



**LONG-RANGE PLANNING
SESSION REPORT &
A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE FUTURE**

**for the
Board of Directors
of the
Academy of Rural Veterinarians, Inc.**

January 2009



**Prepared by:
Capitol Hill Management Services, Inc.
90 State Street, Suite 1009
Albany, New York 12207-1710
(518) 463-8644
www.caphill.com**

The Academy of Rural Veterinarians

LONG-RANGE PLANNING

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Introduction/Overview

On December 4, 2008, the Academy of Rural Veterinarians (ARV) conducted a Long-Range Planning Session as part of its Annual Meeting held at the Winter 2008 Academy of Veterinarian Consultants Conference in Denver, Colorado. The session followed the reporting portion of the Annual Meeting and its purpose was to provide a forum for ARV leaders, members and supporters to learn about the latest trends in not-for-profit association management, brainstorm ideas, share concerns, and plan for the future. Capitol Hill Management Services of Albany, New York, which provides association management services for ARV, provided the facilitation for the session.

The following report outlines the content of the Long-Range Planning Session and provides the initial draft of a Strategic Plan. The contents will be reviewed by ARV leaders, members and supporters, in order to gain constructive feedback before being finalized for adoption and action by the ARV Board of Directors.

The following ARV leaders, members and supporters were present for the Long-Range Planning Session:

Shelley Lenz, ARV President (Killdeer, North Dakota)
Bob Gentry, ARV President- Elect (Beloit, Kansas)
Brett Andrews, ARV Treasurer (Burwell, Nebraska)
Rexanne Struve, ARV Immediate Past President (Manning, Iowa)
Steve McDonald, ARV Executive Director (Henrietta, Texas)

Bill Burdett, Intervet (Cairo, Nebraska)
Dean Christianson (Ashley, North Dakota)
Christine Navarre, LSU Faculty Liaison (Louisiana)
Keith Schumacher (West Point, Nebraska)
Barry Stewart (Hartselle, Alabama)
Thomas Van Dyke, Merial (Damascus, Virginia)
Kurt Walters (Buffalo, Wyoming)
Steve Willnerd (Rushville, Nebraska)

Brian Buff of Capitol Hill Management Services facilitated the session.

This report is composed of the following sections, corresponding to the session's structure:

- A Brief History of ARV
- Association Management 101
- Where's ARV At? What is the Current State of ARV?
- The "Challenges"
- Focus Points/Strategies
- Where Do We Go From Here?
- Strategic Plan Timeline
- Supporting Material

A Brief History of ARV

The following brief history is offered as a context to the contents of this report. For further context about the beginning of ARV and the reasons for its development, please see "Lessons Learned About Veterinary Students and Rural Practice" by Steve McDonald, DVM, in the Supporting Materials section.

In 2000, a group of dedicated rural veterinarians met while taking the Beef Cattle Production Management Course at Clay Center, Nebraska. Upon finding an a common belief in the value of rural practice, this group began visiting each other's practices and offered critiques about ways that the practice could work more efficiently. One thing became almost immediately noticeable through these visits – the challenge of finding qualified associates interested in joining a rural practice.

At a June 2003 meeting in Northport, Nebraska, Dr. Dave Horn was presenting to the group on practice management, and a discussion ensued about what rural veterinarians were doing to promote their noble profession. Dr. Horn offered that rural practice was perceived by many stereotypes, such as low pay and poor quality, yet many in practice made a good living and enjoyed the work. The group decided to organize with the mission of promoting the rewards of veterinary practice in rural America.

The Academy of Rural Veterinarians formally came into being in the fall of 2003 at a meeting held at the HR Bar Ranch in Buffalo, Wyoming. Its "originators" were Brett Andrews of Nebraska, Phillip Kesterson of Nebraska, Bob Gentry of Kansas, Steve McDonald of Texas, Larry Moczygemba of Texas, Keith Schumacher of Nebraska, and Kurt Walters of Wyoming. Larry Moczygemba was elected the new association's first president.

The group was greatly assisted by the following group of advisors: Drs. Mike Apley, Peter Chenoweth, Dee Griffin, Dale Grotelueschen, Larry Hollis and Dave Horn.

ARV plunged into its work by organizing school visits in order to present to students and show them through personal example and experiences that the perceptions of rural practice were simply not true. ARV's first school meeting was presented in 2004 at Texas A&M.

Association Management 101

Brian Buff of Capitol Hill Management Services provided the group with an overview of the work of CHMS and the benefits of multiple-management. By partnering with CHMS, ARV leaders will be afforded the time to truly lead and address the needs of the association, as CHMS staff will be taking care of the daily needs of the association (membership services, communications, advancement, etc.).

The CHMS Organizational Governance Checklist was included in session materials and the group briefly reviewed the major components of association management – focusing on seven major areas:

- Governing & Legal Documents
- Strategic Advancement
- Risk Management & Insurance
- Volunteer Board & Committees
- Administration, Staffing & Finances
- Membership & Stakeholders
- Organizational Packaging

ARV leaders will take some time, and in conjunction with CHMS, will make sure all of the association's files are consolidated and in order – systematically going through the checklist to make sure they have all of the necessary information and documentation in place. Going through this type of “association inventory” will also assist ARV's leadership in prioritizing its needs.

Please note: Not every item listed on the Organizational Governance Checklist is required of every association. Some items might not apply.

Where's ARV At? What is the Current State of ARV?

The work of the Long-Range Planning Session began with a simple “taking of the temperature” of ARV leaders, members and supporters. The group was asked to share their initial thoughts as to the current state of the association. Information from the reporting portion of the Annual Meeting also provided some useful insight for this “gut reaction” exercise.

The group offered the following:

- True to our mission
- Do a lot with humble resources
- Same leaders; getting tired
- Need to increase membership, participation, and volunteers
- Provides excellent forum for collaborative efforts and networking
- Voice of the profession

- Tough year attracting corporate support
- Competition from other organizations (for resources, student involvement, etc.)
- Transition issues – going from all-volunteer led organization to one working with association management firm.

Most of these statements or descriptions illustrate an association that has taken a serious look at itself and has dealt with some serious challenges and issues in the recent past, and knows the areas that need to be addressed in the coming years.

The “Challenges”

After checking with the participants on how they felt about where ARV is currently in terms of its development and energy, they were asked to identify the challenges that ARV faces. Among those identified, include:

- After five years, maintaining momentum and growing the association
- Finding adequate financial backing to support ARV's externship and school visit programs, as well as other possible programming ideas
- Building a larger cadre of leaders – for the board, regions and committees
- Growing membership and support
- Making sure that the website serves as a first-line resource for members and rural veterinarians across the country
- Growing competition for resources (students, financial support) from associations with cross-referenced missions, i.e. AVMA, AABP
- Consolidating ARV's resources – so office has all the information it needs to answer questions, etc.

These responses provided the session with focus areas for discussion.

Focus Points/Strategies

The Long-Range Planning Session participants discussed and brainstormed possible strategies for ARV's future. Attention was paid to both immediate and long-range plans.

The Profession, Industry & National Trends

Certainly the major concern of financing the operation of ARV vis-à-vis the current state of the economy was discussed. For months, the media and elected officials have been educating Americans on the grave economic situation we face: the greatest crisis on Wall Street since the Great Depression; the meltdown of the financial services sector, the expected loss of jobs in the national economy; and an expected national unemployment rate of over 8 percent in 2009.

ARV has prided itself on running a lean, effective association, and must look at maintaining that practice in the next few years ahead. The association must double its

efforts in researching and soliciting funds from corporations, foundations and other sources.

Based on current responses, revenue from membership should slightly exceed that from past years as the association has consolidated its membership database and refined its renewal process.

In its first five years of operation, ARV has made an impact on raising awareness of the rewards of rural practice. The association's programming is effectively reaching its intended target, as the following testimonial shows:

I thought the ARV Externship Program was an amazing experience that I might not have experienced if ARV hadn't planted the seed in my head. It confirmed my desire to work in a rural area, even though I have always lived in cities. I also gained experience with a great variety of different species and cases. The one-on-one and hands-on learning experience, which is not easy to achieve in a school setting, clarified so many of the ideas I learned. Thank you so much ARV!

- Natalie Mickelsen

It is interesting to note that recently, ARV leaders and others have identified other organizations creating or adjusting their outreach and programming along the lines of that offered by ARV. In as much as it is said that "imitation is the purest form of flattery", but these other organizations are possible competitors for members, student attention, and financial support. In these economic times, ARV must be extra vigilant and creative in seeking additional sources of support and revenue.

Defining Why/How ARV Works Best

Recently, Dr. Dave Horn offered the following points as to why ARV has many advantages to other groups trying to replicate this work, including:

- ARV has been doing it longer than anyone on a national level at all the veterinary schools and is now recognized as the leader. There is now a generation of graduates in practice that know ARV and what it does.
- ARV has an established volunteer national Board of Directors that coordinate activities within their geography at veterinary schools and with mentors/members.
- ARV is "grassroots" and believes that this problem can only really be fixed at the local level by motivated rural veterinarians who want to solve this problem.
- ARV is comprised of "real" veterinarians in practices across the country telling their story to students. ARV has credibility that an AVMA, corporate or government agency representative cannot have.
- ARV has an established website that is working to reach its audience and support its members.
- ARV is efficiently run and provides a least-cost program to get the job done as we are managed and supported internally by volunteers. ARV utilizes Capitol Hill Management Services to help the association to be more efficient and professional – still allow ARV to run with a very lean cost structure.

- ARV currently sees and talks to 1000 students each year through volunteers and minimal company support. (It is not unimaginable that a large organization like AVMA will spend as much or more in mailings as ARV spends actually meeting with students.)
- ARV in collaboration with Oregon State, Ohio State, Michigan State and Colorado State conducted a nation wide survey in 2008 addressing the issue of retention of veterinarians in rural practice. The resulting articles will appear in 2 consecutive JAVMA issues in spring 2009. Please see abstract on the retention study in Supporting Materials.

Leadership, Committees & Volunteers

The ARV Board of Directors is composed of highly dedicated professionals who volunteer their time and expertise to guide the association. The Board is earnest in continually communicating with each other (via conference calls and e-mails) in order to clarify situations and make decisions.

As it happens often with organizations totally run by volunteers, the onus of running the organization on a day-to-day basis takes away the true focus of the Board – to look at “the big picture” and address major issue facing the organization. For this reason, in early 2008, ARV contracted with Capitol Hill Management Services (CHMS) in order to create an office to serve as the “hub” of the association’s efforts. This past year has been one of transition – as both ARV and CHMS learned about each other – and began putting a plan of operation in place.

For the past few years, some of the work, research and discussions that should be handled by separate and distinct committees have been absorbed by the Board. This dynamic can bog down a Board’s effectiveness because instead of items being brought to the body for approval or action, issues and projects get discussed with the “nitty-gritty” detail work often tabled or overlooked.

The Board should activate all committees called for in the By-Laws to study, prepare and offer options/plans on a number of fronts, including programming, education and membership. The committees do not and should not be comprised exclusively of Board members. Volunteers from the general membership should be actively sought. This brings fresh input and also offers a possible “farm system” for future Board member nominations.

Currently, two standing committees stand moribund and vacant. These are the Forward Planning and Education committees. A majority of standing committees are led by active ARV officers.

Committee chairs should be regularly communicating with ARV officers and office. By fully activating and requiring productivity from all committees, ARV leadership would be enhanced, and greater productivity should result from this action.

Overall, the Board should undertake a leadership analysis. The position of Secretary of

the Board is currently vacant and an effort needs to be mounted to find a candidate. The leadership analysis should address the small size of the Board, nominating and election process, and available leadership training. Job descriptions for the Board should be developed, as these can be used in recruiting qualified candidates in the future.

Programs, Training & Outreach

People see success in activity. The more active a group is, the more people view it as a successful and winning operation. This is especially true for professional groups. It is true that there is automatic benefit of membership by being able to burnish one's credentials. But the real value comes in the offerings an association has for its members to professionally and personally improve.

ARV has a successful track record in reaching out to the future of the profession through several successful programs:

The Externship Grant Program places veterinary students in rural practices in order to work side-by-side with seasoned professionals to discover the rewards of this field. This program has led to an increase in the number of veterinary students choosing rural practice as their career path. We sincerely hope that as these young veterinarians grow in their careers, they will remember the encouragement and guidance given to them, and in turn, encourage the next generation of rural veterinarians. Since its inception, over 150 students have worked with 150 seasoned mentors.

ARV also conducts a Veterinary School Visit Program, where members visit campuses to personally speak about their careers and the impact that rural practice has had on their lives, and the lives of the communities they serve. Time-and-time again, these members hear from students that they never even thought about a rural career, and that the visit raised their awareness of this valuable option. Over each of the last five years, over 40 veteran rural practitioners have brought our message to 1,000 students.

ARV also promotes rural practice through its website that serves as a clearinghouse of information for veterinarians and veterinary students across the nation.

All agreed that focus should be paid to reaching out to the future of the profession – the students in veterinary programs across the nation. All of the issues identified came down to addressing:

M&P: The Challenge of the 21st Century Professional Organization

The facilitator shared that the greatest challenge facing any 21st century professional organization is: MOTIVATING & POPULATING. These two concepts must be applied to every aspect of an association.

Leaders must work to motivate all those involved in their operation – board members, committee chairs, committee members, volunteers, members, and supporters. The

motivation must be to bring people to their fullest potential in whatever their role is in the organization.

Leaders must also “populate” the association. By this, we mean, to actively recruit and retain support through increased levels of membership, participation in association leadership, on its committees, and lining up additional supporters (sponsors, advertisers, and legislative).

In both motivating and populating – the power of the personal invitation can not be overlooked. Studies and experience has shown time-and-time again that when a person is contacted and personally invited to participate (whether to attend an event, join an organization or become a leader) the results are usually positive.

Where Do We Go From Here?

The information and ideas discussed at the session were incorporated with suggestions made earlier by ARV leaders. All of this information has been synthesized and will serve as a reference in helping the association’s leaders in setting ARV’s overall goals and specific strategies for the upcoming year and beyond.

ARV leaders will discuss this report and its recommendations through a series of conference calls. The draft report will also be made available to the ARV Membership to gain their comments. After a period of member review, the draft will be finalized and adopted by the Board of Directors.

Strategic Planning Timeline

The following timeline/objectives are offered based on this preliminary draft. These will be adjusted following initial feedback from ARV leaders and session participants.

By February 28, 2009 (First 60 Days)

- Board will review Long-Range Planning Report & Strategic Plan and set further long-term priorities; report to be posted for member feedback
- President should fill Board Secretary opening and all open/vacant committee chair assignments, and request goals for 2009 from all committee chairs.
- Leadership job descriptions created, reviewed and approved.
- All solicitations out for corporate and foundation support; where possible, solicitations will be personalized
- The association's website will be fully implemented and operational; members notified of all updates, changes and new features.
- Organization's 2009 activity schedule should be solidified and publicized to the membership.
- All association documentation and files (paper and electronic) should be sent to the office – so there is a Master Copy of each.

By June 30, 2009

- Full leadership review conducted (nominations, elections, etc.)
- Research and report on all possible sources of federal funding to Board; identify realistic sources and apply.
- Potential new Regional Directors and Deputy Directors identified – with core leadership contacts and interest level assessed; design and implement meaningful Regional operations
- Board and Membership Committee will review membership roster, identify geographic areas of strength and areas that need improvement; also identify who is missing, and from here a "hit list" will be established.
- Creation of recognition program that will show worthy rural practices and encourage membership/knowledge of the profession

- ❑ Thorough review of organization's marketing effort should be conducted – making sure that organizations is tapping into all possible revenue streams.
- ❑ Develop a fresh marketing approach – including a new membership brochure or recruitment piece for distribution.

By December 31, 2009

- ❑ First anniversary review of Strategic Plan conducted; adjusting plan to conditions and setting new goals.
- ❑ Full 2010 schedule of events solidified and distributed to members and potential members.
- ❑ Develop volunteer recruitment and retention plan.

Into 2010 & Beyond

In the upcoming months, the Board will further identify and set long-term goals that will be incorporated into the Strategic Plan.

Some of the long-term goals mentioned at the Annual Meeting and in its aftermath have been:

- Creation of a Rural Practice Day coordinated by ARV and co-sponsored by veterinary schools and possibly some corporations. Such an event can be rotated among the ARV Regions and held as a national event.
- Holding the ARV Annual Meeting as an independent event for its members and supporters – expanding to a conference format with continuing education, etc.

Final Note

Thank you to all who participated in the Long-Range Planning Session. The focus and energy shared that day are a testament to your desire and hope to make the Academy of Rural Veterinarians a stronger and meaningful organization advocating for, protecting, and advancing your noble profession.

Resources Distributed at Leadership Training Symposium

The following resources were distributed to the session participants, and should be used as reference material and guides for future planning:

Capitol Hill Management Services' "Organizational Governance Checklist"

"Turning Intangible Information into Tangible Member Benefits" Handout

"Benefits and Services Value" Handout

"25 Most Common Policies" Handout

Supporting Material

Lessons Learned About Veterinary Students and Rural Practice

by Steve McDonald, DVM

We of the Academy of Rural Veterinarians, back in 2003, before we even gave ourselves that name, were a group of mixed-animal practitioners who were alumni of the Beef Cattle Production Management School at Clay Center, NE. Six of us formed a mentoring group among ourselves, and we met several times a year to discuss practice-related issues as they related to us both individually and collectively. A frequent topic was the difficulty in finding new associates willing to come to our practices. Eventually, after debating among ourselves and bringing others in for advice and direction, we developed the thesis that today's students were reluctant to come to the country simply because they had the idea that rural practice was underpaid, poorly equipped, and overworked. We decided to visit a few schools and give lectures to as many students as would attend. We offered our practices and lifestyles as examples, which did not fit the rural practice mythology that is prevalent on so many campuses of our nation's vet schools. We went to 10 schools in 2003-2004, 20 in 2004-2005, and 16 in 2005-2006. We have been to all of them the past two years. What follows are my impressions of the students we have met, the schools that have hosted us, and the role practitioners must fill if rural practice is going to continue to be a part of veterinary medicine.

1. Many students strongly desire a career in a small town or rural community, and this applies to those interested in small animal as well as the larger species. Many have significant debt and fear they will not have the earning power to both service their debt and start their lives as full-fledged members of society. They will take jobs that pay them enough to satisfy their financial needs regardless of their hearts desire. Rural practitioners that cannot offer competitive salaries will not have their positions filled. This problem may necessitate fundamental re-thinking of a practice owner's philosophy of practice.

2. 60 to 80 per cent of new graduates are female. Get used to it. I cannot tell you why young men are not attracted to the profession, but the mythology of long hours and short pay certainly must play a part. (See #1) There are enough female rural practitioners out there now to convince me that they are able to overcome the physical challenges that they might encounter. Social and cultural issues, however, will continue to challenge them.
3. Their academic knowledge is extensive, they are technologically adept, but their clinical and surgical skills are much more variable. I had a senior student on an "equine track" that was much better with an ultra sound than I am, yet had never passed a nasogastric tube, and had very limited knowledge of equine pharmaceuticals. Her first employer will have to mentor her closely till she acquires her clinical skills. Another was on a "bovine track"; she could palpate as well as any one, yet had worlds of problems giving epidurals. Though they are initially not productive enough to earn their wages, a practitioner can look upon them as investments in a practice's future and nurture them through the difficult early months.
4. We begin to lose them by the third and fourth year. After years of hitting the books and being force-fed all the information and being subjected to endless testing, they lose sight of the fun and wonder this job offers, which is why we veterinarians should step up and offer summer jobs to these students to keep them rooted in the fundamentals of what it means to be a veterinarian. Many veterinarians report that the summer months are slow, and they cannot afford to hire students. Three years ago, we at ARV embarked on such an endeavor, and have funded well over 100 externships and summer jobs to students nation-wide. We require students to evaluate their experiences, and we can document very favorable results in terms of their perception of rural veterinary practice.
5. Academic interest in the problem of manning rural practices is extremely variable. We are warmly greeted and invited to see the dean in some schools, yet have been to others for four years and have yet to meet the first faculty member. They all, however, respond to pressure, and it falls upon us to apply it to our schools of choice. Leaving one segment of our society underserved is certainly not in a state-supported universities best interest.
6. The issue of retention is more complicated than recruitment in that retention is intertwined once again in each individual associate-employer relationship. Attraction is one obstacle, retention is another. Much is made of generational differences, but these can be overcome through communication and a willingness to adapt. This applies to all generations.

The message to practitioners is that the acquisition of their future new associate or their own replacement may require efforts to encourage and mentor these young people. Veterinarians may need to become more involved in actually educating students. This is a rewarding task, and it's better than locking the clinic door forever on retirement day.

Rural Veterinary Practice in North America: Why Veterinarians Enter and Leave Rural Veterinary Practice (Retention Study)

To assess potential factors influencing entrance into and exit from rural veterinary practice (RVP), responses (n=1,339) to an internet-based survey of veterinary practitioners and veterinary students were analyzed. General topical areas for the survey included when and why an interest in RVP developed, what factors may have influenced employment in RVP, reasons for leaving RVP, a personal definition of RVP, and potentially relevant demographic characteristics of respondents. Respondents with a rural background and livestock experience developed interest in RVP earlier than their urban counterparts with no livestock experience. Our results suggest that urban students seemed to decide on entering into RVP during their years of higher education, including veterinary school. Our results suggest that interest in RVP is influenced by background, experience with livestock, region, and interaction with key personnel such as veterinarian mentors and faculty and these factors should be considered when targeting efforts to enhance interest in RVP.

The main reasons for leaving rural veterinary practice were related to emergency duty, time-off, salary, practice atmosphere, and family concerns. There were differences in median scores assigned by respondents of the various generational groups and professional experience categories. We conclude that the shortage of rural veterinarians may be influenced by a lack of retention.

If you have any questions concerning what was covered in the session or this report, please feel free to contact the facilitator:

Brian Buff

Senior Association Management Director
Capitol Hill Management Services, Inc.
90 State Street, Suite 1009
Albany, N.Y. 12207-1710

Phone: (518) 463-8644, Ext. 125
Fax: (518) 463-8656
brian@caphill.com
www.caphill.com