Dosing farm animals

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E\text{very year, many valuable animals are lost through illnesses which could have been prevented, or checked in the early stages, by the timely administration of suitable medicines. It is unfortunate that far too many stockowners, either through lack of knowledge or other causes, tend to postpone the dosing until it is too late for the drugs to be fully effective.}

Most animals, particularly those which frequent handling has rendered reasonably docile, can be dosed easily by methods which have been in vogue for many years. Even unbroken stock can usually be dosed by these methods plus some simple form of restraint such as a suitable crush or ball, hobbles, sidelines, etc.

For the qualified veterinary surgeon, stock dosing is a fairly simple matter, for he has access to drugs and equipment not usually available to the layman, but as many of our flocks and herds are depastured in areas where professional assistance is not readily obtainable it is hoped that these notes will assist the stockowner compelled to adopt “do-it-yourself” methods.

**SHEEP**

Most sheepowners are familiar with the hypodermic syringe, used principally for administering vaccines and anti-toxins. A fairly wide range of drugs may now be given by hypodermic injection but these are largely restricted to veterinarians.

Many sheep medicines can be given in the form of drenches, and several types of syringes and drenching-guns are now available to facilitate the operation. The most popular models are those which automatically eject a measured dose and refill ready for the next sheep.

When using these drenching guns, care must be taken not to injure the sensitive membranes of the sheep’s mouth and throat. This occurs most frequently if the nozzle of the gun becomes damaged and is left with a rough surface.

In some popular automatic drenching guns the dose is discharged through a plastic tube which extends into the oesophagus or gullet of the sheep. This is a useful feature in minimising staining of the wool when phenothiazine worm drenches are used.

Similar automatic guns are available for administering capsules and pellets, such as the “cobalt bullets” recently introduced by C.S.I.R.O. workers.

Individual sheep may be drenched from a bottle, or a powdered medicine may be given as an electuary—mixed with treacle or molasses and smeared on the back part of the tongue by means of a smooth flat piece of wood. Electuaries may be used for dosing most types of livestock.

**HORSES**

For drenching horses, a specially-made drenching-bit is a good investment. This is a length of hollow tube closed at one end which fits into the mouth like an ordinary bit and is held in position by a leather headstall passing over the horse’s head. A small funnel fits into the open end of the tube, and liquid poured into the funnel finds its way into the horse’s mouth through one or more holes in the bit.

A metal nose-piece, shaped like an inverted U, carries a loop or eye so that a cord can be passed through it and over a rafter to hold the head up.

To drench a horse, the animal should preferably be backed into a stall, the head raised and the drench given a little at a time.
Don't haul the horse's head up until the nose is pointing skyward. The head should never pass the horizontal position. 

Don't pinch or punch the throat in an endeavour to make the horse swallow. 

Don't tie the head up; pass the cord loosely over a hook or rafter so that if the horse attempts to cough, its head can be lowered immediately. 

Don't rush. Give the drench in small quantities and give the horse time to swallow. Medicines which "go the wrong way" and finish in the lungs can lead to pneumonia.

Don't try to drench through the nostril. Anything entering the nostril is likely to go direct into the lungs.

Where a drenching bit is not available, it is a simple matter to drench with a bottle. Special metal drenching-bottles were commonly used, but a glass bottle is quite satisfactory if reasonable care is taken.

Introduce the neck of the bottle into the corner of the horse's mouth between the cheek and the teeth. Pour in a little of the liquid and give the horse time to swallow it before giving any more. A hand under the lower jaw will keep the head up if the horse is a quiet type. Failing this, use a strong halter and pass a rope through the nose-band and over a beam.

**Balling a Horse.**

Many horse medicines are given in the form of "physic balls." These are gelatine capsules, oval or cylindrical in shape, containing drugs in powdered form. The ball is swallowed whole and on reaching the stomach, the gelatine dissolves, releasing the dose.

The "balling pistol" shown in the illustration is a handy aid to administering a ball, and was a common article of stable equipment in the days of horse-teams. The ball fits into the cup and is ejected by pressure on the end of the plunger which slides freely inside the barrel. In giving the ball, it was usual to slip the left hand into the horse's mouth, grasp the tongue from above and then turn the hand so that the thumb was pointing upward and pressing against the roof of the mouth to keep it open. The barrel of the balling pistol was then pushed well in towards the root of the tongue, the ball ejected and the horse's tongue released.

A good substitute for a balling pistol is a length of suitably-sized hose with a piece of cane or dowel-stick to serve as the plunger.

Where a mouth-gag is available, it is a simple matter to give the ball by hand as with the gag in position, the ball may be pushed well to the back of the tongue where the horse can swallow it easily.

Giving a ball without any special equipment is a task which looks simple when
performed by an expert but calls for considerable skill and perfect timing.

The tongue is grasped as described earlier and the horse’s mouth held open. With the ball held in the tips of the first, second and third fingers, the right hand is thrust quickly towards the root of the tongue, the ball pushed well back towards the gullet and the tongue released.

Unless the ball is placed correctly, the horse usually spits it out again. Subsequent attempts with the horse becoming increasingly hard to control and the ball becoming more and more slippery are seldom successful.

**CATTLE**

Dosing cattle usually requires some form of restraint such as bails and/or crushes. Occasionally, the medicines may be given in the form of electuaries—mixed with treacle and smeared on the tongue—but in most cases a drench is necessary.

Quiet dairy cattle may usually be drenched easily if two people are available. One person grasps the horns and raises the head slightly. The other handles the bottle, allowing a portion of the drench to run into the mouth. A thumb and forefinger in the nostrils or the use of nose-grips are sometimes helpful. Polled cattle should be haltered for easy drenching.

Cattle seldom spit out a drench once it is in the mouth and it is a simple matter to give the drench in small doses of a quarter of a pint at a time. Once the dose has gone into the mouth, the cow’s head may be released to facilitate swallowing.

**PIGS**

Drenching pigs generally entails a strenuous course of catch-as-catch-can wrestling accompanied by a chorus of ear-torturing squeals so it is fortunate that most pig medicines can be given in the feeding-troughs, mixed with some sloppy food.

If the animals are starved for about 24 hours they will usually gulp down even unpleasantly-flavoured drugs in milk or sloppy pollard mixtures.

The time-honoured method of drenching a large pig by using an old boot with a hole in the toes is quite satisfactory. Pass a slip-knot round the top jaw behind the tusks and pass the end of the rope over a rail so the head is slightly raised. Push the toe of the boot into the pig’s mouth and pour the medicine slowly into the boot as he chews at it. An assistant straddling the pig and holding the ears will help to keep him in the required position.

An improvement on the boot is a piece of wood about 18 in. long and two to three inches in diameter with the ends shaped into handles. A hole, big enough to take the neck of a bottle, is drilled through the centre.
The assistant straddles the pig holding the piece of wood in the animal's mouth like a bit. The bottle neck is placed in the hole and the drench given slowly.

**DOGS AND CATS**

The dosing of dogs and cats often presents some problems. Pills may be given in pieces of meat and powders can be mixed into butter or dripping—always provided that the animal is not so sick that its appetite is impaired.

Don't open a dog's mouth to give him a liquid medicine. Have the medicine in a small bottle such as is used for aspirin tablets. Pass one finger into the corner of his mouth and press the cheek outward to form a pocket into which the liquid can be poured. This can be done even when the dog is wearing a muzzle—which is always advisable when dosing a vicious animal. Keep the head slightly raised to encourage swallowing.

Cats should be rolled in a cloth or bag to prevent their claws from coming into action and can then be compelled to swallow small tablets or liquid medicines by the following method.

Place the hand at the back of the cat's head so that the head fits into the U formed by the thumb and forefinger—or the thumb and middle finger. Press the cat's cheeks inward so that the animal opens its mouth and cannot close its jaws without biting its cheeks. A tablet placed on the cat's tongue can now be poked to the back of the throat with the little finger of the other hand, or a small quantity of liquid can be introduced by means of a teaspoon, eye-dropper or small bottle.
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