



Biography:

Dr. Colin Palmer is an Associate Professor of Theriogenology (Animal Reproduction) at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine. Originally from Nova Scotia, Dr. Palmer worked in mixed practices in Ontario and British Columbia and has owned/operated a practice in Saskatchewan. Dr. Palmer along with his wife Kim and children Lauren, Emily and Carter run a herd of purebred Red Angus cattle under the KC Cattle Co. name.

Until an effective Covid-19 vaccine is developed, it looks like we will be living this new reality for at least the next several months. Recently, I attended my first virtual conference including an annual general meeting that I chaired. Just three months ago we planned to hold our typical 2½ day conference including an awards dinner, business meetings and a pre-conference symposium in a major hotel in downtown Pittsburgh. As the pandemic evolved, including the still in-place Canada-US border closure, we realized that we had two choices ... cancel or attempt our first virtual meeting. We chose virtual and we pulled it off! Sure, there were a few glitches and lots of new things to learn; however, my American colleagues adopted a slogan used by the US Marine Corps – “improvise, adapt and overcome”. As a Canadian, I chose a more simplified personal slogan – “Can Do”. Whatever personal motivator one chooses, I think it is imperative that we continue to move forward. Bringing new knowledge to our businesses is key to adapting our businesses to an ever changing world.

All, or nearly all, of our annual Ag-oriented trade shows, fairs, and exhibitions have been cancelled for 2020. Several years ago (2011), I wrote an article called Continuing Education for Farmers and Ranchers which I opened with: “If you never get off the farm you are never going to learn anything!” In my article, I extolled the value of physically attending conferences and shows because of the opportunity to chat with industry representatives and friends thereby, building excitement and enthusiasm that could be brought back to your own business. I also said that learning new things from a book or online is just not as exciting as learning new things from your colleagues. By and large, I still believe what I said; I look forward to things getting back to the way they were!

What should we do? How can we see new things? My answer is: get on the web! If you are not computer savvy, find someone under 20 to help you. Preferably, someone in your family group so that physical distancing is not an issue. Short bits of information and news items can be found on Twitter. I follow a few news organizations and receive updates daily in my email inbox. The Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association puts out a weekly bulletin with links to several industry-related news items, market reports, production information, video links etc. Many farm papers, breed organizations, farm equipment manufacturers, and government organizations circulate information via online links.

My newest media addiction are Vlogs, which is abbreviated from video blog or video log. A video blog or video log, combine video with supporting text and other data. Most are 12 to 20 minutes long with story lines being recorded in one take or cut into multiple parts. Vlogs can be found on YouTube which I access through my internet connection either on my computer or most commonly through Apple TV. You are encouraged to subscribe to a vlogger’s page and will be notified of updates. Some of the most popular ag-based vloggers have tens of thousands of followers; some have followers numbering in the hundreds of thousands. Ag technology manufacturers have recognized the value in working with the most popular vloggers and are partnering with them to demonstrate the use of equipment in their videos. Others are providing support through pop up ads which, as I understand it, are tailored toward what the viewer likes to watch. For example, I see ads for cattle vaccines, farm equipment, trucks and pesticides. With access to advanced cameras and drones, it is truly remarkable to see what these

individuals can produce. The information being distributed by a vlogger may not be completely accurate, but because subscribers can like, dislike and comment on a vlog, most vloggers will provide the correct information either later in the same video or in a subsequent video. Millions of informational videos may also be found on YouTube. I have used YouTube videos to learn how to make repairs, set up my seed drill, correct issues with my GPS and autosteer, and to answer agronomy questions. If you are having trouble understanding the step by step instructions in a service manual or you don't even have a manual, in most cases you will be able to find at least one YouTube video that can help.

Virtual conferences, meetings and webinars provided through platforms like Zoom, Webex, Microsoft Teams, and GoToMeeting, to name a few, have become the new norm and are very easy to use. My experience to date suggests that it may actually be easier to keep a virtual meeting on track than in the live setting, and they are most certainly better than conference calls. Voting on motions is simple and easy. Attendees may show a thumbs

up or thumbs down as opposed to "I" or "Nay" with more elaborate secret ballots being available. PSAV, a full service global event production company handled the conference I attended coordinating the prerecording of all speaker sessions. The speakers were available right after their sessions for a live question and answer period. We also had a room for industry sponsors where attendees could look at promotional videos and chat with reps.

Virtual meetings, conferences and trade shows offer the advantage of eliminating travel, food, lodging and additional entertainment costs. From my point of view, it is always nicer to stay in your own bed. The ability to visit with friends, both old and new, is not the same and from what I have seen, it is harder to keep an audience engaged; especially, for several hours. Maybe the 10 to 20 minute VLOGs have an advantage ... they are certainly more entertaining than most lectures.

Stay safe and try your best to get engaged. A lot of businesses need our continuing support and we need them too.