

Electronic Forum: Patenting and Other Forms of Intellectual Property Protection in the Farm Animal Sector

Concluding Remarks from the Forum Moderator

This forum was visited 309 times and a total of 11 written contributions were made. Many thanks to all those who took the opportunity to voice their opinion on this topical issue.

Protecting Intellectual Property (IP) has been, is, and is expected to continue to be a matter of concern to all involved in the farm animal sector, whether we are industry, research institutes, universities, non-profit societies, government organizations, consultancies or farmers. Several methods were discussed and various motives were identified (financial, technical, cultural, ethical, historical, scientific).

The following benefits were recognized:

1. Recover research and development costs, which may be quite large in biological sciences.
2. Increase industry research funding to universities and research institutes; this can promote and enhance scientific research activities on better methods, processes and products.
3. Forge stronger relationships between scientific and application outfits.
4. Facilitate technology transfer into practice, bringing potential benefits to the society as a whole.
5. Protect/facilitate indigenous knowledge in sustaining and enhancing animal production, especially in developing countries; this can economically benefit the latter as they may secure the rights of their indigenous livestock populations.

A few concerns were also brought forward, suggesting a cautious approach toward patent application. Specifically:

1. We must ensure patents don't stifle research and they don't prohibit genetic improvement by restricting access to genetically superior germplasm.
2. We must also ensure they don't apply overly control on and prevent farmers (especially in developing countries) from benefiting from their own or community stock.
3. There is still lack of adequate information/understanding of the entire patenting and IP issue amongst scientific and farmer circles.
4. The broad principle "no patent on life" should be duly observed.

As for future applications, there are changes in targets, processes and philosophy behind patenting that may result in fewer, bigger patents being registered in the years to come. In any case, patents and other forms of IP protection are here to stay. In a fair world, benefits would accrue and be shared in a balanced way, according to levels of investment, special needs, and "prior art".

Georgios Banos
Professor, School of Veterinary Medicine
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece