

Topics for House Ag Committee, 1/31/25, 11:15

Rep. Durfee – Chair

Thank you for this opportunity to address the committee. The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association, established in 1898, has consistently championed the veterinary profession. Our organization boasts 385 members representing diverse areas of veterinary science. We are available to provide expert testimony on matters pertaining to the veterinary profession and animal welfare. Please do not hesitate to contact us for assistance with any related legislation.

Here are some current issues we are facing:

**H5N1 or Avian Influenza** – this virus has been devastating poultry farms and wild birds for a few years. Cats seem to be particularly sensitive to the virus. The virus is being transmitted to barn cats via raw milk from infected cows and from wild birds. The first human death from H5N1 occurred a few weeks ago in Mississippi where the patient was older and had underlying health conditions.

The USDA has begun developing vaccines for animals to help prevent the spread of the virus which has mutated significantly since it was first discovered. The vaccine is currently in the field testing stage and it is only 1 genetic mutation away from being a virus that can be spread from human to human. HHS has funded Moderna to accelerate the development of mRNA vaccines for use in humans.

All states including Vermont have been directed by USDA to begin testing milk supplies to detect the virus before it spreads. We have been fortunate in Vermont in that most of the cattle here are moving out of the state with very few moving in so we are hopeful that the virus can be kept in check.

**Xylazine** – We are sincerely appreciative of your work last year to pass the xylazine bill that originated in the Senate (S.58). The law schedules penalties for possession of xylazine with a carve out for veterinarians who use this drug on animals regularly in the course of their work.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to convince our federal delegation to support a similar initiative in Congress. Both Senators Sanders and Welch have refused to support it citing the ill consequences of scheduled drug policy on minority communities. We will continue to work with them to find a solution.

**Vermont Food Animal Veterinary Education Loan Repayment Grant**

We are also very grateful for your continued funding of this \$30,000/year grant which is distributed to food animal veterinarians working in Vermont. It has been very successful with almost all recipients remaining in the state working with cattle (dairy and meat), goat, and sheep farms. The good news is that this year we had more candidates than funding to distribute and the bad news is that we had more candidates than funds.

