

President's Letter
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As a young veterinarian newly in practice in Chino, CA, I was handed a phone call one day from a local newspaper reporter. The reporter asked me as a veterinarian whether I thought it was normal for a cow to have convulsions while she was calving. I gave him all sorts of possibilities of milk fever and ketosis and other metabolic diseases, then asked him the question: "What are you researching." His story began as follows:

The neighbor of a local backyard cow owner heard a cow bawling painfully while lying out in the nearby pasture for a prolonged time. The well-intentioned neighbor attempted to call the cow's owner but the owner was not home at the time. By this time, the exasperated Good Samaritan could think of nothing other than helping this poor cow. The decision was made to summon a local sheriff's deputy. Together the neighbor and the lawman decided that due to the suffering of the cow, something must be done and quickly. The deputy shot the cow to put her out of her misery.

The cow's owner sent the dead cow to Stiles Dead Stock and asked Mr. Stiles to perform a post mortem exam. The cow was found to have been in the midst of calving and had a calf ready to emerge from her birth canal.

The painful bawling of a cow in labor is a normal occurrence on a dairy on a daily basis since we calve hundreds of cows monthly. We think nothing of it. While we find it normal, our farm-removed friends and customers from town could find the same situation very distasteful. As dairymen, we have a tremendous responsibility to make sure all of our cows are properly cared for. While I can defend normal cow calving and husbandry methods, I cannot and will not attempt to defend any instances of abuse or neglect.

In my example, a grave mistake was made. To tend to a truly suffering cow, a veterinarian skilled in cow care should have been consulted. The reporter in his newspaper article quoted me as saying that it was (1) "normal for a cow to have convulsions while calving" and (2) "I would not have prescribed a bullet for her problems." I did not say #1 but I did say #2.

There is a lot of misinformation concerning animal abuse and animal welfare. We must be vigilant on our dairies to make certain of the following:

1. No person should ever be allowed to participate in any animal abuse or neglect so there would never be anything to photograph.
2. When hiring, we must instruct all new employees of the rules of proper animal care and handling on each of our dairies. We must also instruct them that if they see or participate in any animal abuse whether filming or not, they will be turned in to the authorities for full prosecution for animal abuse.
3. We must ensure that the employees understand what constitutes abuse since many people see things differently.

Several years ago, I told a dairy client of mine that his cows were very defensive and scared during vet check and several tried to kick me. Several had swellings on their legs and joints. I told him to check on his milkers to be sure no one was injuring them at milking time. My client did not really want to believe me but he sneaked into his barn at milking time that night to observe anyway. What he found was an angry milker beating the cows on the legs with a steel pipe when they did not do what he wanted them to do. My client jumped out of the shadows and demanded that the employee stop hitting the cows. The employee retorted that he would milk the cows any way he wanted to and you guessed it—the fight was on! The employee quickly lost the battle and went limping out the driveway. A little later, the sheriff showed up and arrested my client for assault.

When I showed up for vet check the following month, I had not heard of any of these incidents but my client quickly filled me in. He said that I would have to speak to the judge for him because he told the judge “My vet told me to do it!” After I recovered from the initial shock of his fight and his arrest, he said he was just “punking” me about talking to the judge. The judge had dismissed the case when he heard of the circumstances whereby the dairyman was defending his cows.

While I am not advocating violence of any kind, I believe we have a moral duty to protect our animals and make certain that they are properly cared for and never abused. I am proud of my client for protecting his animals; and by the way, I did not get kicked any more during vet checks at that herd.

Ask your veterinarian for input to set up programs to prevent or stop animal abuse on your farm. Be active and proactive. We should be certain that there is nothing to film even if someone does sneak a camera onto our farms.

On a different subject, I would like to thank everyone who worked on our Annual Convention this year including Beverly Idsinga, Kaye Whitefoot, Susan Curry, Maria Curry, Hayley Curry, Kathy Bustos, Sandi Whitefoot, Molly Smith, Becky Woelber, and Kelli Goodpasture. There is a tremendous amount of work that goes into the Convention. The Silent Auction is always a favorite feature as well, and it takes a lot of

work to pull it together so beautifully. So, thank you again to all who worked hard to make this year's Convention a huge success!