

Veterinary Act changes worry Sask. MLA

By Michael Raine
Saskatoon newsroom

A member of the Saskatchewan legislature feels changes to a provincial bill that regulates the veterinary profession threatens producers' rights to treat their livestock and could drive

out animal health practitioners who aren't vets.

When Bill 28 came before the provincial legislature last fall, it opened up the Veterinary Act for amendments.

Yogi Huyghebaert, Saskatchewan Party MLA for Wood River, criticized

the proposed amendments. He questioned some provisions of the new act that allow the Saskatchewan Veterinary Medical Association to govern who may practise aspects of veterinary medicine in the province.

The bill has several housekeeping-type changes along with those the MLA is concerned about. It was tabled to the current session of the legislature.

"It could be interpreted that the bill and the act gives the SVMA the right to keep veterinary dentists from practising their trade or farmers from pregnancy checking their animals," Huyghebaert said.

Dentistry in all animals has been considered part of the professional practice of veterinary medicine and is in the present Saskatchewan act. Alberta is the only Canadian province that does not include dentistry as a part of a veterinarian's practice.

SVMA registrar Curt Hagele said despite the existence of an American program that trains people to perform treatments on horses in many North American jurisdictions, these people would be considered to be practising without a licence. The four training programs for veterinary dentists specify that their graduates should work with a licensed veterinarian, not solo as some have been in Prairies.

"We have recently had to bring charges against someone for this," Hagele said of a private prosecution

to go ahead this summer.

"The profession isn't telling producers they can't treat their own animals, but we are saying that unlicensed people with the training of a veterinarian shouldn't be hanging out a shingle to service livestock for a fee," said Hagele.

Huyghebaert said the changes before the legislature might be interpreted as preventing producers from pregnancy checking or castrating calves, and that the act should allow the American-trained veterinary dentists to practise in Saskatchewan. He said the lone practitioner in Saskatchewan has recently moved to Alberta.

"We're restricting business opportunities and driving people out of the province with these sorts of rules," the MLA said.

"(The amendments to the act) would also prevent producers from castrating their horses. They would have to pay a vet for that," he said.

Hagele said the proposed changes in Bill 28 are not designed to prevent producers from performing the day-to-day work of operating a farm, but would limit a few techniques such as the castration of a horse.

"That is something that needs to be done using something to mitigate pain and that means restricted drugs ... equine dental procedures (teeth float-

ing) is another area that often requires medications, restricted drugs that require a licence to administer."

The SVMA approached the province with the amendments along with improved definitions to the act for disciplining and levying fines against those who breach professional or legal statutes. Huyghebaert said he is in favour of the housekeeping changes and the expanded ability of the SVMA to enforce standards within its membership.

Amendments will crack down on unlicensed people providing services for a fee.

"I just don't want to see them having control over what producers do."

The MLA included caesarian sections and some other types of surgery in his assessment of procedures that producers should be allowed to perform on their own animals.

Hagele said the proposals that deal with surgery and dentistry were debated within the profession.

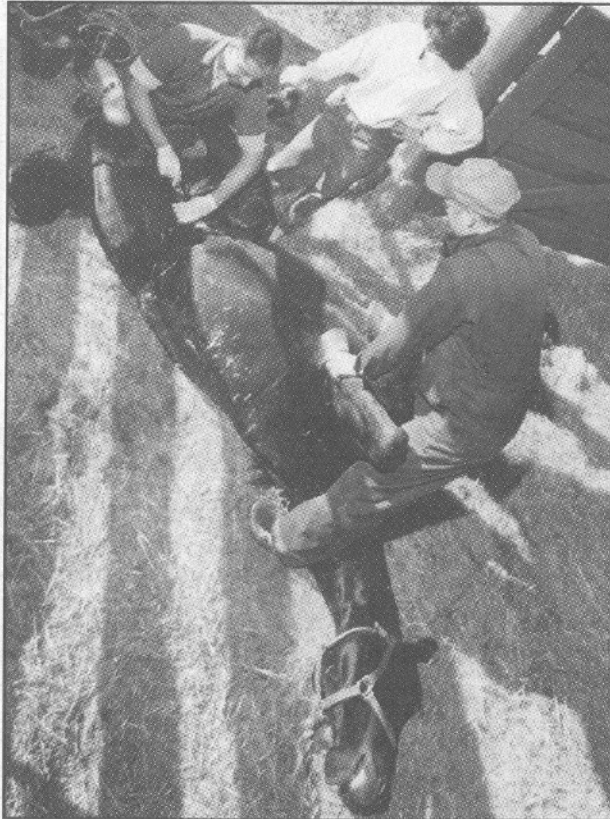
"We reasoned that the requisite knowledge of anatomy, pharmacology, physiology and technique are required to perform these procedures safely and keep the welfare of the animal in mind," he said.

"Do we want to give animal rights groups ammunition in their fights against animal agriculture? Good rules, well enforced, are an argument that will stand up to public scrutiny and these are good rules," he said.

Provincial agriculture minister Mark Wartman said before the controversial Bill 28 amendments return to the leg-

Proposed changes to Saskatchewan's Veterinary Act have raised concerns that they may limit producer control.

(WP photo by Michael Raine)



the Saskatchewan Stock Growers, an equine ranching association and Farm Animal Care Saskatchewan will further analyze the issue.

"They are discussing it right now and will provide some direction," Wartman said. "Issues about who may perform equine castration, dentistry and pregnancy checking are implicit in the act already. It's veterinarians. Producers can perform many of these on their own animals and in some cases breed and producer associations and others also define what producers can and can't do."

"The proposed changes to the act are not and never (were) designed to keep a farmer from preg-checking his animals or from having his neighbour do it," he said. "The legislation can go forward without the controversial elements, but it would be best if the stakeholder groups could agree on the proposed changes and have them included in the act."

The Saskatchewan Stock Growers and the equine ranching association say vets are not well practised at dentistry and as a result aren't as good as the specialist lay practitioners.

The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities passed a resolution at its convention in Regina earlier this month to exempt equine castration and dentistry from the act.

"The current proposed amendments seem to affect only the equine industry and may not cause serious disaster for many producers yet. However, once big brother's foot is in the door, the cattle industry, pork industry, etc., will be affected," the RMs said.

Hagele said when the SVMA charges a layperson with performing veterinary medicine without a licence, it is a result of a complaint by a farmer or owner that someone has injured their animal.