

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SELF-FINANCING VETERINARY SERVICE FOR CAMELID OWNERS IN SOUTHERN PERU

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LABVETSUR was formed as the result of an aid agreement between the governments of Great Britain and Peru. Because of the difficulties of handling state laboratories in Peru, it was decided that the laboratory must eventually be self-financing. The British government had previously, in conjunction with the Peruvian Ministry of Agriculture, started a veterinary laboratory in the Department of Cajamarca in northern Peru. This laboratory was given over to the Ministry of Agriculture in 1985, but because of budgetary constraints the laboratory has not been able to function as was originally planned. Therefore, it was decided that future veterinary projects of the Overseas Development Administration (ODA), (now called the Department for International Development, DFID) in Peru should charge for their services and become self-financing.

The laboratory in Arequipa is managed by a committee consisting of FONGALSUR (the local farmers' cooperative), the Ministry of Agriculture and the Veterinary Association. This committee determines the policies of the laboratory and is also responsible for the fabric of the building.

In order to ensure that all farmers in southern Peru (there are 10,000 dairy farmers) participate in the financing of the laboratory, it was decided that the laboratory should take responsibility for laboratory testing for major diseases such as brucellosis, enzootic bovine leucosis, salmonellosis and infectious equine anaemia. This work ensures a continuing source of income for the laboratory. In 1988 LABVETSUR took over the diagnostic functions of the *Brucella* eradication scheme in southern Peru and to date this is providing 70% of the laboratory income. There is hope that by increasing this type of work, the laboratory will be able to survive.

The laboratory charges different fees to different types of farmers; ie farmers with large herds pay more for the same work than do small-scale dairy producers or campesinos in the sierra. In order to help the farming community, postmortem examinations are offered without charge and diagnostic work using imported reagents, on a cost-plus basis.

The laboratory offers the following services to its farming clients: postmortem examinations and histopathology, bacteriology, parasitology, serology, haematology and somatic cell counting in milk. Investigations of diseases on farms are undertaken and small-scale applied research projects are carried out. An important aspect of the laboratory work is training, and to this end a monthly report is produced of the diseases diagnosed; a detailed annual report is also published. Young Peruvians are being trained in the laboratory on an ongoing basis. During the four years of its existence, the laboratory has trained 26 people including young veterinarians, graduates in biology, pharmacology and animal husbandry.

Problems

1. Buildings

In 1990 the laboratory performed over 50,000 tests in a building of 800 sq ft. Because of the lack of space it is unable to increase the range of services to include biochemistry, toxicology and virology. None of the veterinary staff has offices, and even desk space is unavailable for them. LABVETSUR is actively seeking US \$250,000 to provide the necessary buildings to allow for the inclusion of disciplines that are presently lacking due to space considerations and to offer office accommodation to its staff.

2. Staff

In a laboratory that has to fund its own staff, it is difficult to obtain a sufficient complement from which to select future leaders. In state laboratories there is often a greater wealth of talent from which such leaders can be selected. The British government is providing money to enable the laboratory to contract more staff. DFID is also paying for staff training overseas, but the laboratory must continue to pay the salaries of staff during this training. This places a burden on the laboratory in that it cannot afford to employ extra staff. Furthermore, once the staff have been trained and returned to Arequipa, the next problem is how to keep them with the salaries that the laboratory is able to pay. For example, technical staff can receive up to US \$150 per month and veterinarians up to US \$200 per month. It should be pointed out that these salaries are in excess of those paid by the state, but they do not compete with the salaries of private organizations. The question arises, how does one increase the salaries of staff without increasing the cost to the farmers?

3. Field investigations

It is very difficult to see how a self-financing laboratory can undertake field investigations of diseases such as anaplasmosis, clostridial infections and Newcastle disease. This is particularly true for farmers in the Andes, who have little cash income. Once the diagnosis has been made the farmer is content and sees no reason why he should then pay for an investigation to determine the spread of the disease. Various methods of solving the problem of who should finance field investigations have been tried, including asking the agricultural industries to underwrite such investigations. However, thus far the problem remains unsolved.

From time to time new diseases occur in the area. For example, a febrile disease causing haemoglobinurea in cattle was investigated, but how does one pay for this research? Much work is also required to help improve the production and productivity of South American camelids (alpacas and llamas) in the sierra of southern Peru. How are such investigations to be financed?

4. Development of Field Services

The farmers in southern Peru are unaccustomed to receiving adequate veterinary services. In order to overcome this problem LABVETSUR has embarked on a policy of opening field offices with permanent attention and offering services such as disease control campaigns, clinical veterinary services and services of artificial insemination. These, too, have to be self-financing.

Conclusions

Despite the problems of massive inflation in Peru during the past few years, LABVETSUR is now completely funding its payroll and is purchasing most of its chemicals, media and reagents. The personnel of the laboratory are confident that LABVETSUR will continue to build on its strengths. However, the author would welcome hearing from any institutions that feel they can help in the development of this non profit-making laboratory.