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An oral history of the global eradication of rinderpest

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Introduction
In 2011 the World Organization for Animal Health and the Food and Agriculture Organization announced the global eradication of rinderpest. Rinderpest is only the second disease after smallpox to have been globally eradicated. Eradication would not have been possible without coordinated leadership and the hard work of dedicated individuals from all over the world. This milestone in animal health is arguably the most important achievement of the veterinary profession and a major contribution to global food security. To complement the 2022 publication of the FAO/WOAH book “Rinderpest and its Eradication”, (https://www.fao.org/3/cb9644en/cb9644en.pdf [free download]) we have been collecting video recordings of the personal recollections of those involved in the eradication program. This presentation will illustrate the history of rinderpest and the contributions of those involved in its eradication. Video clips of several of those interviewed will be shown.
Methods
Starting in 2016, most of the video interviews were recorded on an iPhone mounted on a tripod. Interviewees were asked questions regarding their first involvement with rinderpest, their role in its eradication, their biggest achievement while working on rinderpest, and their reflections on the eradication. Interviewees were also asked about what lessons could be learned from the eradication of rinderpest and be applied to the eradication of other diseases.
Results
Those involved in the eradication programme were eager to participate. Over 25 individuals have been interviewed across 4 continents. These recordings are currently being edited so that the lessons learned from the eradication of rinderpest can be applied to ongoing and future eradication programs.
Conclusions
Those interviewed described the planning and execution of the eradication and were proud to hav been involved. Often, they provided valuable insights into the small details that had to be addressed to achieve success. Nearly all emphasized how important it had been to place the eradication into a sociological context.
It is very fitting that rinderpest be discussed at the International Symposium of the World Association of Veterinary Diagnosticians for it was here, in the city of Lyon in 1761, that the world’s first veterinary school was established for the specific purpose of controlling the ravages of rinderpest in Europe.