



Addressing Washington's Large Animal Veterinarian Shortage

Recommendations for the Washington State Legislature

IMPORTANCE OF VETERINARIANS

Veterinarians serve critical functions that impact both animals and humans in important ways. Their highly specialized knowledge is needed to secure the food supply by protecting the health and welfare of livestock and ensuring food is safe for humans. Veterinarians also stand as the first line of defense against zoonotic diseases that can transfer from animals to humans, potentially threatening not only human health, but also national security.

WASHINGTON'S VETERINARIAN SHORTAGE

Washington is facing a critical shortage of rural, large animal veterinarians who work with livestock and other farm animals. As a result, in 2025, the Legislature passed Engrossed House Bill 1705 directing Washington State University to convene a work group to study the issue and develop strategies to help address the state's veterinarian shortage. The work group conducted a broad assessment of workforce needs, challenges, and potential solutions to develop targeted recommendations to address the multiple factors contributing to the shortage.

GOALS FOR THE LEGISLATURE

1

Grow the pipeline of prospective large animal veterinarians in Washington.

2

Reduce the debt burden for students who commit to rural, large animal practice.

3

Build the educational and clinical infrastructure to train and support future large animal veterinarians.

4

Strengthen the economic viability of rural, large animal practices.



WSU EXTENSION

**Division of Governmental
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RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE GOALS

Recommendations are listed in order of priority.

	Recommendations	Implementation
1	Fund WSU's Food Animal Veterinarian Conditional Scholarship Program (Chapter 28B.121 RCW) — supplemented by industry partnerships sought by the College of Veterinary Medicine — to award two qualifying, Washington-resident students annually.	• Create a standing appropriation of \$65,832 (average annual tuition and fees for two students to attend the four-year DVM program) during the first funding cycle, \$131,664 during the second funding cycle, \$197,496 during the third funding cycle, and \$263,328 for each cycle thereafter. By the fourth funding cycle, the scholarship will simultaneously support 8 students dedicated to the large animal veterinarian profession in Washington State effectively creating a guaranteed pipeline of new DVM graduates practicing large animal veterinary medicine in the state's high-need, rural locations.
2	Provide a dedicated line item in the state's operating budget to fund and support the reinvigoration of the College of Veterinary Medicine's Field Disease Investigation Unit (FDIU).	• The Legislature should provide permanent funding to support one new faculty position in the College of Veterinary Medicine along with annual expenditures for materials and equipment as necessary to effectively run the FDIU. • Estimated annual cost of implementation: \$290,000 + benefits
3	Provide additional funding to WSU's College of Veterinary Medicine to expand seat capacity reserved for Washington resident DVM students for the purpose of addressing the state's large animal veterinarian shortage.	• Increase annual funding to the College of Veterinary Medicine to convert 20 non-resident seats (which currently generate higher tuition) into seats reserved for Washington residents who may be interested in serving rural areas of the state. • Annual implementation costs are estimated in the range of \$1.2 million per year (about \$60,000 per seat x 20 seats), reaching approximately \$5 million annually once fully subscribed across four cohort years.

	Recommendations	Implementation
4	Increase funding for the Washington Future Farmers of America Association (FFA) and Washington 4-H programs for the purpose of exposing Washington youth to the agricultural/large animal setting.	•Fund the creation of an Urban Ag 4-H Faculty Advisor position with statewide responsibility to increase urban 4-H programming and reach. The position should expand youth exposure to large animals beyond Washington's more rural areas where 4-H programming tends to be strongest. The legislature should also increase funding to Washington FFA for the purpose of increasing urban youth involvement in Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE).
5	Create and fund a task force, if deemed necessary by WSU, of relevant stakeholders to determine whether, where, and how a College of Veterinary Medicine satellite location may be established to further enhance agricultural animal education and services.	•Create and fund, in the form of a legislative budget proviso, a task force whose responsibilities will entail creating recommendations for the implementation of a satellite location. Members of the task force should include the Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine (or designee), the Washington State Veterinarian (or designee), the President of the Washington State Veterinary Medical Association (or designee), and members representing organizations from the following groups (at minimum): practicing veterinarians, farmers and ranchers, livestock producers, and community members who may be affected by a satellite location.



	Recommendations	Implementation
6	Fund the development of high-quality veterinary technician programs in Eastern Washington to better serve the state's rural population.	•Fund the development of an accredited Veterinary Technician program in Eastern Washington that includes a strong focus on large animal clinical rotations. •Avoid introducing a new mid-level practitioner for the purpose of solving the state's large animal veterinarian shortage. •Implementation Status • The College of Veterinary Medicine has initiated planning for a veterinary technician program to be embedded at the college, with budget and tuition structures currently under development. Estimated implementation costs are approximately \$575,000. Legislative funding would be necessary to fully establish and sustain an accredited program.
7	Support policy that prevents unhealthy competition between the state's rural veterinarians and telemedicine practices that are operating in the state's jurisdictions.	•Do not adopt new policies that further widen the conditions under which a Veterinary Client Patient Relationship (VCPR) can be established virtually. Maintain policies that prevent out-of-state, tele-medicine operations from practicing telehealth within Washington State.
8	Facilitate increased access to business development capital for large animal veterinarians practicing in rural areas.	•Expand Washington's existing Linked Deposit Program to include veterinarians who are practicing agricultural veterinary medicine in rural areas of the state, allowing them to qualify for reduced interest rate loans. •Fund, via a budget proviso, a grant program for rural veterinarians to support the purchase of equipment and facilities. The grants should range between \$25,000 to \$100,000, and the program should be administered by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA).