Regulation Nation: Digital Tools to Stay Current and Ensure Compliance with Regulations Governing Food Animals

An ever-increasing amount of government regulations leads savvy food animal veterinarians and producers to seek high-tech solutions to stay current and ensure compliance.

For Pipestone Animal Clinic in Pipestone, Minnesota, and Independence, Iowa, compliance with the Animal Disease Traceability Rule means tracking the health history and managing health certificates for millions of pigs. In addition to the usual health certificates necessary to cross state lines, Iowa requires a health certificate any time animals are moved within the state. Additionally, more animals than ever are being moved farther and farther across the nation and globally. Keeping up with current regulations regarding animal movement and satisfying all requirements for each state and country might seem like a daunting task—and a lot of paperwork. However, innovative digital solutions are streamlining the process, making compliance with regulations easier and faster than ever.

Electronic tools streamline compliance
Pipestone's team of veterinarians and support staff works proactively to avert herd health problems and promote the success of their clients though health programs, production recordkeeping, monthly assessments, and marketing education. The clinic relies heavily on electronic solutions to document detailed health histories as well as navigate regulations and manage health certificates.

Janice VanRoekel, who works in Pipestone's information bureau, shares her thoughts on minimizing the burden of regulations with the help of electronic solutions: "The technology helps us serve more clients because we're able to do so many more health certificates, we can store regulations in the database, and we can reduce wait time because we don't have to send forms though the mail."

One tool the clinic uses is GlobalVetLINK, a software application that helps producers and animal health professionals create, access, and monitor animal movement records quickly and efficiently via an easy-to-use web portal. The company's HealthLINK product allows for creation of electronic Certificates of Veterinary Inspection (eCVIs). These eCVIs are accepted in all 50 states as official health documentation, and they're available in real-time to state animal health authorities in both the origin and destination states.

Save time, eliminate hardcopy storage
This electronic system is a far cry from the old paper system, which included handwritten forms sent via snail mail and fax with as many as five copies for each animal each time it was moved. "We would probably have to hire another person just to keep up with the paperwork," speculates VanRoekel. The ADT rule requires veterinarians to send copies to both origin and destination states within seven calendar days of creation. Additionally, the ADT rule states that veterinarians must retain a copy of the health certificate for two to five years, depending on the type of animal. GlobalVetLINK offers online storage and easy retrieval to comply with this aspect of the regulation, eliminating the need for hardcopy filing and storage.

The electronic system results in significant time savings because key information is retained. "I can't count how many times I had to write 'No PRV vaccination' by hand on a health form before we had the electronic system," explains VanRoekel. The software's intuitive data entry and selection drastically reduce the need to re-enter owner data. An additional benefit is that all data entered is searchable in the event of a trace back situation.

Smart software for accurate data
Another critical technological tool employed by Pipestone is Porcitec, a swine management program that allows veterinarians to track the health history of an animal from birth. It also includes a range of options for producers to generate breeding reports, monitor growth performance, manage feed rations, and oversee financial data. This platform has the ability to receive data directly from producers via handheld computers used in barns. Producers and veterinarians are then able to access data any time from an online dashboard.

Porcitec streamlines data entry by allowing batch entries, saving hours of personnel time compared to manually inputting information. The software's Fast Entry form provides a single screen for adding information, which can be performed directly from the keyboard without the need for a mouse or navigating multiple windows.

Serve more clients with fewer personnel
VanRoekel suspects that the efficiencies gained through these innovative technologies allow Pipeline to serve more customers without having to hire additional employees. "GlobalVetLINK offers you the chance to do more health papers than you could have done by hand," says VanRoekel. "When I first started, I thought a million swine was a lot. Now, that's nothing!"

In addition to the time and related cost savings, the electronic systems are more accurate. An eCVI contains multiple ways to identify an animal, including premises (PINs) and location IDs (LIDs) as well as a digital photo of each animal to ensure the health information matches directly to the identification of an animal. Furthermore, electronic forms remove the guesswork of deciphering handwriting. Because Porcitec is accessible at the barn level, it allows for precise recording of life events.

VanRoekel hopes that in the future Porcitec and GlobalVetLINK will become integrated to further streamline operations and facilitate compliance with regulations. Currently GlobalVetLINK does integrate with several widely used practice management software systems. GVL continues to seek integration opportunities as more digital solutions become available.

VanRoekel sees another opportunity for digital innovation when it comes to moving swine internationally. "They're still using ancient technology," she jokes, stating that some government forms must be printed on a dot-matrix printer and then mailed to the appropriate governing body. VanRoekel relies on the USDA APHIS website to determine restrictions or necessary vaccinations for each country receiving animals. An electronic system would drastically streamline this process.

How you can keep current on changing regulations
To keep current on government regulations concerning food animals, VanRoekel makes a habit of calling Iowa's state veterinarian's office about every three months. As Pipestone expands its reach, she must learn the regulations of more and more states. "Colorado, for example, requires documentation that the swine have not been feed any garbage," explains VanRoekel. "Most states want to know there has been no PRV vaccine given to the animals, and many want to know about semen health. This all goes in the database. Once a regulation is in the computer it stays there for future reference."

For states outside of Iowa, VanRoekel relies on USDA websites or simply calls the state veterinarian's office where the swine are headed. "They're very helpful when you call," she says. "If they don't know the answer to your question, they will find someone who does." The USDA is often proactive about

spreading the word on new regulations. "If something has changed or there are new policies, they usually notify us," states VanRoekel.

Animal disease traceability is just one regulation made less burdensome by electronic solutions. By providing ready access to accurate information, software platforms like GlobalVetLINK and Porcitec can also help producers and veterinarians maintain compliance with regulations and recommendations concerning judicious use of antibiotics and variable feed directives. For more information on current government regulations, call your state veterinarian's office, visit the state- or country-specific USDA webpage, or engage the services of a vendor like GlobalVetLINK, who can help you manage compliance automatically.