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Calf Note #256 – Professional Development in Animal Science

Introduction

Raising calves is both science and art. However, the science component of calf nutrition and management continues to expand and the depth of knowledge needed to successfully and efficiently raise calves seems to be increasing exponentially. New developments in feeding programs, effects of early life management on future milk production and longevity, and many other discoveries make it more and more challenging to “stay up to date” on the most recent developments in the industry.

This Calf Note is somewhat of an “opinion piece”, in that I will argue that continuing professional development is essential for animal scientists, whether they are working with calves, cows, or other animals.

For many animal scientists, formal training ends at graduation, whether from a BS, MS, or Ph.D. program. We pack our diploma and move into a new stage of life, working in some aspect of the industry – academia, industry, etc. And the risk is, there’s little continued development of the person’s knowledge with key aspects of the industry. They become “stale”, less relevant and valuable to the organization to which they belong, and to their customers. That’s why continuing education is so important.

Many professional organizations require their members to complete continuing education courses throughout their career. The number of courses (credits) depends on their certification, but continuing education is required of all professional members. An example is the Veterinary profession. Veterinary professionals are required to complete a certain number of “RACE” (Registry for Approved Continuing Education) credits each year. RACE is a function of the American Association of Veterinary State Boards that sets the standards for veterinary education and continuing education. This makes perfect sense – we certainly want our veterinarians to provide excellent care and have knowledge regarding developments in veterinary medicine while doing so.

In the Animal Sciences, the American Registry of Professional Animal Scientists (**ARPAS**) serves a similar function. According to their [website](#), ARPAS “*The American Registry of Professional Animal Scientists (ARPAS) provides certification of animal scientists through examination, continuing education, and commitment to a code of ethics, and disseminates applied scientific information through a peer-reviewed journal publication.*” This is an important and worthy goal and I recommend that all animal scientists, at every level – BS, MS, or Ph.D. – should be a member of ARPAS and should commit to the code of professionalism and ethics. One paragraph from the ARPAS Code of Ethics states:

“Every animal scientist incurs an obligation to advance the science and art of the profession, to guard and uphold its high standards and conform to the best principles of professional conduct.”

I have been a member of ARPAS for many years and I believe in the need to continue to develop the professionalism of the industry, but also to continue to develop my own competence as an animal scientist. Like veterinary professionals, ARPAS members are required to submit continuing education credits to ensure members grow professionally and maintain their technical skills. Meetings such as ASAS and ADSA are recognized for ARPAS credits, as are nutrition and reproduction conferences in the United States and Canada. More information regarding ARPAS is available from the [website](#).

Other organizations are also forming professional societies to provide continued professional and technical development for their members. For example, the company with was employed is Cargill. The company created an organization called “Alaatus” with a goal to “*deepen the knowledge, skillsets, and development of top industry-facing technical talent while enhancing their careers and creating value for Cargill and our customers.*” The number of animal scientists working for Cargill is considerable, and usually within a country or region the number of animal scientists rival Colleges of Agriculture at many of the largest agricultural universities. This is surely the case for other agriculture-related companies. Cargill saw the need to provide for continued education and professional development for their high-performing scientists. The Alaatus program provides continuing education across species and functions, so that participants learn about business, leadership, and cross-functional cooperation. And, of course, they take “deep dives” into important technical areas such as improving sustainability, dairy cattle lifetime profitability, and many other topics.

The Alaatus program is one example of the recognition that continued professional development and professional ethics are critical to the success of the industry. Organizations like ARPAS provide independent, third-party certification of a scientist’s abilities and ensures a commitment to professional ethics. Within private companies, organizations such as Alaatus provide recognition of achievement and a platform to continue to develop professionally. It is important that, as scientists, we continue to grow and develop professionally and participating in organizations such as these are essential to professional growth.

Check out [ARPAS](#). If you are a scientist committed to the further development of a professional and ethical industry, please consider membership and take the steps to join the ARPAS community.

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