



## Veterinarian Shortage Reported

### Vet shortage means farmers challenged to find care for livestock

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Get some basic information about caring for your animals. Read "In Your Hands" by Dr. Lyle G. McNeal. The Jan/Feb 2007 Hobby Farms article helps livestock owners recognize and care for illness in their herds, outlining basic animal husbandry skills that can help you maintain your animals health and keep your vet bills down. The number of veterinarians who care for livestock in the United States are increasingly in short supply. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), the number of veterinarians focusing on large animals has dropped to fewer than 4,500 from nearly 6,000 since 1990.

The association also says those doctors now make up less than 10 percent of private-practice veterinarians. A recent study predicted that by 2016, 4 out of every 100 food-animal veterinary jobs would go unfilled.

#### Why the Drop?

Reports indicate the drop in large animal veterinarians is due in large part to the following: More money to be made in caring for cats and dogs. Dog and cat owners can be more willing to pay for expensive surgery and treatment and small animal vets can fit more appointments into their daily schedule; large animal vets must often travel long distances between farms and ranches; this mean fewer appointments and less money earned. Fewer students come from farm backgrounds and fewer gravitate to rural jobs. The physical challenges of large-animal care, such as bad weather conditions and managing the size of the animals. The inclination for more veterinarians to be women, who are generally less inclined toward large animals

The AVMA's president Dr. Roger Mahr calls the situation a "crisis" with serious consequences for both farmers' and animals' well-being, as well as the potentially for food safety and the impact of non-native diseases like bird flu.

According to Mahr, 75 percent of emerging diseases found in people in the last 25 years were were transmitted from animal; veterinarians are the ones to identify those diseases in animals first.

#### What Can Be Done?

Some efforts to improve the situation have included: Congress enacted a law in 2004 offering to repay the student loans of veterinarians working in underserved areas, but it has received little financing. States with loan repayment or grant programs under way or proposed in Kansas, Maine, Missouri, North Dakota, Texas and elsewhere. Other states are considering tax breaks for large animal vets. Some veterinary schools try to entice teenagers to become rural veterinarians by visiting county fairs and 4-H meetings.

To cope, some farmers will choose to sacrifice valuable animals they have tried to save in the past, treating it as a business expense. Others take advantage of training sessions designed to teach farmers basic livestock care, such as tips on giving cows anesthesia and pumping their stomachs.

To learn more about the crisis, watch a video (look for "Veterinarian Shortage for Farms" in Latest Video Reports) provided by the New York Times (registration required).