

House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development
Testimony of Kristin M. Haas, DVM, Vermont State Veterinarian
Vermont Food Animal Veterinarian Educational Loan Repayment Program (VFAVELRP)
January 20, 2016

- Thank you for the opportunity to provide information for you regarding the VFAVELRP. This Program was put into place in FY2012 and is intended to ensure an adequate and stable supply of food animal veterinarians in Vermont. The Agency of Agriculture and the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association are appreciative of the Committee's support of this annual Next Generation funding appropriation.
- The Veterinary Loan Repayment Program is important to Vermont's veterinary profession, and it is also important to Vermont livestock owners, industry members and Vermont consumers who take advantage of the bountiful supply of our locally grown animal-based food products.
- The Program directly supports many of the Statewide Outcomes that were codified in statute in 2013 as follows:
 - **Vermont has a prosperous economy** – Vermont food animal veterinarians directly support Vermont's livestock industry, which is valued at \$637 million dollars with large increases in both the swine and poultry sectors in the past 10 years. The swine industry in VT is currently valued at \$820,000, up from \$157,000 in 2003. The poultry industry is valued at \$5.7 million dollars in 2006 to \$12 million in 2012 (source: NASS 2012). Vermont food animal veterinarians represent the first line of detection for domestic as well as newly emerging or foreign animal diseases of livestock and poultry. An outbreak of a high consequence disease such as Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza or Foot and Mouth Disease could be economically devastating for our state. An outbreak of a domestic livestock disease such as Tuberculosis would place a significant economic burden on our state's farmers and producers as they would face lengthy quarantines and have to incur the cost of additional disease testing in order to access the out-of-state markets in which many of them are currently successful.
 - **Vermonters are healthy** – An adequate supply of food animal veterinarians in the state, both in the public and private sector, helps to ensure the health of food-producing animals in the pre-harvest phase and enhances consumer confidence in the safety of Vermont's food supply. As an example, Vermont has experienced significant growth in the dairy processing sector (cheeses, butter and yogurt production to name a few) over the last decade. Food animal veterinarians are critical to the safety of these products and the profitability and efficiency of the processes used to create them. Another concept to keep in mind is that approximately 60 percent of all human diseases and 75 percent of all emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic, meaning that they can spread from animals to humans. Most human infections with zoonoses come from livestock, including pigs, chickens, cattle, goats, sheep and camels. So, not only are food animal veterinarians protecting the health of animals, they are protecting the safety of the food we eat and the health of Vermont's citizens.
 - **Vermont's environment is clean and sustainable** – there is significant focus on improving water quality and environmental health currently, and a stable food animal

veterinary supply in Vermont can augment the success of that initiative. I know many food animal veterinarians who take the opportunity during herd health checks and preventative care visits to farms to also discuss with their farming clients the ways that environmental stewardship of the land used by their livestock can improve the health of their animals and their bottom line. Veterinarians also directly support the individuals who preserve the working landscape and the rural nature that Vermont is known for.

- **What do we do?**

- The Vermont Agency of Agriculture administers a contract with the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association, and I participate on the VVMA Task Force convened to administer the Program
- The Program documents (overview, application form, grantee contract) were created in a manner that mirrors the similar program available for Vermont dentists.
- The goal since the Program's inception has been to make the application and selection processes transparent, meaningful and fair in order to ensure that taxpayers' support is appropriately utilized.
- The Program appropriation has been \$30,000 annually between FY2012 and the current fiscal year, for a total appropriation of \$150,000
- To date, the Program has supported nine grant awards, totaling \$113,600. Administrative costs since Program inception have totaled \$6,207, or 4.14% of the total Program cost.
- By accepting a monetary award, recipient veterinarians commit to one year of service in a designated geographic or practice niche shortage area.

- **How well do we do it?**

- To date, the Program has supported nine grant awards, totaling \$113,600. Administrative costs since Program inception have totaled \$6,207, or 4.14% of the total Program cost.
- Grantees have included a new graduate, a new practice partner in a multi-vet practice, and a single practice owner in a single veterinary practice.
- The Program has enticed applicants every year, thereby demonstrating a continued need.

- **Why do we do it?**

- To support the One Health concept – animal health, human health and environmental health are linked, and impact to one impacts all. Food animal veterinarians are critical to supporting this concept.
- Historically, Vermont's food animal veterinary demographic has been predominantly male and close to or at retirement age. New veterinarians are coming on board but need to be supported in order to maintain a stable supply of professionals in our state.
- This Program offsets the significant debt load that these professionals experience (>165,000 at graduation on average).
- We are appreciative of the funding support to date and are hopeful that it continues in the future as long as the need is there.

