dr. Gordon Spronk's efforts. According to Dr. Spronk, "We have no intention of letting up on those efforts." Dr. Schmitt and Dr. Wayne are also key members of the Pipestone health team."

Dr. Schmitt emphasizes disease science, "I'm the microbiologist of the group, looking at pig disease interaction. I give input to the team on how a disease appears to progress and how to influence what is going on in the pig."

As for Dr. Wayne, "My special interest is disease transmission between farms and tracking the spread of a PRRS strain across a region. I'm working to understand the impact of densely populated pig-production neighborhoods and pig movement."

For more on the approach System vets take to disease research, read Dr. Scott Dee's comments on Page 1. He's one of the foremost PRRS researchers in the world.

RETOOLING FOR MORE FACE TIME

Many shareholders surveyed said they don't see our veterinarians often enough. We all take those comments very seriously, says Luke. "In June, we'll be adding another vet to increase our ability to be where you need us to be." We are also emphasizing the importance of producers calling for help early in the situation. Our swine veterinary team continues to make every effort to improve our communications.

Naturally, those additional vet visits won't be cost-free. And as a result Luke says tougher economic conditions could ultimately mean fewer phone calls. "Some clients will stop spending money...when they really shouldn't. Now is the time to actively protect a shareholder's investment in pigs." Spending less is not always achieving the best return.

SURVEY SAYS...

"COMMUNICATE MORE."

"We need to do more," says Luke on the topic of shareholder communication. The investment in our Web site is a strong step in the right direction. We will be implementing the use of the Web site for shareholders more as we move through 2009. The efforts being expended on the Health Management Initiative (HMI) is an additional symbol of our commitment to communicate. There is a quote Luke likes about communication, "The problem with communication is the illusion that it happens." The bottom line on communication is that it takes a lot of effort from all parties, and we are trying to improve every day. ■

Interested in More Information From Pipestone System?

We're serious about communicating with shareholders. In addition to the time we put into this newsletter, production reports to shareholders, and face-to-face conversations we've invested heavily in our re-vamped Web site. Visit www.PipestoneSystem.com at least once a week because that's how often we're updating news and other content there. And when you read something that strikes a cord, email us or pick up the phone!

MEET THE TEAM MEMBERS WHO CONDUCTED OUR SURVEY

Gerald F. Kennedy – Joined Pipestone Veterinary Clinic in 1960: a nationally known livestock expert, innovator, and co-founder of the Pipestone System. DVM, Iowa State University. Native of Humboldt, IA.

“In the ’80s, we saw operations disappear for lack of good business advice, so we began looking for other things we could do to help our customers. From that desire to assist customers make a success of farming, a totally new concept was born: Pipestone System.”

Barry Kerkaert – Directs Pipestone System Grow-Finish Management team. Bachelor’s degree animal science, South Dakota State University; DVM, University of Minnesota. Native of Marshall, MN. 15 years with Pipestone System.

“Nearly every single client I’ve worked with in the past 15 years has expanded. I want to continue playing a part in client success and growth!”

Luke Minion – As Pipestone System CEO, responsible for all business operations. Active veterinarian for 5 System farms. DVM, University of Minnesota. 8½ years with Pipestone System. Hometown Jeffers, MN.

“The whole idea of getting our vets to the kitchen table with shareholders was my idea. I didn’t ask them to do that so customers who have the chance to pat us on the back—I wanted to know how we could improve.”

Bryan Myers – After 20 years practicing in eastern Iowa, recently joined Pipestone System. Bachelor’s animal science, University of Nebraska; DVM, Iowa State University; Native of Lincoln, NE. Based at Pipestone Veterinary Clinic of Iowa.

“I’ve known some of these clients for 20 years and if they’d stayed with their own 40-sow herds they wouldn’t be in business today. I’m here to help them adapt to a new set of conditions.”

Joel Nerem – Special focus on Pipestone System bio-security. Served as Christensen Farms staff veterinarian for five years. Bachelor’s degree, biology, Luther College; DVM Iowa State University; Native of West Union, IA. 2½ years with Pipestone System.

“Sure, the swine industry is going through tough times but there are always challenges. I can’t think of another group of customers or another team of veterinarians I’d rather be working with during the challenging times.”

Cameron Schmitt – Special focus on disease interaction and disease processes. Master’s degree in microbiology and DVM, both from Iowa State University. Father is a DVM in Stewart, IA. 7 years with Pipestone System. Based at Pipestone Veterinary Clinic of Iowa.

“I’m pleased when shareholders want to know the thinking behind a specific practice. Really good pork producers always expect to hear the reasoning.”

Gordon Spronk – Co-founder of Pipestone System production model. Bachelor’s degree in veterinary science and DVM, University of Minnesota. Active in family-owned swine business. Native of Edgerton, MN.

“Dr. Minion’s leadership helps us build on a foundation laid down nearly 20 years ago. That team merges Dr. Kennedy’s governance skills with Dr. Nerem’s people skill’s and Dr. Kerkaert’s doggedness for excellence. Dr. Schmitt and Dr. Wayne play both defense and offense with their combined emphasis on disease tracking and control.”

Spencer Wayne – Special focus on epidemiology and disease transmission between farms. Previous experience working for Cargill and Smithfield farms. Bachelor’s degree and DVM, University of Minnesota. Ph.D. candidate at the University of Minnesota. Joined full-time staff in 2008.

“My special interest is disease transmission between farms and tracking the spread of a PRRS strain across a region. I’m working to understand the impact of densely populated pig-production neighborhoods and pig movement.”

Note: Dr. Jay Bobb, an active member of the Pipestone System governing board, devotes the bulk of his time to dairy and general practice clients. ■





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WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS TOLD US



Dr. Luke Minion
**DR. LUKE MINION, CEO
PIPESTONE SYSTEM**

Recently, Pipestone veterinarians informally surveyed a random selection of customers and partners in the Pipestone System. We didn't schedule these visits to discuss sick pigs but rather to learn more about them, their businesses, and how we perform for them.

My own kitchen table conversations with System shareholders will motivate me in the days ahead. For one thing, customers want to know more. In discussion, we identified ways we can educate our customers while we carry out herd health procedures. We learned we should also encourage open communication during our farm visits, something we rarely take time to do.

Personally, I gained a lot from these talks with shareholders and I'll use insights from those conversations to improve. As a veterinary team, we will take the lessons of this customer survey to heart. All too often, we've been so busy that we've missed opportunities to apply skills and

knowledge our team collectively represents.

That team includes our shareholders. Producers' experiences with System pigs and with their own production challenges create a valuable knowledge base. Moving forward, we will increasingly tap that experience.

Together, we've created a truly great pig production system but we're not content to stand still. By adding talented veterinarians, we've strengthened our commitment to System owners. If you haven't met our entire veterinary team, I encourage you to get acquainted inside this issue. Each of our seven DVMs has specific interests and talents that contribute to our ability to offer you very complete service.

We're striving toward better communication as we work with you. It's another way we'll fulfill our mission: Helping Farmers Today Create the Farms of Tomorrow. ■

