

Value and Opportunity: The Perfect Match at Iowa State University

By McKenzie Beals Weber



Iowa State University has many qualities and offers unique opportunities that make it my ideal veterinary school. There is an abundance of opportunities to learn from the very best in every field of veterinary medicine at ISU. With my focus in food animal medicine, I value the distinguished and experienced food animal professors who teach our courses and numerous electives to prepare us for a successful future in the industry. An extensive variety of electives are offered in every species of food animal, including beef, dairy, swine, small ruminant, and poultry. These elective courses provide a deeper examination of the topics beyond the content provided in our required curriculum. We become proficient in production-based situations through these courses, such as data informatics and analysis, diet formulation, heifer development, and specific skills such as embryo transfer, among others. Iowa State University also provides multiple food animal rotations that are not available or are very limited in other programs. These opportunities include Bovine Embryo Transfer and first access to the rotations at the Great Plains Veterinary Education Center in Clay Center, Nebraska and the Swine Medicine Education Center in Audubon, Iowa. The proximity of many farms

and ranches to Ames, Iowa provides the cases that brand our program with the highest food animal case load of all U.S. veterinary schools. This familiarity between producers and the veterinary school offers students unparalleled access to a wide variety of clinical cases during fourth-year rotations to enhance our skills.

Iowa State University is also at the forefront in global impact because of research that influences animal health, human health, and food safety. Such state-of-the-art research leads to advances in the veterinary industry, livestock and food production, and human health. This research ensures that students develop a broader understanding of the world-wide importance of veterinary medicine and its significance to global animal and human health.

Iowa State University is also the one of the most affordable veterinary programs in the United States for both in-state (#5/23) and out-of-state (#10/30) students. ISU also has a 2+2 cooperative program with Nebraska. I'm happy to say that I was one of the 28 Nebraska residents annually admitted into the 2+2 program who receive in-state tuition at ISU. Veterinary student debt is on the rise with the average veterinarian graduating with over \$150,000 in debt. Decreasing debt through affordable veterinary tuition and availability of scholarships at Iowa State University allows student to repay their loans earlier and opens opportunities for future practice ownership.

While Iowa State University tops many of my education priority lists, there is one thing that I believe could be improved. According to the AVMA, in 2018, 75% of practicing veterinarians worked in companion animal exclusive or companion animal predominant private practices. In comparison, only 16% of clinical practitioners worked in food animal or mixed animal practices. Contrasting the national statistics of veterinary careers, Iowa State University has over two-thirds of veterinary students tracking in food animal or mixed animal options. Even with the high interest in food animal medicine, the proportion of required coursework is skewed towards companion animal medicine. In our third-year curriculum, all students take seven credit hours of small animal medicine and three credit hours of small animal surgery. In contrast, these students have three credit hours of production animal medicine, three credit hours of infectious diseases and preventative medicine of large animals, and no production animal surgery course. Iowa State University veterinary students are required to complete four credit hours of electives to graduate. Food animal focused students usually take many more than four credit hours to fulfill their needs for a well-rounded and thorough food animal and production medicine education. For example, I will complete a total of nineteen credit hours of electives during my veterinary education. In addition to an already heavy course load, taking such an abundance of electives can take away students' availability to study the required coursework. It can be a challenge to balance so many credit hours and maintain an adequate GPA. All the while, small animal tracking students can focus on fewer courses because so many of the courses they need to be proficient are included within the required curriculum.

Food animal medicine is no less important than companion animal medicine, it is simply different. Livestock are often managed in large groups and are destined for food, but the need to prevent and treat disease, maintain animal welfare, and support the relationship between humans and livestock still exists as it does



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with companion animals. Additionally, food animal veterinarians have a global impact on food security, safety, and sustainability of the protein sources that enter our food chain and feed our growing world's population while also balancing the need to keep our producers' operations productive and profitable. As more of our population is disconnected from agriculture, and falsehoods spread quickly online, there is an increased need for individuals who know and understand food production to be able to serve as a voice for agriculture. As respected leaders in our communities, veterinarians are in a position to tell the story of production animal agriculture.

Through thoughtful evaluation of veterinary curriculums, a more balanced program of companion animal and food animal courses can be created to better reflect the reality of what each field requires, as well as what every veterinarian must know. I believe all veterinary students should receive a balanced education of both food animal and companion animal medicine to support our future careers, provide an understanding of the veterinarian's role in food production and safety, and prepare us for our civic duty as the animal experts within our communities.

My education at Iowa State University has been extraordinary. I value the quality of training, the opportunities and encouragement to practice, grow, and achieve my goals, and the affordability of this top-rated education. I also value this opportunity to reflect upon my education and to express my ideas for improving the veterinary education at ISU and other U.S. veterinary schools.