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Farm Bill Will Benefit Academic Veterinary Medicine

The nearly \$1 trillion dollar 2014 Farm Bill contains several new programs and program revisions that will have an immediate impact on academic veterinary medicine. By providing new funding streams for agricultural research in animal health, production and welfare, the new bill provides multiple opportunities for schools of veterinary medicine.

Veterinary Services Grant Program

\$10 million per year has been authorized for the new Veterinary Services Grant Program (VSGP). This new competitive program will help relieve veterinary shortage situations by supporting private veterinary practices engaged in public health activities and veterinarians who are participating in or have successfully completed a Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) contract or similar state program.

For more than a decade, the House and Senate Agriculture Committees have worked to resolve the serious shortage of veterinarians in rural communities. With the passage of the National Veterinary Medical Service Act in December of 2003, a program was authorized to encourage large animal veterinarians to practice in communities that USDA designates as veterinary shortage areas. While this assistance helps attract veterinarians to these communities, gaps remain in veterinarian recruitment, attracting and training technical support staff, and meeting the long-term costs of operating veterinary practices in these communities. The Veterinary Services Grant Program addresses these needs and complements the loan repayment program by helping large animal veterinarians become established in these rural communities.

Grants can be used to recruit veterinarians and veterinary technicians in shortage areas, expand and establish practices in high-need areas, establish mobile portable clinics and televet services and establish education programs, including continuing education and distance education.

Qualified entities for the grants include state VMAs; national, allied, or regional veterinary organizations or specialty boards recognized by AVMA; accredited colleges or schools of veterinary medicine; university research or veterinary medical foundations; accredited departments of veterinary science or departments of comparative medicine; state agricultural experiment stations; state, local, or tribal government agencies; and entities located in the U.S. that operate a veterinary clinic in response to a veterinarian shortage situation.

National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN)

\$15 million per year is authorized for the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN). Funding for the NAHLN has been inadequate for years, largely because the NAHLN has not had its own budget line. During the past 12 years the NAHLN, composed of federal, university, and state veterinary diagnostic labs, has established the framework of a surveillance and emergency response system that provides critical resources for surveillance testing, information management, quality assurance and the development and validation of new diagnostic tests.

Animal Health and Disease Research (Section 1433 Formula Funds)

\$25 million per year is authorized for the Animal Health and Disease Research program, which has been changed extensively. The expanded Section 1433 now has a competitive grants program that includes the three focal areas of Food Security, One Health and Stewardship.

Grants can be used to conduct research to promote food security by improving feed efficiency; improving energetic efficiency; connecting genomics, proteomics, metabolomics and related phenomena to animal production; improving reproductive efficiency; and enhancing pre- and post harvest food safety systems.

Grants can also be used to support investigations into the relationship between animal and human health, such as by exploring new approaches for vaccine development; understanding and controlling zoonosis, including its impact on food safety; improving animal health through feed; and enhancing product quality and nutritive value; and developing and disseminating to the public tools and information based on the research conducted and sound science.

Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research

The bill authorizes the establishment of a new Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research, as a means to supplement USDA's basic and applied research activities. The new non-profit foundation is designed to leverage private funding, matched with federal dollars, to support public agricultural research. The Foundation is modeled on similar charities that benefit the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The initial federal contribution to the Foundation is \$200 million.

Federal investment in public agricultural research has been trending downward at a time when the demands of a growing population require that American agriculture

research again take a leading role in pushing forward food production. USDA, the National Academy of Sciences, the National Science Foundation and agricultural research stakeholders will play an integral role in the Foundation.

The Foundation is set up to foster public-private partnerships among the agricultural research community, including federal agencies, academia, non-profit organizations, corporations and individual donors to identify and prioritize the most pressing needs facing agriculture.

Authorization and Funding

The provisions contained in the Farm Bill represent significant achievements. However, with the exception of the Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research, the amounts are authorizations only. We will now need to focus our resources and advocacy efforts on obtaining appropriations for these programs during the annual budget process.

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