



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FEDERAL VETERINARIANS

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NAFV applauds GAO report that urges federal agencies to plan for future veterinary workforce needs

Veterinarians across the federal government are crucial to protecting animal and public health, keeping our food safe, and responding to biological emergencies. Ensuring that key federal agencies that employ veterinarians have the workforce they need for the future is critical, which is why the National Association of Federal Veterinarians (NAFV) is applauding the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) new report that examines this important issue. The NAFV also applauds Representatives Kurt Schrader from Oregon and Ted Yoho from Florida for requesting the recent GAO report.

"Federal, state, industry, academic, and private veterinarians are the country's best resource for responding to animal health emergencies and public health outbreaks involving zoonotic diseases," said NAFV President Ken Angel, DVM.

To ensure that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has the veterinary workforce it needs to prepare for a large-scale animal disease outbreak or other emergency, the GAO recommends that the agriculture secretary identify: the number and types of federal veterinarians it needs, the sources required to have a sufficient workforce to respond, and the training needed to carry out their roles.

The GAO recommended that the director of the Office of Personnel Management monitor and evaluate the Talent Management Advisory Council's (TMAC) progress toward developing governmentwide goals for the federal veterinary workforce. GAO also recommended OPM work with TMAC members to obtain leadership support, particularly from the USDA and Health and Human Services Department, and evaluate whether the need for governmentwide, direct hire authority for veterinarians exists.

The NAFV agrees with the GAO that more work is needed across the federal government to hire an adequate workforce that meets current and future public and animal health challenges, as well as provide sufficient funding to train new workers and give them the resources they need. The United States has already been facing many challenges with inadequate staffing at critical facilities.

Currently, the veterinary workforce in USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) has a 13 percent vacancy rate that is causing severe stress and workload burdens on existing personnel in food production facilities throughout the nation. Veterinarians, inspectors and others are being required to work multiple shifts for multiple months to compensate for the long-term vacancies. FSIS is trying to

address the veterinary shortages by offering bonuses in hard-to-fill locations, but that has not reduced the vacancy rate yet. The USDA needs to commit more effort to easing the stress on the existing personnel so that they can continue protecting our food supply.

Within the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and state animal health agencies, hundreds of veterinarians and others are currently fighting to control and contain outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza--a disease that is rapidly killing millions of poultry across the Midwest. The current outbreaks are the largest in U.S. history and the workforce responding to the spreading disease is being significantly challenged if not overwhelmed. APHIS has maximized its internal workforce response and is now calling on assistance from its National Animal Health Emergency Response Corps. (NAHREC). More volunteers are urgently needed to assure a decisive response to any potential animal health crisis. Aside from that, APHIS needs funding to be able to properly train its workforce and give them the resources they need to do their jobs.

Texas animal health officials are now reporting outbreaks of another foreign disease called vesicular stomatitis, which affects livestock. Vesicular stomatitis mimics Foot-and-Mouth Disease, which the country eradicated in 1929, but if it continues to spread, the United States will require more veterinarians to address this insidious disease on top of the workforce needed to curb the spread of the avian influenza and prevent other disease introductions.

These current outbreaks emphasize the need for the USDA, HHS and other federal agencies to heed the GAO's recommendations. If public or animal health outbreaks or catastrophes occur, a strong veterinary workforce across all federal agencies will be needed.

Dr. Ken Angel emphasizes, "The NAFV is encouraging all federal agencies employing veterinarians to quickly assess their workforce capacities and capabilities to better prepare for emergencies and ensure they can assist other agencies when needed."

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The NAFV, founded in 1918, is recognized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as the representative organization for federally employed veterinarians and as an association of managers and supervisors. NAFV veterinarians practice preventive veterinary medicine on a broad scale, dealing with animal health, public health, and food safety issues with regional, national, and international importance. These broad responsibilities have profound effects on many aspects of American's health, agriculture and animal health.