



Addressing Washington's Large Animal Veterinarian Shortage

Recommendations for Washington State University

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 WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

1

Recruit and attract students into large animal veterinary medicine.

2

Expand hands-on experiential training with large/agricultural animals.

3

Build institutional capacity and practitioner partnerships to enhance and sustain large animal education.



WSU EXTENSION

**Division of Governmental
Studies and Services**

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RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE GOALS

Recommendations are listed in order of priority.

	Recommendations	Implementation
1	WSU's College of Veterinary Medicine should develop a new strategic plan to enhance the delivery of large/agricultural animal education across all four years of its DVM program.	•The College of Veterinary Medicine should create an interim position for the purpose of developing a new strategic plan for delivering agricultural animal education to first- through fourth-year DVM students. • Consider further partnership with Animal Sciences, a certificate program, and a range of hands-on experiences. •Estimated annual cost of implementation: \$150,000 + benefits • One faculty position dedicated half-time to strategic planning with the remaining half-time dedicated to fulfilling the sixth recommended action.
2	WSU's College of Veterinary Medicine should take immediate steps to expand availability of externships and preceptorships in select livestock-concentrated areas in Washington State to enhance agricultural animal education.	•Identify and implement new opportunities for preceptorships and externships in the livestock-concentrated areas across Washington State to address current faculty shortages as well as decreased caseload in the veterinary teaching hospital. •Implementation Status • The CVM has already begun work on this recommendation. The Preceptor Director, the Associate Dean of Professional Programs, and the lead veterinary extension faculty are leading this effort, with plans to expand stakeholder involvement and improve communication with students to reduce barriers to preceptorship and externship opportunities.

	Recommendations	Implementation
3	WSU’s Animal Science program should increase undergraduate student opportunities for hands-on, experiential learning with large animals, to include opportunities for herd experience and production-based medicine.	•Expand and develop collaborative relationships with livestock producers in the immediate surrounding regions. •The College of Veterinary Medicine should coordinate with the Animal Science program to seek opportunities for its DVM students to participate, alongside Animal Science students, in these hands-on experiences. •To support internal opportunities for hands-on experiences, WSU should prioritize increased faculty and updated facilities for its Animal Science program.
4	WSU’s College of Veterinary Medicine should identify and implement new hands-on learning opportunities in the livestock-concentrated areas across Washington State.	•Leverage existing relationships to collaborate with relevant stakeholders (including the Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine, WSU [or their designees], the Washington State Veterinarian [or their designees], and other key actors) to identify potential sites. •Site visits should be conducted to determine the most strategic locations for focused clinical teaching experiences.



	Recommendations	Implementation
5	WSU's College of Veterinary Medicine should expand and strengthen collaborations with the University's Animal Science undergraduate degree program to enhance its outreach and facilitate targeted recruitment into the DVM graduate degree program.	•Coordinate recruitment efforts with CAHNRS' Animal Science undergraduate degree program to create a direct feeder of interested and qualified pre-veterinary students from the Animal Science program into the DVM program. •Implementation Status • During the course of this study, the CVM hired a full-time staff member to focus on engagement and outreach as part of a college-wide strategic plan. This staff member is currently working with CAHNRS to advance the coordination efforts included in this recommendation at no additional cost to the state.
6	WSU's College of Veterinary Medicine should coordinate with WSU's Animal Science program to increase its presence at youth-focused, large animal events and competitions statewide to conduct targeted recruitment well before prospective college students select an undergraduate major.	•The College of Veterinary Medicine, in coordination with the Animal Science program, should ensure routine presence of at least one faculty/clinical staff member, whose expertise or area of interest is focused on large animal medicine, at relevant agricultural events around the state.



	Recommendations	Implementation
7	WSU's College of Veterinary Medicine should further develop, expand, and leverage its existing Veterinary Paraprofessional Certificate Program for introducing high school students to the large animal veterinary profession.	•Design a new paraprofessional certificate that introduces high school students to information and skills related to large animal medicine and rural practice. The certificate should be actively promoted in high schools with specific emphasis among those located in Washington's rural communities that may not have faculty available to teach pre-veterinary and agricultural animal sciences. •Implementation Status • The College of Veterinary Medicine has already begun work on this recommendation with probable implementation scheduled for Fall, 2027 at no additional cost to the state.
8	The College of Veterinary Medicine should establish and host quarterly virtual town hall meetings with practicing rural veterinarians across the state.	•The Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine may designate a faculty member with large animal medicine expertise to host quarterly, virtual town hall meetings. Rural veterinarians from diverse regions across the state should be invited to attend. Emphasis on the inclusion of practicing veterinarians who are willing to provide support and hands-on experience to DVM students interested in large animal medicine should be prioritized. Recurring town hall meetings should seek to create a formalized communication channel between educators and practitioners to ensure an exchange of critical feedback that is beneficial to both the College and the larger food animal veterinary community. •Implementation Status • The College of Veterinary Medicine has already begun work on this recommendation with implementation scheduled for Fall, 2026 at no additional cost to the state.