

UNITED STATES ANIMAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION - 2008 RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION NUMBER: 12 APPROVED

SOURCE: COMMITTEE ON DIAGNOSTIC LABORATORY AND
VETERINARY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

SUBJECT MATTER: VETERINARY MEDICINE LOAN REPAYMENT
PROGRAM (PL 108-161)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) was created in 2003 by the National Veterinary Medical Service Act (NVMSA) and is a student loan repayment program for veterinarians who practice in underserved areas. This loan repayment program is to be administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Secretary of Agriculture can determine veterinary shortage areas in rural practice, urban practice, federal and state government agencies, and discipline areas. Recently highlighted awareness of bioterrorism and foreign animal disease threats to public health and food safety has heightened the urgency of a fully-funded and implemented program. The VMLRP also creates a reserve corps of veterinarians available for mobilization in the event of an animal disease emergency or disaster. Adequate funding for VMLRP is \$20 million annually.

NVMSA was enacted in December 2003 and has received modest appropriations beginning with the 2006 fiscal year. Until recently the regulations governing the VMLRP remained unwritten by USDA rendering the program non-functional. Language in the 2008 Farm Bill helped to expedite that process and USDA now reports it is on schedule to have the program running by March 2009. In the past, the Bush Administration has not included funding for NVMSA in the President's budget.

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) requests that the United States Congress fully fund the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) (Public Law 108-161) for \$5 million in the Agriculture Appropriations bill and requests that the administration budget \$20 million for the National Veterinary Medical Service Act (NVMSA).

USAHA recommends that the first phase of NVMSA's implementation should prioritize shortages of large and mixed animal practitioners in rural communities and training of veterinary diagnostic laboratory personnel because of urgent national security concerns for public health, bioterrorism preparedness, and food supply security.