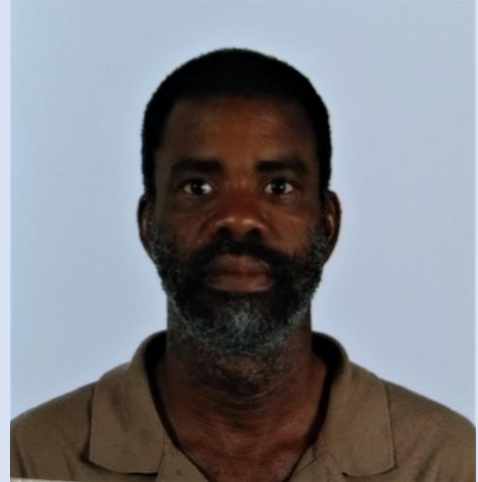


Sustainable Agriculture

Dr. Robert Logan

Credit is usually given to the veterinary and other allied professions for the advances in conventional agriculture that have resulted in abundant and cheap food with great assurances for food safety and freedom from zoonotic diseases. However, attempts to take this model of agriculture to the developing world where risk averse and poorly educated farmers have access only to marginal and



sub-marginal lands have exposed the worst deficiencies of conventional farming - notably the degradation of soil and water resources, antimicrobial resistance and disintegration of rural communities. Not surprisingly there have been loud voices calling for farmers to adopt “sustainable agriculture”.

What exactly is Sustainable Agriculture? Sustainability in general speaks to



providing for the present without compromising the capacity to provide for the future. A common vision for sustainable agriculture is about achieving optimum balance between environmental soundness, social equity and economic

viability. In practice, sustainable farming systems recognize that natural ecosystems are extremely resilient so farming systems that mimic them are likely to be sustainable. However it is important to note that the mainstream vision of sustainable agriculture is not about reverting to the practices of two centuries ago characterized by poor yields and poverty for farmers.

How should we go about making the transition to sustainable agriculture? Conventional agriculture is guided by Good Agricultural Practices which focus on safe food, animal welfare, environmental protection and security for people. For sustainable agriculture to be successful, productivity, risk reduction, environment preservation, financial viability and social acceptability are also important. These must also be covered directly by Good Agricultural Practices.



What leadership role should vets play in transitioning to sustainable agriculture? Providing leadership to the effort for resource-poor farmers eking out a living in the fragile agro-ecological systems to transition to sustainable agriculture will indeed be

challenging. Somehow Good Agricultural Practices will have to be redefined to address productivity, financial viability and social acceptability in a more direct way. It will require a cadre of professionals with the requisite site-specific scientific and technological knowledge and skills. It will also require that these professionals must have the drive and the commitment to consistently advocate for the new paradigm.

For the veterinary profession, no ideological shift is necessary as vets, through the One Health approach, have successfully provided effective leadership in the multi-disciplinary effort to bring sustainable health benefits to animals, humans and the ecosystems they occupy.

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