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## **AVMA, veterinary foundation tackle veterinary shortage with new incentive program**

(SCHAUMBURG, Ill.) March 12, 2010 – Their numbers are dwindling at such a rate that our food supply may be in jeopardy – and that decline may continue as their educational debt continues to rise.

These are just two of the challenges facing food animal veterinary medicine, one of the bulwarks of our food safety system.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), as part of its ongoing effort to bolster the number of food animal veterinarians in the United States, today announced a new initiative to help reverse the downward trend – an educational debt relief program for those veterinarians whose job it is to keep our food animals healthy and our food supply safe.

The Food Animal Veterinarian Recruitment and Retention Program, a joint effort of the AVMA and its charitable arm, the American Veterinary Medical Foundation, and funded by several industry partners, will provide financial incentives in the form of student loan debt forgiveness for veterinarians who commit to four years of employment in food animal veterinary medicine.

Dr. Ron DeHaven, AVMA chief executive officer, says the pilot program comes at a time when the federal government is also recognizing the critical role food

animal veterinarians play in protecting our food animals, our food supply and our economic and national security. The United States Department of Agriculture recently announced that a similar federal program, the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program, will soon begin accepting applications.

“The AVMA has been working on Capitol Hill for years to generate attention, pass legislation and fund programs that would directly address the food animal veterinarian shortage, and we are very pleased that the federal loan repayment program is seeing the light of day,” Dr. DeHaven said. “But we also know that we can’t rely solely on government funding; we also have to step up and do our part.

“That’s why we worked to develop the Food Animal Veterinarian Recruitment and Retention Program. It’s a wonderful complement to the federal program, and being able to announce that the program is up and running is a testament to our industry partners and their commitment to helping turn the tide.”

According to AVMA membership data, about half of all food animal veterinarians are over the age of 50 and at the cusp of retirement. At the same time, only about 15 percent of veterinary school graduates are pursuing that career path, most of whom have an average of \$120,000 in educational debt. At that rate, recent studies indicate that the supply of veterinarians working in food safety will fall short by 4 to 5 percent annually through 2016.

“Food supply veterinarians are the guardians of our nation’s food supply from both a health and safety perspective. In fact, they will be the very first medical professionals to diagnose and contain animal diseases that could threaten the human population,” Dr. DeHaven said. “We’re facing an impending crisis, and action is required to make sure that our country has enough of these professionals working for the benefit of society.”

Depending on demand and the availability of future funds, the new AVMA program seeks to support about 50 rural food animal veterinarians over the next five years by providing total payments for each practitioner of up to \$100,000 that can be applied to student loan debt.

The AVMA announced the new program today at the annual meeting of the Student American Veterinary Medical Association in Madison, Wis., an annual gathering of more than 1,000 students enrolled in the nation's 28 accredited veterinary schools and colleges.

“This is bigger than just loan repayment. This is also about recruiting and retaining the highest quality veterinary professionals to ensure the health and safety of the nation's food supply,” said Michael Cathey, executive director of the American Veterinary Medical Foundation. “As the charitable arm of the AVMA, our focus will be to infuse long-term support into this critical area. We are confident that the animal health industry and the general public will embrace this initiative with open arms and contribute resources to make it a permanent program, the impact of which will be felt not only across the nation but around the world. We view this as a perfect example of how charitable giving can have a lasting effect on the betterment of society.”

Dr. DeHaven offers a video statement on this new student loan debt forgiveness program and the shortages it will address at the [AVMA Media Library](#). The direct link is:

<http://www.avmamedia.org/display.asp?sid=233&NAME=Dr. Ron DeHaven, AVMA CEO, explains new food supply scholarships>.

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The AVMA and its more than 80,000 member veterinarians are engaged in a wide variety of activities dedicated to advancing the science and art of animal, human and public health. Visit the AVMA Web site at [www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org) to learn more about veterinary medicine and animal care.

The American Veterinary Medical Foundation is the charitable arm of the AVMA. For over 40 years, AVMF has been dedicated to protecting and advancing the well-being and medical care of animals. Charitable contributions and support to the Foundation help veterinarians help animals. Funding priorities include state emergency preparedness, disaster planning, animal health studies and veterinary student scholarships. In the last decade, AVMF has awarded grants totaling over \$7,500,000. For more information visit, [www.avmf.org](http://www.avmf.org).