



University of Missouri

College of Veterinary Medicine

[Applying](#) | [Calendars](#) | [Contact](#) | [News & Events](#)

Search

INFORMATION FOR:

[Admissions Guide](#)[Current Students](#)[Alumni & Friends](#)[Faculty & Staff](#)[Veterinarians](#)[About the College](#)[Departments](#)[Teaching & Research](#)[Giving to Vet Med](#)[Teaching Hospital](#)[Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory \(VMDL\)](#)[CVM Employment](#)[Zalk Veterinary Medical Library](#)[CVM Course Materials](#)[MyZou](#)[Home](#)NEWS
& EVENTS

Vaccine Developer to Address Class of 2013

After three years at Missouri Southern University in Joplin, Mo., Neosho native Jim Rhoades was considering a scholarship offer in Palo Alto, Calif., pursuing a PhD in elementary particle physics. Instead, he applied to enter the MU College of Veterinary Medicine and despite not having the advantage of age like his classmates, was accepted. "My first block was a real eye-opener, but I made it," he said.

Rhoades earned his DVM in 1992. He returns May 17 as the guest speaker for the College's 64th Commencement. Commencement ceremonies will be held at 1 p.m. in Jesse Hall on the MU campus.

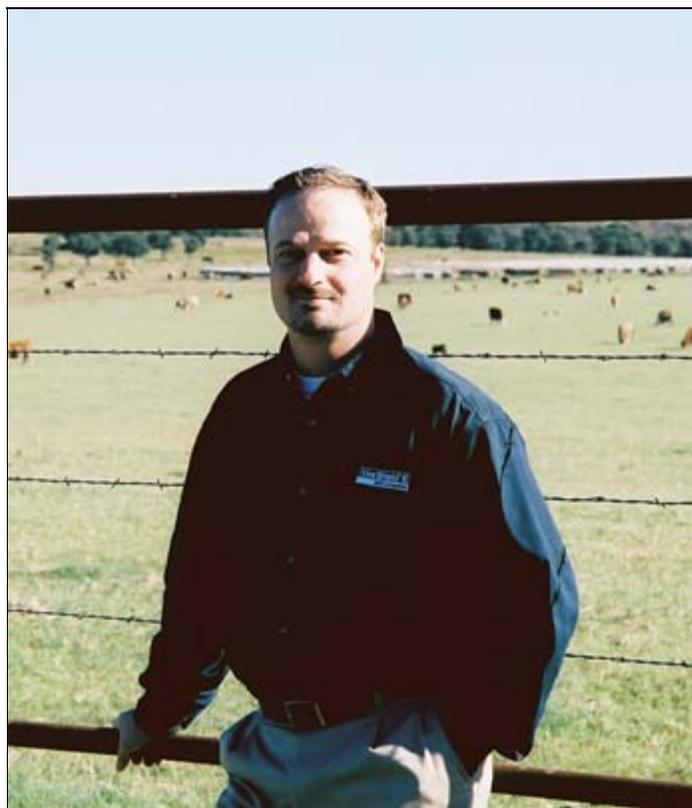
He spent six years working primarily as a large animal veterinarian in the Ozarks, during which time he began assisting a small Iowa-based vaccine company, Grand Laboratories, with some field safety trials. When the company offered him the opportunity to join the technical product development team working on new vaccines from concept to market, he gave up practice for research.

Four years later, that company was purchased by the Swiss company Novartis, now the third largest pharmaceutical company in the world.

Rhoades' position as the head of Novartis' Global Technical Services for mammalian vaccines takes him around the world assessing the threats of new viruses and viral mutations and developing vaccines to counter those threats. A recent outbreak of BVD 2C (a mutated strain of Bovine Viral Diarrhea Virus) in Germany prompted an urgent meeting to develop strategies to prevent the virus from spreading to other European Union nations. "Can we make a vaccine against this mutated BVD virus? That's where I come in," Rhoades explained. "I look at the best way to take a virus and make a vaccine out of it. Does it need to be a marker vaccine, for example?"

Rhoades provides technical oversight for research and development and organizes the trials and studies of equine, bovine, caprine and swine vaccines.

"Ninety percent of all projects that begin will fail. Now that's a little hard on the ego, but those 10 percenters that do succeed are probably going to save someone's life," he said.



After living in Europe and North Carolina, Rhoades and his wife, Susan, once again make their home in Missouri. However, he has offices in North Carolina and Switzerland and is part of Novartis research and development teams based in Switzerland, Australia and Iowa.

“Even though I’m a vet and I use the clinical experience and knowledge I acquired in veterinary school, I no longer practice. To me, there is nothing better than pulling a calf and getting it on its legs for the first time. That is like watching a miracle. But there is also a great deal of satisfaction in bringing new vaccines to countries like Thailand to help the people there produce healthier protein sources. There is a need for veterinarians to understand that there are opportunities outside of practice. As a group, we need to broaden our horizons.”

Rhoades noted that among those opportunities are helping address the food production needs of a world whose population is expected to swell to nine billion people by 2050.

“Where is the food to feed those people going to come from? Seventy percent will need to come from increased efficiencies in production.”

Rhoades noted that at sheep farms in Australia and New Zealand parasites had become resistant to the currently available anthelmintics. Lambs were dying at an early age at an alarming rate because they were so infested with parasites. Novartis was able to develop a class of anthelmintics and bring a new product to market that overcame the resistance and saved the sheep industry from decimation. However, the needed efficiencies in future food production will come less from anti-parasites and antibiotics that treat animals, Rhoades said, but in vaccines to prevent the illnesses.

[Return to News and Events home](#)

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