

## **USAHA/AAVLD COMMITTEE ON DIAGNOSTIC LABORATORY AND VETERINARY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

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The Committee met on October 20, 2013 at the Town and Country Hotel in San Diego, California, from 1:00 - 5 p.m. There were ten members and six guests present. The meeting included several presentations pertinent to the Committee's purpose.

### **Presentations and Reports**

#### **Availability and Use of Veterinarians by Small-scale Livestock Operations**

Andrea Beam, Mary Jane McCool, Randy Pritchard  
USDA-APHIS-VS Centers for Epidemiology and Animal Health (CEAH)

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) conducted a survey of small-scale U.S. livestock operations in spring 2011. The study focused on operations that raised animals and had gross annual sales from \$10,000 to \$499,999. Producers from 8,123 operations in all 50 States completed the study questionnaire. Because of concerns about food animal veterinarian shortages, one objective of the study was to explore producer access to and use of veterinarians. In this study, 62.0% of operations had used a veterinarian in the 12 months prior to the survey. Farms with higher sales (\$100,000 or more) were more likely to use a veterinarian. The most common reason for not using a veterinarian was "no disease or other need for a veterinarian." Overall, 82.0% of operations had a veterinarian available within 29 miles of the operation, while 1.4% had no veterinarian available, or the nearest veterinarian was 100 or more miles away. To better characterize areas where producers had limited access to veterinarians, a spatial hot-spot analysis (Getis Ord Gi) was performed at the county level for the entire United States. The objective was to identify clusters of counties with a veterinarian shortage, which was defined as areas where producers reported that the nearest veterinarian for their animal type was 100 or more miles away, or that a veterinarian was not available at all. Hot spots were identified in numerous states, and were compared to the 2011 Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program designated shortage areas. Of the hot-spot counties identified in this study, 19.1% were also designated as VMLRP shortage areas. The results of this study are useful to government agencies and the overall veterinary community.

#### **2013 AVMA Workforce Summit**

Mike Dicks, AVMA

Summary of Key Points:

Four major issues were found:

- Excess Capacity in Profession
- High Cost of Entry
- Lack of Diversity
- Lack of Evidence Based Action

Most probable causes of the excess capacity in the companion animal veterinary workforce:

- Supply increased faster than trend

- Demand well below trend
- Price increases above gross domestic product (GDP)/capita growth

Next steps:

- Strategic plan- Building an economic plan- gather data through the following surveys:
  - Pet survey
  - Senior survey
  - Post graduate survey

### **Initiatives to Increase Veterinary Public Practice Opportunities**

Dr. Valerie Ragan, Center for Public and Corporate Veterinary Medicine (CPCVM)

Veterinarians possess a wide variety of skills and training applicable to far more than private practice clinical treatment of animals. These skills can be utilized to address hiring needs within a wide range of veterinary public practice areas in the fields of science, public health, agriculture, environment and other technical/management fields.

The diverse skill set, critical thinking ability and strong scientific background of veterinarians is often over-shadowed by the perception that veterinarians just take care of pets or privately owned livestock, thus leading hiring authorities to under-value the skills and knowledge that veterinarians have to contribute and succeed in a variety of employment areas.

In this presentation, several initiatives to increase veterinary public practice opportunities were discussed. These included the ongoing work of a task force created through a partnership of the Center for Public and Corporate Veterinary Medicine within the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine, the American Veterinary Medical Association, and the National Association of Federal Veterinarians. The task force has created a white paper to deliver to federal authorities including human resource personnel intended to expand opportunities for veterinarians in federal service, with the intent in the future to use the same template for messaging to enhance opportunities in state service and industry as well. A second initiative includes career transition workshops being conducted in multiple venues to help veterinarians prepare for and effectively transition into new public practice career areas.

### **Veterinary Services Reorganization**

Dr. Beth Lautner, USDA-APHIS-VS

Five years ago, the Veterinary Services (VS) leadership started a review of the organization's strategic direction. After reports from many working groups and development of the *VS: New Perspective* document, the Deputy Administrator in June 2012 announced the intent to reorganize VS and provided a draft business structure based on four units. Additional working groups and leadership interactions developed the final organizational structure. The VS reorganization has received the necessary approvals and is scheduled to take place in November 2013. The four business units are: **Surveillance, Preparedness and Response Services (SPRS)** – The SPRS unit will provide planning, policy, program, regulatory oversight and implementation for VS surveillance, preparedness and response activities. It consists of the functional areas of Commodity Health, Field Services, National Preparedness and Incident Coordination, National Veterinary Stockpile, and One Health Coordination.

**Science, Technology and Analysis Services (STAS)** – The STAS unit brings together the VS science centers to provide the solid scientific, technical, and analytical foundation needed to support VS in meeting its mission responsibilities. It includes the Center for Veterinary Biologics, the National Veterinary Services Laboratories, the Center for Epidemiology and Animal Health and the Office of STAS Interagency Coordination. The scientific functions include diagnostic capability and capacity; regulatory activities related to the approval and monitoring of veterinary biologics (vaccines and commercial diagnostic test kits); surveillance design, planning and analysis; economic analysis; risk assessments, and predictive modeling in economics and epidemiology.

**National Import and Export Services (NIES)** – The NIES unit provides policy direction, international collaboration and regulatory oversight activities associated with import, export and interstate movement of animal and animal products. It consists of the functional areas of Policy, Permitting, and Regulatory Services; Service Centers, Animal Import Center Services; Port Services; Agricultural Select Agent Services; and International Animal Health Standards Services.

**Program Support Services (PSS)** – The PSS unit oversees the budget, information management and technology, administrative services, training and recruitment activities, writing services and strategic planning.

## **Rural Veterinary Medicine Challenges and Opportunities**

John Thomson, Professor Emeritus, Iowa State University

Dr. Thomson reminded attendees of the committee's mission of educating policy makers and influencing policy on the supply and demand of veterinarians and laboratory diagnosticians and also animal health laboratory facility needs. He emphasized the importance of such a committee because it is difficult to drive change from within – external stakeholder influence is required. Thomson pointed out that history tends to repeat itself, and some of the issues facing veterinary medicine today are remarkably similar to many noted by the AVMA in 1980 - future direction of the profession, new schools coming, too many veterinary graduates, and economic uncertainty. Today there is significant finger pointing within and at the profession, often with colleges being blamed for an oversupply of veterinarians and graduates who have large debt loads.

The National Food Animal Veterinary Institute (NFAVI) sponsored a conference in December 2012 called "Strengthening Our National Rural Veterinary Infrastructure" where participating organizations were asked to include issues and concerns related to maintenance of the rural infrastructure and to include future projects that might address the issues. All presentations are at [www.nfavi.org](http://www.nfavi.org).

A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis revealed that programs such as the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) are making a difference but the veterinary profession continues to send mixed messages, there are not enough veterinarians to respond to a national emergency, and student debt currently is a significant negative impact. There are opportunities for the profession to unite for advocacy, to provide leadership and business opportunities for animal wellbeing, food safety and disease surveillance, and to address education and its costs. Online training modules for business, regulatory and technical training are available through NFAVI. Threats to the rural veterinary infrastructure include fragmentation of veterinary agencies (multiple messages), loss of credibility and perceived need, and further deterioration of rural America where there is loss of influence and recognized relevance in general and also for veterinary medicine.

Thomson ended his presentation with additional focus on the VMLRP where he emphasized the significant need to remove the required tax on VMLRP awards. Awards are currently taxed at 39%, with the taxes paid by the USDA on behalf of the award recipient. Removing the tax would result in one additional veterinarian for every three based on current appropriations. Dr. Thomson also indicated that assessment of the VMLRP awardees by National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) will occur in 2014, which will determine contributions, best practices and future programming. There are opportunities for coordination of financial and economic initiatives, for partnering between public and private practitioners to address rural needs, and for emphasizing the value of a strong veterinary infrastructure to the health and wellbeing of animals, humans and the nation.

## **Meeting Surge Capacity Needs within the Veterinary Workforce**

Michael J. Gilsdorf, Federal Talent Management Advisory Council

If the U.S. had a major animal disease outbreak or public health event, who would lead the effort?

- Nationally APHIS-VS would be in charge
- Locally State Animal Health Authorities would be in charge
- Department of Homeland Security (DHS) would help coordinate

Major zoonotic disease, public health event, or food defense issue

- Nationally Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) would be in charge
- Locally State Public Health Authorities would be in charge
- DHS would help coordinate

## **Segments of the U.S. Veterinary Workforce APHIS-Veterinary Services (VS)**

Department of Health and Human Services

- FEMA
- FSIS
- State Veterinary Response Teams
- Non-Government Veterinary Response Teams
- Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratories
- Canadian Veterinary Reserve (CVR) Example

APHIS-VS has fewer than 250 deployable veterinarians to immediately respond to a major animal health event and Four Incident Command teams. APHIS-VS also has the National Animal Health Emergency Response Corps (NAHERC). NAHERC has approximately 1,000 veterinarians who have volunteered. There is an online training site created by the Center for Food Security and Public Health, located at Iowa State University in the College of Veterinary Medicine.

For responses to state and local public health emergencies, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has the following volunteer opportunities for skilled Health professionals:

- Emergency System for Advance Registration of Volunteer Health Professions
- National Disaster Medical System (NDMS)
- Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)
- Citizen Corps
- Commission Corps

#### U. S. Army Veterinary Corps

- The US Army has one Veterinary (VET) detachment on call with NORTHCOM
- Their mission is to provide support in national emergencies
- That would include a total 58 person detachment with eight veterinary corps officers

#### State Government Veterinary Surge Assistance

- SARTs- State Animal Response Team- (# of veterinarians ?)
- CART- County Animal Response Team (# of veterinarians ?)
- VMRC- Veterinary Medical Response Team (# of veterinarians ?)
- VRT- Veterinary Response Team (# of veterinarians ?)
- SAADRA- Southern Agriculture & Animal Disaster Response Alliance (# of veterinarians ?)
- NASAAEP- National Alliance of State Animal and Agricultural Emergency Programs (# of veterinarians ?)
- There are also others

The American Veterinary Medical Associations - Veterinary Medical Assistance Teams (VMAT) serves as first responders to ensure high-quality care of animals during disasters and emergencies. There are 140 members in the VMAT that includes veterinarians, technicians, and others.

#### **Diagnostic Laboratory Surge Capacity**

In preparation for a major animal health surge event, the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) laboratories are trained, proficiency tested, and follow standardized testing protocols for the following diseases:

- Avian Influenza (AI)
- Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE)
- Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)
- Classical Swine Fever (CSF)
- Exotic Newcastle Disease (END)
- Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)
- Pseudorabies Virus (PRV)
- Scrapie
- Swine Influenza Virus (SIV)
- Vesicular Stomatitis Virus (VSV)

The Canadian Veterinary Reserve (CVR) is a national voluntary group of trained veterinarians that was created by the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association to provide supplemental veterinary resources ("surge capacity") to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) in the event of a foreign animal disease outbreak in Canada that exceeds the veterinary response capacity of the CFIA

#### **In Summary:**

- There are numerous veterinary response groups established to respond to animal health and public health disasters/events
- In several instances we have estimates of veterinary workforce capacity
- However, there is not a national assessment of the veterinary workforce surge capacity in the U.S.
- A national assessment is needed to determine if the veterinary workforce surge capacity is adequate

- It is proposed that all veterinary and animal health groups and stakeholders join together to conduct such as assessment
- This assessment information can be used to establish workforce needs and identify permanent funding gaps and resolve those gaps to maintain the workforce
- A cost/benefit analysis could then be conducted to show the benefit of maintaining the veterinary workforce

### **USDA-FSIS Update**

Al Almanza, USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)

*(submitted in lieu of presentation)*

Thank you for the invitation to speak with you all today. I regret that recent events in Washington have impacted FSIS' operations so that I was unable to join you in San Diego.

I was asked to give an update on FSIS' proposal to modernize the way we ensure that poultry produced in this country is safe to eat. This proposal is the agency's top priority right now, and it is something I would very much like to discuss with all of you.

Rates of illness caused by *Salmonella* have been steady, even showing occasional rises, in recent years, while *Campylobacter* is the second-most reported illness in the United States. We must reverse this trend, and if we are to do so, one thing is clear: we cannot continue inspecting poultry the way we have been for over 50 years.

Our proposal is based on a 15-year pilot program, and our peer reviewed risk assessment shows that this new way of inspecting poultry would prevent at least 5,000 illnesses annually.

There has been public criticism of our efforts, but I reject that criticism. I want to make it clear that this proposal sets the right course. It is first and foremost about saving lives. It would refocus our inspection program personnel on the inspection activities that are proven to make food safer, allowing our workforce to do our job of protecting the public health better than we have ever done it before.

The National Association of Federal Veterinarians, who I know is well represented at today's meeting, has given the proposal a lot of support in the press. My colleagues at FSIS and I truly appreciate that support.

The proposal is still in the rulemaking phase. We cannot predict a timeline right now for its progression, but we do hope that it will move forward soon.

Again, this is the top priority for FSIS currently. I hope you all enjoy your time in California, and I hope that future circumstances allow for an in-person meeting with all of you who are so important to food safety.

### **Committee Business**

The Committee reviewed their resolutions. No resolutions were modified. One new resolution was passed and forwarded to the Committee on Nominations and Resolutions.