

A distance-learning course in paraveterinary care brings much-needed expertise to Pacific Island communities

Good Health for Pacific Animals



Photo: Dennis Miyahara

The nations and territories of the Pacific Islands are home to more than 13 million farm animals but fewer than 100 veterinarians. This shortage of animal-care professionals can endanger not only animal welfare but also food safety and human health. To expand the available pool of animal-care providers, the Agricultural Development in the American Pacific project teamed with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the University of the South Pacific to develop a curriculum that combines distance and on-site learning to enable community members in remote Pacific locations to train as paraveterinarians.

After an introductory orientation, students in the Paravet Program participate in 16 weeks of distance learning followed by one week of hands-on education and a final exam. As they work through the *Paravet Training Manual*, the students meet weekly with a coach in their area who has some familiarity with animal science, such as a veterinarian, a science teacher, or

a nurse. Homework is e-mailed or faxed to the headquarters of the SPC, located in Fiji. Topics in the training manual include the role of animals in Pacific Island communities, animal anatomy and diseases, livestock production techniques, veterinary medicines and methods, public health, and quarantine issues. If computers are available, students can supplement the printed manual by viewing digital video clips on a compact disc.

To date, the Paravet Program has graduated 92 students, improving access to animal care in Samoa and American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, the Marshall Islands, the Solomon Islands, the Cook Islands, and Tuvalu. By helping families and farmers raise healthy animals, these graduates increase the value of livestock and enhance animal welfare in small communities. By recognizing food safety concerns and working to

prevent the transmission of animal diseases to humans, they can help protect public health throughout the Pacific region.



Photo courtesy of Anju Mangal

Instructor Peter Manuelli of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community teaches swine care to Fijian farmers.