

Impact of Recruitment and Retention of Food Animal Veterinarians on the U.S. Food Supply

Food animal veterinarians (FAV) safeguard the health and welfare of livestock, poultry, and aquatic food animals and food safety and quality along the entire “farm to fork” continuum.

- Of particular importance is the role veterinarians play in preparation for and mitigation of disease outbreaks.
- A 2015 study estimated that the total economic impact of an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the United States would range from \$16 to \$140 billion.

The veterinary profession has struggled with a central workforce related question—[why is it difficult to recruit and retain FAV in the United States?](#)

- [Underlying factors impacting recruitment and retention](#) include food demand and food animal production intensity, both of which are driven, in part, by population growth.
- The [availability of FAV](#) in rural areas extends to livestock producers, rural communities, and veterinary colleges, even reaching national news media and warning of risks to livestock and the food supply.
- [Multiple social and economic factors](#) can be identified in driving the recruitment and retention of rural veterinarians including comparative wage rates, lifestyle preferences, social and community support systems, access to services, and veterinary practice infrastructure.
- The [rural nature](#) of many of the FAV practices is a disincentive for veterinarians that seek greater access to services, employment opportunities for family members, and a more robust social support system than many smaller communities can provide.
- [Salaries for rural mixed practices](#) are generally lower than for specialized, exclusive FAV and companion animal veterinarians and when added to a very high student debt load poses further challenges for rural mixed FAV.



[An adequate supply](#) of FAV starts with getting students interested in FSVM, getting them adequately trained and employed in FSVM jobs, and finally, keeping them in those FSVM jobs.

- Many of the recruitment factors such as [student debt, rural living, gender, and generation](#) influences are also retention factors that lead to career or job switching by FAV.
- [High student debt](#) is arguably the biggest issue facing the veterinary profession. When asked about issues important to the veterinary profession, FAV interested students in particular ranked debt highest.
- Many students interested in FSVM come from [rural communities](#) and have experience in animal agriculture and these students are thought to be an important pool of future FAV.

Practices that create an environment where employed veterinarians feel appreciated, supported, and successful are likely to have higher retention rates.

- Establishing a [clear plan for mentorship](#) and following through on that plan provides an excellent return on investment through veterinary employee retention.
- The increased use of [veterinary technicians/nurses](#) is linked to higher practice efficiency and revenue.
- [Telehealth](#), or using technology to deliver health information, education, or care remotely, also presents opportunities for expanded scope and reach of services for rural practices.

Experts to Contact for More Information:

Dr. Christine Navarre (CNavarre@agcenter.lsu.edu); Angela Daniels (Angela.Daniels@tahc.texas.gov); Dr. Clay Mathis (Clay.Mathis@tamuk.edu); Dr. Tye Perrett (tyep@feedtohealth.com); Dr. Dan Posey (dposey@cvm.tamu.edu); Dr. Alejandro Ramirez (ramireza@iastate.edu); Dr. Anjel Stough-Hunter (stoughha@ohiodominican.edu); Dr. Carie Telgen (carietelgen@gmail.com); Dr. David Welch, (welchdavid59@gmail.com); Dr. Nicole Olynk Widmar (nwidmar@purdue.edu); Dr. Matthew Salois (MSalois@avma.org)

To view the complete text of this CAST Issue Paper, click [here](#) or visit the CAST website (www.cast-science.org) and click on Publications. For more information about CAST, visit the website or contact CAST at 515-292-2125 ext 231.



To order copies of *Impact of Recruitment and Retention of Food Animal Veterinarians on the U.S. Food Supply*, visit the CAST website (www.cast-science.org), click on Publications, and select Issue Papers.

CAST COMMUNICATES CREDIBLE SCIENCE

The Council for Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST) is a nonprofit organization with its membership composed of scientific and professional societies, companies, nonprofits, and individuals. Through its network of experts, CAST assembles, interprets, and communicates credible, balanced, science-based information to policymakers, the media, the private sector, and the public.

The primary work of CAST is the publication of papers highly regarded as a source of science-based information written and reviewed by volunteer scientists and subject experts from many disciplines. CAST is funded through membership dues, unrestricted financial gifts, and grants.

Upcoming CAST Publications/Events

- ***Producing Food Products from Cultured Animal Tissues*** (April 2020)
- ***Stewardship Challenges for New Pest Management Technologies in Agriculture*** (May 2020 rollout)
- ***The Microbiome's Positive Impacts on Crops*** (June 2020 rollout)

