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Bob Dieterich, interviewee

Steven Lay, interviewer

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Bob Dieterich, veterinarian with the Institute of Arctic Biology, said from a medical viewpoint Brucellosis and warbles are the two major problems of the reindeer they have to get in hand. There are a number of other viral diseases and bacterial diseases that need attention. They hope to get to those as they get a handle on the two major diseases. The two medical problems have substantially hampered reindeer industry's growth. Brucellosis and warbles have had a devastating effect on the herd. Brucellosis is also known as an ungulate fever. Warble flies are a parasite and live on the reindeer and draws nourishment from the animals. They weaken the animal, prevent weight gain and, in some cases, even kill the animals. Solutions for both brucellosis and warbles may have been found. Dieterich is testing a new medicine, ivermectin, for warbles and the preliminary testing has been highly encouraging. Dieterich said they tested a group of forty animals this spring. They had better weight gain than the untreated animals. At this point it does look like it is having an effect. They hope in the near future to have a modern drug to control these parasites. Ivermectin has been shown to be effective on other parasites in the animals. They are also looking at other parasite drugs to control internal parasites such as lung worm. Ivermectin is still in the testing phase. There is also a vaccine for brucellosis being tested. It is specifically designed for reindeer and was developed at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Dieterich said they are encouraged. They have tested four different vaccines for brucellosis. It appears a vaccine they developed right from the germ which causes brucellosis in Alaska reindeer looks like it is effective. They hope to try a trial basis inoculation within a year on the Seward Peninsula in some of the infected herds. At the present time they have just been testing in a laboratory situation. These promising medication developments are just a portion of the reindeer research going on at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Other members of the university faculty and staff are studying management, economics, nutrition, and other related matters. With the conquest of major medical problems there may be the possibility of buying reindeer meat at the supermarket in the future. Dieterich said he can go to Kotzebue and Nome and buy reindeer meat in the store. They hope that branches out and in the next few years be made available throughout Alaska. Dieterich has been involved in reindeer research at the University of Alaska Fairbanks for more than a decade.

Steven Lay talks about the campus calendar and activities.