

Stimulating an interest in rural veterinary practice by innovative hands-on challenges for pre-clinical students

Holm, D.E.¹; Heise, A.¹ and Annandale, C.H.¹

¹Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Pretoria, Onderstepoort, South Africa

ONDERSTEPPOORT
FEEDLOT CHALLENGE



A perception exists that rural veterinary services are under threat due to a decrease in young veterinarians entering this career. Career choice can be influenced by several factors from student background to first employment. The Onderstepoort Feedlot, artificial insemination (AI) and pregnancy diagnosis (PD) Challenges are initiatives to stimulate interest in rural veterinary practice, improve the morale of students through rewarding teamwork and to develop general skills such as leadership, communication, business- and management skills.

For the Feedlot and AI Challenges, students are divided into competing groups having to master tasks required to plan and run a beef feedlot (from purchasing calves to selling carcasses) or a synchronised AI program in a group of cows (from cow selection to pregnancy diagnosis). Groups are evaluated on planning and successful execution of procedures, evidence shown of experience gained, and scientific reporting.

The PD Challenge is a competition between individual students to determine accuracy of PD skills after a single training session, and consists of two rounds to determine the overall winner. PD accuracy is measured in cows with pre-determined pregnancy status.

Student participation and innovation are incentivised by support from commercial industry partners and public prize giving ceremonies. Social media platforms are used to facilitate communication, to track ongoing performance, for students to share and express their learning experiences and to market the Challenges to stake holders. Student feedback is overwhelmingly positive and a retrospective study showed that the Challenges can influence career choice during the forming years.

