

VETERINARY UNIVERSITY- THE ROAD AHEAD

A veterinarian is unique in that the ramifications of his job are two fold. On the one hand he is ameliorating suffering of animals and on the other hand he is contributing to the amelioration of human suffering by way of generating a sustaining livelihood. The social implications of the latter are many. It is imperative that we look within ourselves to see if we are rising up to the expectations of our noble profession and to give it a thought amidst our busy schedule. Being a veterinarian is something more than establishing one's own practice- this profession has an enormous role in helping others to help themselves. The Animal Husbandry Department has a pivotal role to play in this regard. In the past, something was lacking in our struggle to achieve this goal. Today, however the scenes have changed. We are witnessing a revolution in the department- a silent revolution permeating every nook and corner of the department and the initiative has come from a team that we are privileged to have. An young enthusiastic Director, a brilliant technocrat turned Secretary to government and a seasoned Minister. This trio has begun changes in the department, which will make it ready to face the new challenges especially in the context of globalization.

Coming to other developments in the animal husbandry sector one cannot ignore the issue of the Veterinary University, which is on the verge of becoming reality. The long awaited decision of the government to establish a veterinary university has come in the budget and along with it are challenges before the veterinary fraternity to rise up to the occasion. The decision to establish a University points to the fact that both planners and the political administration of the state have understood and acknowledged the importance of this sector and its contribution to society. Many people have been involved actively in the pursuit of this goal. Our predecessors in the profession, both teachers and doctors in the field, had set examples which have contributed to the development of this sector. In recent times, the concerted and co-ordinated efforts of the Director (AH), Secretary to government (AH) and the Minister (AH), Veterinary associations,

and the veterinary institutions of higher learning in the state have contributed in bringing to the notice of the government the need for a Veterinary University.

When we contemplate the initiation of the University we have many models before us to emulate, TANUVAS being one. However, the question before us is should we step into their shoes and follow their footsteps or should we be more adventurous and strive for something more suited to us but filled with a little bit of risk and uncertainty? The time has come to ponder over these and many more facts and to assess what is the role of such a university in Kerala society today.

From a farmer's point of view what are the expectations of these comrades in the field, the actual beneficiaries of such an initiative. Do they expect the University to be a credible agency supplying all inputs both technical and physical required in their AH ventures? Hitherto we have concentrated more on technical inputs. What about physical inputs? Can the University meet the public's demand for University branded livestock?

An emerging new segment of population who are also stakeholders in this venture are the companion animal owners. Figures on the National level indicate that apart from Japan, India has the fastest growing level of pet ownership at up to 26 percent a year during the 1990s. The country has 12 million dog owners, a figure expected to double by 2008. It is important to think about what their expectations from the university would be.

From the public health point of view, there is an immense dearth of quality livestock products in the state markets especially meat and milk. The University could have an immense role in facilitating the promotion of such products and establishing standards for such products. Besides the above points, it is imperative that researchers recognize the need for developing areas like bioinformatics, organic animal husbandry, ethnoveterinary medicine, evolving suitable beef breeds for Kerala and initiating steps to promote such ventures at

the farmer level. It is a known fact that there exists a huge demand for quality beef and other meats in Kerala. The University should be able to address this issue in such a manner that revenue and employment is generated in the state.

From a researcher's point of view, the setting of a Veterinary University would offer a great deal of autonomy and open up avenues for greater accessibility of funds. Let us hope that this will be translated to the lower levels of the hierarchy of the animal husbandry community.

The culmination of our search for autonomy would be the setting up of Indian Council for Veterinary Research on the lines of other national regulatory bodies. On the national scene the disparity in allocation for agriculture and animal husbandry is glaring. Though the annual out put value of food grains sector is estimated to be about Rs 120 000 crores, it gets massive support from the government to the tune of Rs 20 000 crores by way of subsidies for various inputs. In contrast, the animal husbandry sector which is estimated to have an asset value and estimated output market value of Rs 80 000 crores is supported by a meager 100 crores from the government. It is important that our efforts are now directed at the national level as well to focus attention on these issues and demand our due share.

Coming back to Kerala and the University, it is imperative that we ensure that a liaison between this institution of higher learning and research and other sister agencies in the animal husbandry sector such as the AHD, KLDB etc exists. The University could provide suitable inputs to all parts of the state based on the unique topography and climate of that particular area through the vast network of institutions under the Animal Husbandry Department. Establishment of grass root Animal Husbandry Vigyan Kendras (AHVK) would help to hasten technology transfer besides offering a helping hand to an over burdened vet.

To conclude on an optimistic note, let us hope that the Veterinary University will herald a new era in the history books of this sector by increasing its contribution to the state economy and her people.

Dr. Shibu Simon, Editor

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