

Competitive forces influencing the strategic position of swine practitioners

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Over the past several years there have been extraordinary changes in the global swine industry, including increased integration, fewer and larger farms, transition from production companies to food companies, and consumer-driven purchasing power. The United States swine industry uses approximately 3% of AVMA members. This small percentage, coupled with these other characteristics of modern swine production, are challenging the competitive position of swine veterinarians (Fig 1).

Our customers are changing from traditional, independent producers to producer alliances and corporations. The largest 15 commercial swine producers in the United States (representing 550,000 sows) employ only 13 full-time veterinarians. Many of these huge corporations conduct their own

research and development, and are reluctant to share it. If current trends continue, a total of 500 full-time swine practitioners will be required to service the industry in 10 year's time. The alternatives force (paraprofessionals) is becoming stronger because the increasing sophistication of products and technology creates a demand for their services. Regulations, barriers to entry and technologic developments maintain the need for swine practitioners. However, our key challenge is to remain competitive between our customers and suppliers.

Swine veterinarians can maintain a competitive position by heeding the adage: luck is when preparation meets opportunity. The challenges to swine practitioners identified in Fig 1 are really potential opportunities, which we must be *prepared* to confront.

Some of the ways we can solidify our competitive position in the future include:

- investing in our own education via short courses that have a business focus;
- learning another language to open ourselves to a global focus. Traveling to other parts of the world to understand their competitive advantages;

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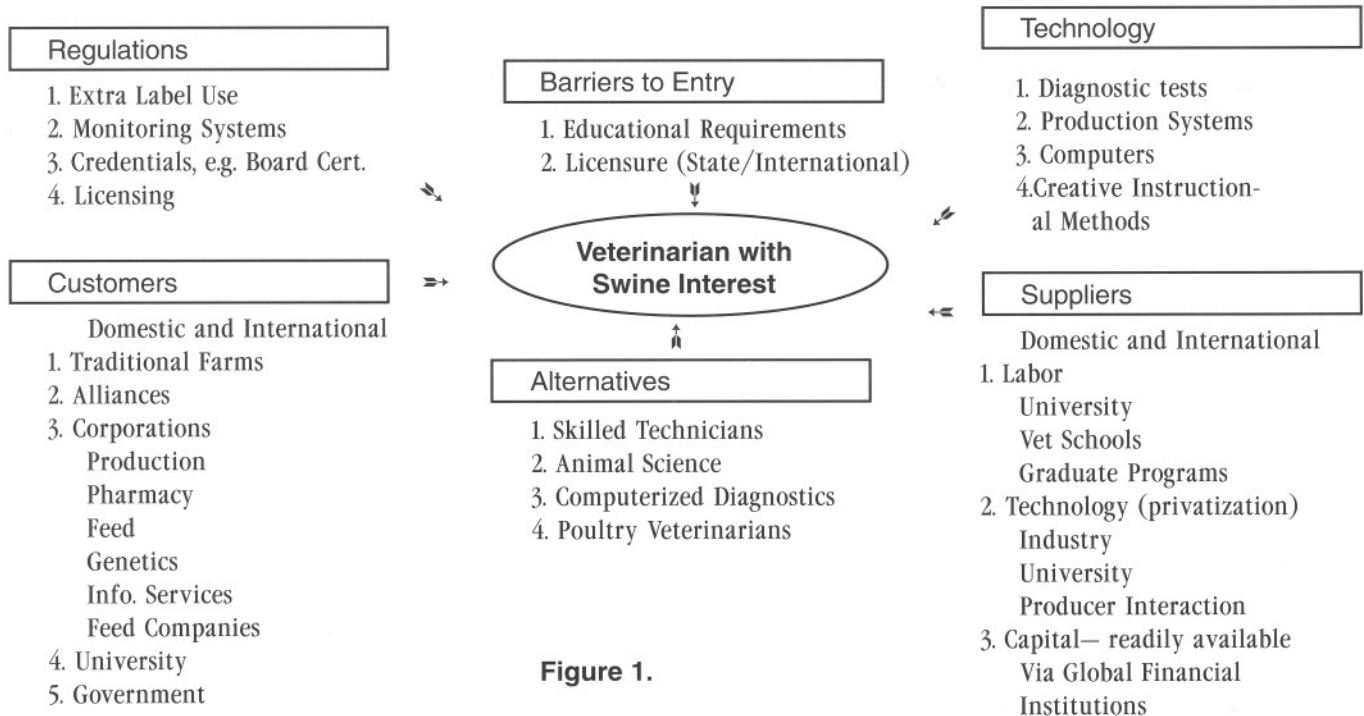


Figure 1.

- supporting key educational programs including the Master of Science Swine Medicine Specialist program at the University of Minnesota and the Executive Veterinary Program (EVP) and Integrated Food Animal Management Systems (IFAMS) programs at the University of Illinois.
- supporting key research, teaching, and service efforts that can provide an excellent platform for our future. This would include the proposed Al Lemman Endowed Chair at the University of Minnesota. This vehicle could provide a key platform for research and development, mentorship and teaching for the emerging industry.
- attending key continuing education programs that have a major swine focus at the veterinary colleges. These would include the University of Illinois, Iowa State University, University of Minnesota, University of Missouri, North Carolina State University and Purdue University.
- networking with industrial leaders and investing in relationships that will provide the basis for our changing industry.

How do we truly honor Al Lemman?

Kent Kislingbury, DVM

It has been nearly 4 months since the untimely death of our friend and colleague. The number of tributes and condolences people around the world have expressed is almost unbelievable. It truly exemplifies the impact he has had on the swine industry and all of us associated with it.

As we listened to these tributes to our friend, we asked the question, how can we honor this *great man* in a way that would preserve these wonderful memories forever? How can we do something that would continue Al's legacy, and further his quest for excellence in swine health and production? It should be something that would honor his dedication to an educational program that emphasizes applied research in swine health and production and would also be dedicated to the continuing education of veterinary students, graduate students, practicing veterinarians, and producers.

I think it is important that it be something that would amplify its impact so that it could affect the most people possible in all areas of swine production and health. As some of you may know, Al had a vision of what he wanted to accomplish at the University of Minnesota. Most of these dreams came to fruition before he left the university, but one dream did not: his longtime goal of an endowed chair

in swine health fell short. However, the idea of an endowed chair is a good one.

A chair is the highest university faculty position, even higher than full professor. Chairs are internationally recognized for their leadership and for their vision. It is a permanent position; because it is endowed, it will be here forever. It would be the only chair in swine health in the world. It seems to me that this is by far the best way to remember Al. It is something that would continue to give his name and his cause high visibility and have a continuing impact on the greatest number of people in the industry. This is something that would benefit us, our children, and our children's children. It forever recognizes and honors Al's memory. Last, but not least, the chair is there to support something for which Al had great feeling and it would fulfill his longtime dream.

To me it's payback time. It's a chance to show my eternal gratitude to a friend and colleague who had such a profound impact on my professional career. I am heading the campaign for the Allen D. Lemman Chair in Swine Health; it is a responsibility that I do not take lightly. I'll need the help of all of his friends and colleagues to translate their good feelings for Al into action in helping establish this chair in Al's name. Thanks.