



USAHA News Release

UNITED STATES ANIMAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

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Animal Health Leaders Underscore Importance of Veterinarians

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ST. JOSEPH, Mo. – A shortage of veterinarians has been a growing problem for the United States, particularly those involved in food animal health care, serving in rural communities and with training in public health. Industry leaders had an opportunity to testify to the importance of this during a hearing this week of the House Energy and Commerce Committee's Health Subcommittee. The hearing was specific to the Veterinary Public Health Workforce Expansion Act (VPHWEA) H.R. 1232, designed to expand capacity in this nation's veterinary schools.

Drs. Ron DeHaven, American Veterinary Medical Association, Marguerite Pappaioanou, Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges, Alan Kelly, University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, and Sheila W. Allen, University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine each testified to the importance of supporting U.S. veterinary schools. Each cited the existing shortage of veterinarians and the role veterinarians play in diagnosing diseases—especially those of human health significance.

Pappaioanou, during her testimony, noted that 61 percent of human infectious diseases involve animals, and 75 percent of emerging diseases are transferable from animal to man. This demonstrates the importance of veterinarians and their training in comparative and population medicine.

The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) has long been a supporter of initiatives to reverse this trend. With the inclusion of the Veterinary Workforce Grant Program (Section 11014) and the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment (Section 7003) in the Senate version of the 2007 Farm Bill, in addition to the Veterinary Public Health Workforce Expansion Act (H.R. 1232) USAHA and other animal health organizations may see this come to fruition.

While the Farm Bill sections and VPHWEA may have some similarities, DeHaven indicated that each has its place and it is important to implement both in a manner that is complementary. These, with the National Veterinary Medical Services Act, which was passed in 2003 to help place veterinarians in areas of need, would be positive moves to addressing the veterinary shortages.

Ultimately the panelists felt that if fully funded, VPHWEA would meet the needs of veterinary schools to accommodate more students. Kelly warned though, that the industry must continue to look ahead and that 20 years from now, this will likely not be adequate. Allen added that

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current funding mechanisms mostly provided at the state level are not enough and the need for additional federal support is necessary.

“With an increasing population, there is greater demand on the food supply, thus producers will continue to need access to veterinary medical resources. Currently, those resources are inadequate,” says USAHA President Jim Leafstedt. “U.S. veterinary needs can be alleviated by Congressional approval of this legislation.”

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USAHA, this nation’s animal health forum for over a century, is a science-based, dues-supported, voluntary organization whose membership includes state, federal and international animal and public health agencies, allied industry and professional organizations, as well as individual members representing academia, animal owners and animal health professionals. USAHA primarily serves as a forum for communication and coordination among animal health constituents on issues of animal health and disease control, animal welfare, food safety and public health. USAHA operates with 32 species- and subject-oriented committees, and hosts an annual meeting each year with the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

Listed below is key information from the National Research Council of the National Academies, Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Institute for Laboratory Animal Research, American Veterinary Medical Association and Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges that highlights the veterinary medicine needs.

- There are only 28 U.S. colleges of veterinary medicine; they graduated 2,478 veterinarians in 2007. These colleges are at maximum capacity for students they can accept due to space limitations for diagnostics research, laboratories and teaching facilities.
- There is currently an identified shortage of 1,500 veterinarians in the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Homeland Security and in national/local veterinary positions in biosecurity, domestic and foreign animal disease research, rural practice, wildlife disease control, animal care and welfare, and laboratory animal care and research.
- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2025 the human population will increase 15 percent. Historically animal populations increase proportionally. With today's shortages combined with projected increases over the next 20 years, there will be a shortage of 15,000 veterinarians.
- In order to provide the current level of veterinary medical services for society, in the next 40 years there will be an equivalent need of 9 veterinary medical colleges due to the projected increase in population.
- 43 % of veterinary pathology positions are unfilled today and many pathologists are nearing retirement.
- There is currently a shortage of 500 food animal private veterinarians and that number is increasing every year.

In July 2005, the National Research Council of the National Academies called for the country to build veterinary capacity through both recruitment and preparation of additional veterinary graduates into careers of food systems, biomedical research, diagnostic laboratory investigation, pathology, epidemiology, ecosystem, and health and food animal practice. In addition the National Academies called for competitive grants to be made available to scientists to upgrade equipment for animal disease research and to construct and maintain government and university biosafety facilities for livestock, poultry, and wildlife.