

A Multi-faceted Study of the Availability of Food Animal Veterinarians in Tennessee

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Veterinary medicine today more than ever before is being challenged to meet multiple missions. While most veterinarians are being called upon by the public to provide companion animal medical services, there are also increasing demands in the areas of public health, food safety/security, regulatory medicine, biomedical research, academia, and corporate America.

The University of Tennessee, College of Veterinary Medicine's (UTCVM's) mission is to educate students in the art and science of veterinary medicine and related biomedical sciences. To fulfill this mission, the UTCVM professional curriculum must be diverse, encompassing the full spectrum of subjects which will help to meet societal needs. In other words, the veterinary curriculum must ensure students obtain diverse knowledge to meet societal needs in companion animal medicine, food animal medicine, public health, research, regulatory medicine, and academia. Also, admission practices should ensure a diversity of students to fulfill these needs.

UTCVM's management team has reviewed the findings from the multi-faceted study of the availability of food animal veterinarians in Tennessee (References at end). The findings from the study have been condensed into four key points as follows:

- 1. Most Tennessee livestock owners are satisfied with their access to veterinary medical services**
 - a. 82% of Tennessee livestock owners report that they have adequate access to veterinary services;
 - b. Among the 18% who reported inadequate access, delay in getting services was the primary reason, followed by the costs of such services, and the requirement to transport the animal(s) to the veterinarian; and
 - c. < 4.0% reported a lack of access to veterinary services.

- 2. Counties with inadequate veterinarians (based on population rates) also have inadequate numbers of other medical professionals**
 - a. This appears to be reflective of market forces which do not attract these professionals; and
 - b. This represents a potential threat to Tennessee's agriculture industry and to food safety and public health.

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- 3. An economic solution is necessary to address item 2**
- a. The solution is not on the input end, but rather on the output end of the veterinarian supply pipeline. The National Veterinary Medical Service Act represents an economic solution. Since Congress has not adequately funded this program, Tennessee should seek a state-level equivalent;
 - b. Each class admitted UTCVM has on average > 50% who are animal science majors; >75 % who have taken at least one animal science course; and
 - c. Solutions such as Senate Bill 19 will further drive up the costs of a veterinary education, without guaranteeing an increase in rural Tennessee practitioners. Senate Bill 19 will hurt some Tennesseans in that those who train at colleges without animal science will not qualify for admission to UTCVM except that they take more courses at other institutions, adding to their overall educational expense. More educational debt increases the likelihood of not being able to locate in a rural Tennessee community.
- 4. The University of Tennessee is fulfilling its land-grant mission when one considers that the primary sources of information for Tennessee livestock owners are directly or indirectly from the university** (see Table 9. *Veterinary Services and Tennessee's Animal Enterprises*, pg 20)
- a. Local veterinarian (54% of all TN rural veterinarians trained at UTCVM);
 - b. UT Extension in all 95 counties;
 - c. UT College of Veterinary Medicine trained most of Tennessee's veterinarians and also provides expert advice to them and services to livestock owners; and
 - d. It is particularly noteworthy that *for the past six years there has been an increase in the number of rural Tennessee veterinary practitioners.*

References: Multi-faceted study of the availability of food animal veterinarians in Tennessee –

- *Veterinary Needs Assessment*, UT College of Veterinary Medicine, January 2007
- *Veterinary Services and Tennessee's Animal Enterprises*, Jensen, English, and Menard, January 2007
- *Location of Veterinarians and the Economic Impacts of These Veterinary Services to Tennessee's Economy*, Menard, English, and Jensen, January 2007.

