

The Food Supply Veterinary Medicine Coalition

For Immediate Release

Contact: Randy Williams, Fleishman-Hillard
816-512-2389
Daren Williams, Fleishman-Hillard
816-868-0754

PROJECTED SERIOUS FOOD SUPPLY VETERINARIAN SHORTAGE POSES THREAT TO INDUSTRY, SOCIETY

Veterinary Industry Identifies Strategies to Accelerate Recruiting

MANHATTAN, Kan. (June 1, 2006) — America's livestock and meat industries have one of the world's best health and safety records, but that status may be threatened in the years ahead because of a severe projected shortage of food animal veterinarians, according to the most comprehensive veterinary business study ever conducted on the current and future state of the large animal veterinary profession.

While projected demand for food supply veterinarians will increase a modest 12 percent to 13 percent between now and 2016, the research forecasts a shortfall of 4 percent to 5 percent per year. This means for every 100 food supply veterinary jobs available, there will be only 96 veterinarians available to fill them due to decreasing numbers of veterinary students choosing to practice in the fields in food supply specialties and socio-economic trends, including further declines in rural populations.

“With the American public more focused than ever on food safety and security, the role of the food animal veterinarian has never been more important,” said Dr. Lyle Vogel with the American Veterinary Medicine Association. “Needless to say, we can't afford to have a shortage of large animal veterinarians. It would be catastrophic for the industry and for society.”

The research was published in three articles in the June 1, June 15, and July 1, 2006, issues of the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA)*. The studies, commissioned in 2004 by a coalition of veterinarian organizations and conducted by Kansas State University's College of Business Administration focused on several aspects of the veterinarian profession: comparison of future demand and supply, veterinary student attraction to food supply careers, and career satisfaction and retention.

Veterinarian Shortage/Add One

The findings were based on a review of current studies and literature, conduct of four focus groups, conduct of 13 expert judgment-based forecasting (Delphi) panels representing different sectors of the food supply profession, and surveys conducted with the following groups:

- 718 first-year veterinary students in the United States and Canada
- 759 second- and fourth-year veterinary students
- 713 third- and fourth-year veterinary students
- 214 educators (veterinary school deans and faculty)
- 133 recent graduates (one to five years of experience) who spent at least 50 percent of their time in food supply veterinary medicine
- 2,482 veterinarians who have been in practice for more than five years

“While job satisfaction and retention among new and long-time beef and dairy veterinarians is very high, the industry must do a better job of filling the pipeline if it expects to meet projected demand,” said Dr. Cary Christensen, director of Business Development for Bayer Animal Health.

“This study is a mandate for change within the industry,” said Christensen. “We have to rally the industry in a way that raises the profile of the profession and attracts new students.”

Survey respondents cited several keys to keeping current food animal veterinarians in the industry, while attracting or converting more students to this specialty. Strategies that received strong support from educators included:

- Recruiting/admissions strategies, including putting more emphasis on food animal careers at high schools and offering special incentives to those who choose the food animal career track, such as reserved class spots, early admissions, scholarships, and mentoring/shadowing programs with industry partners.
- Curriculum/financing strategies, including assigned faculty mentors, paid externships, heavier clinical caseloads, more hands-on experience early on, and legislation that forgives student loans for those who take a job in state.

Veterinarian Shortage/Add Two

- Industry image strategies, including creating regional centers of food animal medicine, improving business literacy within the profession, and shared curricula or rotational programs with partner colleges.

Veterinary students who switched to a career focus in food supply overwhelmingly said it was because they were exposed to information about the specialty in veterinary school. More than 70 percent of educators said the main reason veterinary students choose a food animal sequence today is because they are attracted to the rural lifestyle and the prospect of working with animals, while only 6 percent choose it because they can make a positive impact on agriculture or food production.

“Exposing veterinary students early in their careers to the science behind the food supply specialty and recruiting students who would love the rural lifestyle will be two important keys,” said Rick Sibbel, director, Global Ruminant Technical Services for Schering Plough and chair of the coalition. “We have to reposition food animal veterinary science as an intellectually stimulating field that is of fundamental importance to society. We have to compete with city jobs. The lifestyle can be a bonus.”

A high percentage of both recent graduates (78 percent of young beef veterinarians and 80 percent of young dairy veterinarians) and senior alumni (92 percent for both beef and dairy veterinarians) are satisfied with their jobs and 90 percent of both groups are proud of their profession.

The studies will be available in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* or on the AVMA Web site.

###