UNITED STATES ANIMAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

2026 Resolution

130th Annual Meeting
October 15-21, 2026
Madison, WI

RESOLUTION NUMBER: 13 APPROVED AS AMENDED

SOURCE: **JOINT COMMITTEE ON DIAGNOSTIC LABORATORY AND VETERINARY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

SUBJECT MATTER: **United States Department of Agriculture Rural Veterinary Action Plan**

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) and the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians (AAVLD) support the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Veterinary Action Plan (RVAP) and urge the Secretary of Agriculture to expeditiously implement and sustain the actions identified in the Plan.

USAHA and AAVLD further request that USDA establish an annual public RVAP Implementation and Accountability Report, or equivalent scorecard, addressing all five RVAP action areas and identifying, for each, actions completed, actions underway, actions not yet initiated, responsible agencies, milestones and deadlines, funding and authorities, measurable outputs and outcomes, and administrative, statutory, budgetary, or other barriers to implementation.

The annual report should include measures of progress important to rural practitioners, producers, state animal health officials, veterinary diagnostic laboratories, and animal agriculture, including grant-program outcomes; actions taken in response to USDA Economic Research Service findings on rural veterinary shortages; progress toward a veterinarian-specific federal rural-practice resource catalog or equivalent public resource; stakeholder recommendations received through RVAP engagement activities and USDA's responses to those recommendations; and identification of actions USDA can complete under existing authority and those requiring additional statutory authority, appropriations, or other congressional action.

USAHA and AAVLD further request that USDA report on the public veterinary infrastructure needed to support rural practice and animal agriculture, including federal veterinary workforce capacity within the USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). Reporting should include GS-0701 authorized positions, number of current filled positions, vacancies and vacancy duration, attrition, retirement eligibility, time to hire, use of recruitment and retention incentives, hard-to-fill locations, and measurable staffing goals and timelines. USDA should also provide specific information on the implementation status of veterinarian compensation actions, including any special salary rate or equivalent pay

proposal, the responsible office, scope, review stage, outstanding data requirements, expected decision points, and final disposition, as applicable.

USAHA and AAVLD urge USDA to continue meaningful consultation with USAHA, AAVLD, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the National Association of Federal Veterinarians, state animal health officials, colleges of veterinary medicine, veterinary diagnostic laboratories, practicing food-animal veterinarians, livestock and poultry organizations, producer groups, and other appropriate stakeholders as implementation proceeds.

USAHA and AAVLD request that USDA provide the annual RVAP Implementation and Accountability Report to USAHA and AAVLD until the principal objectives have been implemented and measurable improvements have been demonstrated in rural veterinary access, shortage-area recruitment and retention, and the state and federal veterinary capacity that supports animal agriculture.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In August 2025, United States (US) Secretary of Agriculture Brooke L. Rollins announced the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Veterinary Action Plan (RVAP), which outlines actions to increase the availability of food-animal veterinarians in rural communities and strengthen the recruitment and retention of veterinarians within USDA.

A robust and appropriately distributed veterinary workforce is essential to US animal health, food safety, agricultural productivity, and the availability and quality of the food supply. Veterinarians play critical roles in disease prevention, surveillance, diagnosis, and response; biosecurity; food-safety systems; regulatory activities; and the domestic and international movement of animals and animal products.

Shortages of veterinarians in rural food-animal practice and key government positions create vulnerabilities across this system. Inadequate veterinary capacity can delay disease detection and response, limit producers' access to essential services, constrain surveillance and regulatory functions, and increase risks to animal health, food production, public health, and trade. These concerns are heightened by emerging and transboundary animal diseases, zoonotic threats, foodborne disease, and increasing demands on the US food-production system.

USDA's *Rural Veterinary Action Plan* addresses these challenges through five principal actions:

1. Enhance and Streamline Veterinary Grant Programs
USDA has been working to strengthen the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) and Veterinary Services Grant Program (VSGP), including by streamlining applications and increasing support for programs designed to address veterinary shortage situations. These programs can help reduce financial barriers to rural food-animal practice and support sustainable veterinary services in underserved communities.

2. Analyze Rural Veterinary Shortages to Better Understand the Need
To provide the workforce data needed to identify areas of greatest need and inform federal, state, and local policy decisions, USDA directed its Economic Research Service (ERS) to further evaluate rural veterinary shortages. This effort resulted in USDA ERS's September 2026 report,

Food-animal Veterinarians and the Persistence of Rural Shortage Areas.

The report documents that shortages of food-animal and mixed-animal veterinarians remain persistent and localized across rural America, with implications for animal health, farm viability, food safety, disease preparedness, and supply-chain resilience. In 2024, 69 percent of areas designated for USDA's VMLRP remained unfilled, and 59 percent received no applications from veterinarians seeking loan-repayment support to serve those areas.

USDA ERS also identified economic pressures in rural practice, including declines in practice revenue and real veterinarian income, and noted that retirements can have an outsized effect in communities served by few practitioners. At the same time, rural residents are represented among veterinary-school applicants roughly in proportion to their share of the US population, suggesting that the challenge extends beyond attracting rural students to veterinary medicine and includes recruitment, training pathways, practice economics, and retention in food-animal practice.

Together, these findings provide an evidence base for USDA's *Rural Veterinary Action Plan*, reinforcing its focus on strengthening and streamlining veterinary grant and loan-repayment programs, better identifying where shortages occur and why they persist, improving recruitment and retention, supporting sustainable rural practices, and working with veterinary schools and other stakeholders to address barriers to food-animal careers.

3. Recruit and Retain USDA Veterinarians
Veterinarians within USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Food Safety and Inspection Service, and other programs perform mission-critical functions in disease surveillance and response, inspection, import and export activities, regulatory medicine, animal health, and food safety.

Persistent vacancies, particularly in rural assignments, inspection positions, ports of entry, and export certification roles, can limit USDA's ability to carry out these responsibilities. The Plan identifies strategies to address these vacancies, including improved salary rates, enhanced tuition reimbursement, recruitment incentives, and partnerships with veterinary schools and other stakeholders.

4. Catalog Federal Resources Available to Veterinarians for Establishing Rural Practices
Establishing or expanding a rural veterinary practice may require significant investment in facilities, equipment, vehicles, and personnel, particularly for graduates carrying substantial educational debt. USDA plans to catalog federal financing and assistance programs that may help veterinarians establish and sustain practices in underserved communities.

5. Work with Stakeholders to Strengthen the Rural Veterinary Workforce Pipeline
USDA intends to work with veterinary schools, producers, communities, professional organizations, and other stakeholders to better understand barriers to rural and food-animal practice and identify opportunities to improve recruitment and retention.

Strengthening this pipeline requires attention to the full continuum of workforce development, including recruitment into veterinary education, clinical training and mentorship, financial and practice support, and long-term career sustainability.

At the one-year point, publicly available information shows meaningful but uneven implementation of the RVAP. Grant-program activity and the completion of USDA ERS's rural veterinary shortage analysis are visible milestones, while important questions remain about whether shortage communities are gaining and retaining veterinarians, whether rural practices are receiving the promised federal resource support, how stakeholder recommendations are being acted upon, and how the federal veterinary workforce is being strengthened.

Rural private practitioners, state animal health officials, veterinary diagnostic laboratories, livestock and poultry industries, and federal veterinarians form an interconnected animal-health infrastructure. Capacity in each part of that system affects access to veterinary care, regulatory programs, disease surveillance, early recognition of emerging and foreign animal diseases, continuity of agricultural production, and emergency response.

Effective implementation, therefore, requires transparent measures of progress across all five RVAP action areas. Annual reporting should identify milestones, responsible agencies, deadlines, funding and authorities, outputs, outcomes, and barriers so that USDA, Congress, states, industry, and veterinary stakeholders can determine whether the RVAP is measurably improving veterinary access and animal-health capacity.

Prompt and accountable implementation of the *Rural Veterinary Action Plan* will help deliver the veterinary capacity needed to protect animal health, support producers, safeguard the food supply, respond to emerging disease threats, and maintain confidence in US agricultural products and trade.