

Newsletter from Uganda - August 2003

Pete Gray MRCVS worked as a Local Government Veterinary Officer in Western Uganda during 2003 and 2004.

I am working for Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) as a Veterinary Officer for Local Government in Kibaale district, Western Uganda. The district is underdeveloped with poor road infrastructure, low levels of education, poor sanitation and no grid electricity. Farming is typically subsistence only with households having few animals.

The indigenous Banyoro tribe are not traditional cattle keepers and lack basic knowledge on nutrition, deworming and acaricide usage. Most production losses come from the tick borne diseases – East coast fever mostly with also Babesiosis and Anaplasmosis as well as Trypanosomiasis. Improved genetics have become available with the local long horned Ankole cattle being crossed with Friesian. Crossbreeds are much more susceptible to the above tick borne diseases and only the better farmers can keep them successfully.



Peter Gray MRCVS vaccinates cattle in the Kibaale district of Western Uganda

Following the successful Rinderpest vaccination program (PARC- Pan African Rinderpest Campaign) the next disease on the list of control and eradication is Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia (CBPP). The threat in the District is great as we share our border with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and with the ongoing conflict in that region many displaced persons are seeking refuge elsewhere bringing with them their animals. It is a difficult exercise to vaccinate with the farms being so small and scattered. Mobilisation is through the local community radio station as telephone network is very poor, farmers are advised to work together to build a communal crush in a central location eg. near a school so that all surrounding animals can be vaccinated on the same day. The strength and design of the crush is often very poor, using local materials such as bamboo tied together with banana leaves and being too wide allowing animals to turn can make the job frustrating. With up to 5% of animals suffering necrosis of the tail at the injection site poor owner compliance has also been a problem. The program is compulsory and has given me a good opportunity to meet farmers and discuss other problem areas such as nutrition, worm and tick control. Many farms I go to have not seen a veterinarian since the last vaccination program 5 years ago.



Recent outbreaks of African Swine Fever have reduced levels of swine in the District. With pigs being the most affordable source of animal protein, strategies to control and prevent further outbreaks are important. This is difficult however with the open, free roaming system of keeping pigs here. Milk production is still very low and with no means of storage, marketing is difficult. The local people have not been educated on the importance of animal protein in the diet, which locally consists of the staple foods matooke (steamed banana), maize meal and beans.

The Government has launched a donor funded program to privatize the Agricultural sector. The 25 year program called National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) aims to modernize Agriculture by empowering subsistence farmers to access privately delivered agricultural advice. This will effectively force extension workers including Agriculture, Veterinary and Fisheries to shift to the private sector.

The district faces a severe shortage of qualified personnel in many departments including Veterinary. Most new graduates are choosing to stay in the capital city Kampala and work in pharmaceutical shops or continue on with further education.

Although being employed by the Government most of the work that I do is as a private practitioner. I have a motorcycle on which I carry a box of essential drugs and spend most of the day providing direct treatment services to those farmers that contact me. I also offer artificial insemination services, carrying a small flask of liquid Nitrogen in a rucksack on my back. I give a weekly program on the radio about livestock issues. This gives me a good chance to comment about areas that I feel need to be improved as well as routine advice for farmers. The local farmers have responded enthusiastically to my services. Having been disappointed by the local staff they appreciate my honesty, time-keeping and professional skill, some of which I believe has rubbed off onto my colleagues who have been watching closely what I do.



The local Runyoro-Rutoro language has proved difficult to learn. I have had a list of basic questions translated – things like how long has the cow been sick? Is it eating? Have you given medicine for worms? The aim is to get a yes/no response however as Africans love to talk I find that the response is often very lengthy much of which I cannot understand.

Peter Gray