

## **Importance of People Emerges as Key Theme to Digital Animal Health Summit**

*Annual KC Animal Health Corridor event draws leaders from across the industry to discuss increasing inclusivity, employee empowerment and innovative partnership*

KANSAS CITY, Mo., Aug. 26, 2021 — The [KC Animal Health Corridor Digital Animal Health Summit](#) wrapped up today, delivering an in-depth analysis of the topics shaping the industry now and in the years ahead. Summit attendees got exclusive access to discussions on major themes ranging from building a more inclusive talent pool to debunking the myth of the pandemic pet boom to determining employee engagement in the post-COVID workplace.

In parallel with the Summit, the week of Aug. 22-28 was declared Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS) Week by the governors of Kansas and of Missouri. MANRRS has chapters at colleges and universities across the nation to drive awareness and opportunities for minorities in ag, animal health and other related fields. To support the week and the need for inclusivity in veterinary medicine, the Summit featured an interactive Q&A session with Vernard Hodges, DVM, and Terrence Ferguson, DVM, who star in Nat Geo Wild's *Critter Fixers* and co-own a practice by the same name in southern Georgia.

### **Fixin' critters—and encouraging future veterinarians**



*Drs. Vernard Hodges and Terrence Ferguson of National Geographic's Critter Fixers at their Veterinary Hospital in Bonaire, Georgia. (Photo courtesy of National Geographic)*

Dr. Hodges said most veterinarians don't think twice about grabbing a complimentary snack between sessions at a veterinary conference. But if you're part of the 2 percent of veterinarians who are Black, you don't take it for granted—even if you've owned a practice for 20 years.

“I attended a state veterinary conference recently, and my initial reaction was to prove I was worthy of being there,” Dr. Hodges said. “Even getting coffee in the lounge, you almost have to prove that you're a doctor.”

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Dr. Ferguson explained that cultural conditioning causes people of color to navigate unwritten rules. “When you don't see anybody who looks like you, you wonder if you belong,” he said.

To change this, Drs. Ferguson and Hodges have programs in place to show minority kids that people who look like them can and should be veterinarians—because, as they say, “to be it, you have to see it.” They encouraged Summit attendees to mentor young people of color and to

recruit differently. As Dr. Ferguson said, “If you’re casting your net in the same place, you’re going to catch the same fish.”

### **Workplace flexibility and employee well-being**

Along with increasing diversity, companies are figuring out what today’s workplace looks like—whether in-person, remote or hybrid—and how to make it fair. (After all, workers in private practice, R&D or manufacturing roles can’t work from home as easily as office staff.)

During a Summit executive panel, leaders emphasized the need to put employees’ health and well-being first and empower them to find the right balance for themselves and the company. “We trust our employees to know when it’s good to work remotely and when is a good day to be in the office,” said Jesper Nordengaard, president of Hill’s Pet Nutrition.

### **The myth of the “pandemic puppy”**

COVID has affected both today’s workplace and today’s pet owner—but what’s truth and what’s perception? Matt Salois, PhD, chief economist for the American Veterinary Medical Association, shared data dispelling widely accepted claims that the pandemic drove a boom in pet adoptions and, as a result, demand for veterinary services. The reality, Salois explained, is that shelter adoptions were at their lowest point in four years during the pandemic.

While existing veterinary clients did seek care for their pets at higher levels than normal, it wasn’t enough to account for the tailspin many practices found themselves in. Salois said the reasons are more nuanced. Digging deeper, his team found that lack of efficiency, high turnover among doctors and technicians and workplace dissatisfaction—complicated by challenges from COVID—are driving much of the busyness in veterinary practices today.

The good news? Small changes can have a major impact. “Something as simple as a regular standing monthly meeting to address work-life challenges can make a big difference in employee engagement and help minimize burnout,” Salois told Summit attendees.

### **Innovation means partnership**

No Corridor event is complete without extensive discussion of innovation and disruption in the sector, and this year was no exception. According to industry legend Fabian Kausche, Dr.med.vet, MS, president and owner of FK Consulting, many of the advancements the industry will see in coming years will result from startup companies partnering with established industry players. In fact, the spirit of collaboration and partnership is stronger than ever.

“Animal health has gone from three or four startup companies in the 1990s to more than 500 now,” Kausche said during his Summit presentation.

“I would like to think we are playing a role in this,” said Kimberly Young, KC Animal Health Corridor president. “It’s no coincidence that this growth roughly parallels the establishment and increasing influence of the Corridor and its Emerging Company Presentations, which draw new companies together with potential investors and partners.”

## Emerging company presentations

One of the marquis elements of the Summit is the presentations by emerging animal health companies. Here are the innovations presented to potential partners and investors this year:

- **Alopexx Vaccine, LLC**, Massachusetts: novel vaccine for the prevention of rhodococcal pneumonia in horses with a focus on foals less than 6 months of age.
- **ClueJay**, Colorado: diagnostic platform providing pet parents the ability to directly access recommended tests without the need for an in-person visit to the veterinarian.
- **Fidelis Pharmaceuticals, Inc.**, New Jersey: pharmaceutical product line based on proprietary extended-release technology.
- **General Probiotics**, Minnesota: engineered “cellbot” probiotics designed to reduce animal disease and increase human food safety.
- **Isomark Health, Inc.**, Wisconsin: technology that monitors exhaled breath to detect viral, bacterial, and fungal infections as well as response to infection treatment.
- **LifEngine Animal Health Laboratories, Inc.**, Minnesota: application of proprietary GeneWeld technology to adapt CAR-T strategy to veterinary patients.
- **Mazen Animal Health**, Iowa: oral vaccine line using recombinant antigen produced in proprietary maize system.
- **PetHub, Inc.**, Washington: SaaS-based tag solution to better meet municipalities’ pet licensing requirements.
- **Precision Livestock Technologies**, Texas: System that replaces subjective and episodic data collection in the cattle feeding industry with continuous, automated metrics.
- **Rejuvenate Bio**, California: Gene therapy portfolio for use in dogs to target age-related diseases such as heart disease and obesity.
- **Stockguard, Inc.**, California: comprehensive livestock mortality insurance that helps producers protect themselves against unexpected production declines.
- **Vetigenics**, Pennsylvania: Entirely canine antibody-based immunotherapies to treat cancer, autoimmune, allergy, and inflammatory disorders in dogs.

## About the KC Animal Health Corridor

Companies with a business location in the KC Animal Health Corridor account for more than half of the sales generated by the global animal health industry. The Corridor, anchored by Manhattan, Kansas, and Columbia, Missouri, is home to more than 300 animal health companies, representing the largest concentration in the world. For more information, visit [www.kcanimalhealth.com](http://www.kcanimalhealth.com).

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