

TEXAS VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

POSITION STATEMENT

MEETING THE RURAL VETERINARY NEEDS OF TEXAS

Issue: In recent years the state of Texas has experienced a decline in the number of veterinarians available to meet the demands of rural communities in the state. There are numerous causes for this decline, and it will take a comprehensive strategy, using multiple tactics, to resolve the problem.

Background: For years, the State of Texas has been carefully monitoring the adequacy of access to veterinary care in rural communities in Texas and the role veterinary education and other factors play in meeting those needs. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) began formally reviewing the needs for professional education in Texas, including veterinary education, beginning in 2002. Since then the THECB has provided an update on the state of the profession and veterinary medical education in 2009 and 2016. Basing its reports in large part on work done by several other organizations, the THECB found the following:

- Food animal practice as a proportion of the total veterinary workforce has been shrinking since the 1980's.
- Numerous factors have led to this decline in rural-based large animal veterinarians, most of which are tied to broader social and economic trends.
- The decline of the rural veterinarian is also due in part to the transformation of rural areas themselves, with more and more of the state's population shifting to urban areas.
- This sector of the veterinary profession is facing an uncertain future.

TVMA Position: *The Texas Veterinary Medical Association supports a multifaceted approach to addressing the rural veterinarian shortage in Texas, with an emphasis on three key components to increase the number of graduate veterinarians in Texas with a rural background, who are more likely to return to practice veterinary medicine in rural portions of the state:*

- Funding of the "Rural Veterinarian Incentive Program" at a level of \$1,000,000 in FY 2020 and \$1,000,000 in FY 2021 to fund Texas Education Code, Section 88.627, as one of the state's top priorities to help alleviate the deficiency of veterinary services in rural communities in Texas; thus, expanding and improving the channel of graduate veterinarians for rural animal medicine in Texas in order to recruit and retain veterinarians throughout Texas.
- Support for the Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences (TAMU-CVM), including its "Serving Every Texan, Every Day" program that has begun establishing partnerships with four regional system universities through memoranda of agreement to help funnel students with rural backgrounds and interests in key agricultural sectors of Texas into the TAMU-CVM.
- Support for the proposed Texas Tech University School of Veterinary Medicine in Amarillo, Texas whose stated objectives include graduating veterinarians who serve small, agricultural and regional communities across Texas.