

**SECOND AND FINAL REPORT OF THE BOARD
OF VETERINARY MEDICINE, VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS**

**Shortage of Large Animal
Veterinarians in the
Commonwealth (HJR 43, 2024)**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



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COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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TO: The Honorable Alfonso H. Lopez
Chair, House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources

The Honorable Sam Rasoul
Chair, House Committee on Education

The Honorable David W. Marsden
Chair, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources

The Honorable Ghazala F. Hashmi
Chair, Senate Committee on Education and Health

FROM: Arne W. Owens
Director, Virginia Department of Health Professions

DATE: January 5, 2026

RE: Second and Final Report Regarding the Shortage of Large Animal Veterinarians in the Commonwealth

This report is submitted in compliance with House Joint Resolution No. 43 and Senate Joint Resolution No. 15, which required:

That the Board of Veterinary Medicine and the State Veterinarian be requested to study the shortage of large animal veterinarians. [The Board and State Veterinarian] shall (i) identify ways to strengthen existing debt repayment programs for veterinarians, (ii) examine options for developing programs that offer business support to provide incentives or low-interest business loans for large animal private practices; (iii) identify programs that support a strong pipeline of veterinary students from rural backgrounds and help such students navigate post-secondary education to increase retention; (iv) examine other possible solutions for increasing the

number of large animal veterinarians in the Commonwealth, such as expanding veterinary technician-type or physician assistant-type programs to allow large animal veterinarians to expand their scope of practice in rural areas; and (v) reexamine the recommendations from the 2010 study on the shortage of large animal veterinarians published pursuant to House Joint Resolution 730 (2009).

Should you have questions about this report, please feel free to contact me at (804) 367-4648 or arne.owens@dhp.virginia.gov.

AO/EB

Enclosure

CC: The Honorable Janet Kelly, Secretary of Health and Human Resources

Preface

This report is submitted in compliance with House Joint Resolution No. 43 and Senate Joint Resolution No. 15 (hereinafter “the Joint Resolutions”), which required:

That the Board of Veterinary Medicine and the State Veterinarian be requested to study the shortage of large animal veterinarians. [The Board and State Veterinarian] shall (i) identify ways to strengthen existing debt repayment programs for veterinarians, (ii) examine options for developing programs that offer business support to provide incentives or low-interest business loans for large animal private practices; (iii) identify programs that support a strong pipeline of veterinary students from rural backgrounds and help such students navigate post-secondary education to increase retention; (iv) examine other possible solutions for increasing the number of large animal veterinarians in the Commonwealth, such as expanding veterinary technician-type or physician assistant-type programs to allow large animal veterinarians to expand their scope of practice in rural areas; and (v) reexamine the recommendations from the 2010 study on the shortage of large animal veterinarians published pursuant to House Joint Resolution 730 (2009).

The Joint Resolutions require the Board to submit this report “no later than the first day of the next Regular Session of the General Assembly” each year of the two-year study. The first report was submitted January 6, 2025. This is the second and final report.

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I. Executive Summary

Pursuant to the Joint Resolutions, the Board of Veterinary Medicine (“Board”) and the State Veterinarian convened a workgroup which met two times in 2025. The workgroup considered the required topics of the Joint Resolutions, which were as follows:

1. Identify ways to strengthen existing debt repayment programs for veterinarians, including making recommendations on how to simplify application criteria, explore state matching loan repayment programs, limit barriers for participation, and improve methods for consistent identification of veterinary shortage areas to better target rural communities in need.
2. Explore options for developing programs that offer business support to provide incentives or low-interest business loans for large animal private practices.
3. Identify programs that support a strong pipeline of veterinary students from rural backgrounds and help such students navigate post-secondary education to increase retention.
4. Consider other possible solutions for increasing the number of large animal veterinarians in the Commonwealth, such as expanding veterinary technician-type or physician assistant-type programs to allow large animal veterinarians to expand their scope of practice in rural areas.
5. Reexamine the recommendations from the 2010 study on the shortage of large animal veterinarians published pursuant to House Joint Resolution 730 (2009).

During its first year, the workgroup identified four subgroups for areas deemed essential to this study: (1) supporting data; (2) financial resources; (3) licensed veterinary technician (“LVT”) scope of practice; and (4) veterinary school class size. Each subgroup reported findings and recommendations to the workgroup, which adopted the recommendations as summarized below.

The workgroup, based on its first-year recommendations, pursued several actions to attract practitioners and support large animal veterinary practice in rural Virginia. Going forward, these actions require continuing support and funding to make a substantial and sustainable impact on the shortage. Although this report concludes the efforts produced by the workgroup, which has spanned two years, support of large animal veterinarians in the Commonwealth is an ongoing endeavor that requires renewed commitment from public and private partners to remain successful.

Supporting data

Based on the supporting data subgroup’s first year recommendations, the workgroup directed surveys of stakeholders, including food animal producers, livestock market regions, and licensed veterinarians and LVTs. The workgroup then used that data to pinpoint shortage areas and assess ongoing needs.

Financial resources

As recommended by the financial resources subgroup, legislative bills and budget amendments were introduced during the 2025 General Assembly to establish and initially fund two separate grant programs, as well as a veterinary coordinator position through Virginia Tech's Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine (V-MCVM). These changes strategically support established and newly licensed large animal veterinarians in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

LVT scope of practice

Aligning with the LVT scope of practice subgroup first-year recommendations, the Board continues to expand educational outreach to advance awareness of the profession and opportunities that exist in large animal medicine. In August 2025, the Board initiated a regulatory action to create a pathway and requirements for haul-in¹ large animal veterinary establishments, which will increase opportunities for LVTs to practice large animal medicine. The first step of that regulatory action, the notice of intended regulatory action ("NOIRA"), remains in the executive branch review process. The Virginia Association of Licensed Veterinary Technicians is exploring legislation for title protection of LVTs to address the misidentification of veterinary assistants as "technicians"² and to elevate the profile and compensation for this profession.

Veterinary medicine class size

As recommended by the veterinary medicine class size subgroup, a budget amendment was introduced during the 2025 General Assembly to fund an increase in the number of seats available to Virginia residents at V-MCVM. The amendment failed to pass and was not added to the final budget.

¹ Under current regulations, veterinary medicine may only be practiced out of a registered establishment categorized as stationary ("bricks and mortar") or ambulatory (generally house calls or farm visits). (See 18VAC150-20-180 and 18VAC150-20-201.) Large animal veterinarians often travel extensively to provide healthcare at animals' locations, impacting patient safety and contributing to burnout and attrition. Haul-in facilities would enable veterinarians to treat more patients, would address environmental factors (inclement weather, poor barn lighting), and travel times without requiring the veterinarian to incur the financial burden of opening and maintaining a stationary establishment.

² The Board of Veterinary Medicine routinely receives information through investigations, inspections and communication with the public that veterinarians, unlicensed veterinary assistants and the public use the term "veterinary technician" to describe all staff who assist the veterinarian, regardless of whether they are licensed. Unlicensed individuals have been identified as performing duties that require a licensed veterinary technician. This includes placing IV catheters, intubating surgical patients, and accessing or administering federally controlled drugs, all of which directly relate to patient and public safety.

Workgroup Members

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II. Meetings of the Workgroup

The workgroup held meetings on April 16, 2025, and September 4, 2025. The Board's executive director and a board member participated in separate meetings with the State Veterinarian and other stakeholders to develop and review applications to select the 2025 grant recipients awarded through the Virginia Large Animal Veterinary Grant Program ("Grant Program") and the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission's ("TRRC") Large Animal Veterinary Incentive Program ("LAVIP").

As a result of strong contributions from participants and the leading state agencies during the study's first year, the workgroup achieved significant progress in its second year initiating and implementing ongoing programs to address the large animal veterinarian shortage.

III. Supporting Data

During its second year, the workgroup collected and compiled additional reference materials to facilitate development of proposed solutions and recommendations for the two-year study. The reference collection is maintained by the Board and will be publicly posted to serve as a resource to facilitate awareness and participation in programs and implemented solutions.

The workgroup developed targeted questions for the Board's annual veterinarian and LVT license renewal survey that will be used annually and reported by the Department of Health Professions' Healthcare Workforce Data Center ("HWDC") to provide ongoing data capture to identify types and locations of large animal veterinary shortages. The Board will coordinate with the HWDC to revise these survey questions as needed in subsequent years to measure the efficacy of implemented solutions proposed by the workgroup and to identify shortage trends.

The Board is developing a periodic newsletter to increase awareness of opportunities for large animal veterinarians, applicants, and the public.

IV. Financial Resources

The workgroup identified geographic challenges, environmental conditions, and lack of shared resources as factors contributing to the attrition of large animal veterinarians in the Commonwealth. The workgroup recommended development of a regulatory pathway under the Board of Veterinary Medicine for haul-in or shared use veterinary establishments for large animals, which could be matched with grants or other funding for ongoing financial support. These establishments may also expand educational opportunities for participants in Future Farmers of America, 4-H youth development, and high school agricultural programs to generate early interest in large animal veterinary medicine.

The workgroup noted that the development of a state loan repayment program tied to practice in underserved communities may be combined with other federal and private loans to reduce the financial burdens on new veterinarians wishing to enter large animal practice. Following a survey of information from similar programs in other states, the workgroup recommended that a program administrator coordinate student financial resources. Virginia Tech's Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine recently established a position, titled the Coordinator to Support Virginia's Large Animal Veterinary Workforce, to strengthen the Commonwealth's large animal veterinary workforce by supporting recruitment, placement, and long-term retention of large animal veterinarians in underserved areas.

In 2025, the Grant Program was created under the Virginia Department of Consumer and Agricultural Services ("VDACS") to provide four recipients with up to \$110,000 disbursed over three years to support large animal veterinary services across the Commonwealth. Russell County received a Governor's Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Fund ("AFID") Planning Grant matched by TRRC funds to support the creation of a long-term incentive program aimed at recruiting large animal veterinarians to Southwest Virginia. The TRRC LAVIP includes financial and logistical support, enhanced veterinary services, and collaboration with regional veterinary schools. Russell County will also contribute land for facilities and equipment to help new veterinarians establish haul-in veterinary practices.

Beginning July 1, 2025, VDACS received 43 applications from veterinarians across the state who are integral to Virginia's food supply and rural economies. As of October 31, 2025, four applicants have been awarded grants through the Grant Program and three have been awarded grants through the TRRC LAVIP to boost large animal veterinary services across the Commonwealth. Together, the grants total \$890,000. Grant recipients were selected by a panel of industry experts using formalized scoring guidelines focused on community impact. The panel included the State Veterinarian and representatives from TRRC, Virginia Farm Bureau, the Board, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Academy of Food Animal Practitioners, and the Virginia Veterinary Medical Association.

V. Licensed Veterinary Technician Scope of Practice

The workgroup examined a variety of references defining current LVT scope of practice to identify barriers to expansion of the profession. The workgroup determined that Virginia's LVT practice act may benefit from clarification to distinguish the role of an LVT from an unlicensed veterinary assistant. Title protection for LVTs may elevate the earning capacity of practitioners and address the misuse and misidentification of veterinary assistants as "technicians." Additional factors limiting the widespread use of LVTs in large animal medicine include geographic variability, prohibitions to independent diagnosing and prescribing by LVTs, government requirements for food animal medicine, and financial constraints of large animal veterinarians to employ LVTs.

The workgroup developed targeted questions to identify ongoing factors which contribute to the low number of LVTs practicing in large animal veterinary medicine and animal shelters for use in the Board's annual veterinary technician license renewal survey. The questions, which were included in the 2024 renewal survey, focused on identification of LVTs working in a large animal setting and the types of animals treated. HWDC published the results of the 2024 renewal survey in February 2025. Survey data indicated that 11% of survey respondents work with large animals.³ Survey questions will be revised by the Board as needed in subsequent years to measure the efficacy of implemented solutions proposed by the workgroup and to identify areas of specific needs.

Limited exposure to large animal medicine in LVT educational programs contributes to fewer numbers of LVTs participating in large animal medicine upon graduation. Expansion of pathways to LVT programs and opportunities for large animal training in LVT program curricula is needed and may be integrated into a haul-in practice model to increase opportunities for LVTs in large animal medicine. Haul-in veterinary establishments may expand utilization of LVTs in large animal medicine. Only licensed veterinarians and LVTs are authorized to access controlled substances, and LVTs are widely used in small animal veterinary establishments to maintain compliance with drug laws and veterinary establishment inspection requirements, as well as overall practice management. Establishing a haul-in veterinary practice model will allow veterinarians in haul-in facilities to use LVTs to maintain and manage controlled substances, similar to small animal veterinary establishments. Utilizing a stationary establishment for large animal medicine will also expand opportunities for LVTs to assist with clinical tasks, such as anesthesia induction and IV catheter insertion, to support the large animal veterinarian in ways that are not economically feasible in an ambulatory, farm-based practice.

Large animal veterinarians typically work unassisted or use trained individuals to corral and restrain large animal patients to minimize stress and ensure the safety of the animal and veterinarian. A certification program for such assistants is currently available through Virginia Department of Education vocational training that may be developed to meet national certification

³ See HWDC's [Virginia's Veterinary Technician Workforce: 2024](https://www.dhp.virginia.gov/media/dhpweb/docs/hwdc/vetmed/0302VetTechs2024.pdf), available at <https://www.dhp.virginia.gov/media/dhpweb/docs/hwdc/vetmed/0302VetTechs2024.pdf>, page 20.

standards. This would provide large animal veterinarians with a greater number of appropriately trained assistants in Virginia to increase efficacy and safety of patients and the public.

VI. Veterinary School Class Size

During the first year of the study, the veterinary school class size subgroup analyzed information about enrollment, available financial assistance, current class size, and new veterinary programs seeking accreditation and determined that available seats at veterinary schools could potentially increase by approximately 30%. Given the constraints of current programs in recruiting qualified faculty, available educational and training facilities, and budget, an overall increase in class size is not a viable mechanism to address the large animal veterinarian shortage. The workgroup determined that it is possible to increase the percentage of seats offered to Virginia residents if funding is provided and contractual obligations with neighboring states to provide seats are met. Adequate state funding is paramount to enable V-MCVM to offer more seats to Virginia residents pursuing large animal medicine. A budget amendment introduced during the 2025 General Assembly to fund an increase in the number of seats available to Virginia residents at V-MCVM, however, failed to pass.

Lincoln Memorial College of Veterinary Medicine, a private program in Tennessee near the Virginia border, is exploring expansion of its scholarship program for Virginia residents. This would create another pathway to expose veterinary students to local mentorship, resources, and state infrastructure from which to develop a practice network upon graduation.

VII. Reexamination of 2010 Study

The recommendations resulting from the 2010 large animal veterinarian shortage study included similar recommendations to the workgroup created by the Joint Resolutions, including:

- Encourage veterinary access to economic development initiatives;
- Encourage veterinary access to grants from the Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission (now TRRC);
- Provide business mentorship for rural veterinary practices;
- Increase state funding to support growth and expansion of the V-MCVM to serve a larger student body;
- Legislative and executive branch support for ongoing federal initiatives; and
- Use of the Federal Veterinary Medical Loan Repayment Program that was authorized by the National Veterinary Medical Service Act.

Based on the 2010 study, legislation was introduced to establish a grant program to promote efforts to develop, implement, and sustain veterinary services. Legislation filed following the 2010 study also intended to establish fellowships for on-the-job training of veterinarians in food systems security and public health, and to increase faculty teaching in veterinary public health. These bills were ultimately unsuccessful. Lack of funding and ongoing attention to the shortage of practitioners as it existed in 2010 directly contributed to the exacerbation of the shortage noted in the Joint Resolutions.

First year recommendations of the workgroup resulted in the development of meaningful programs and initiatives that will address shortage areas. Ongoing funding and community infrastructure, starting with early education to create pathways to large animal medicine, increased opportunities for veterinary education. Continuing education and support for veterinarians and LVTs practicing in rural areas are critical to the sustainability of the workgroup's efforts.

VIII. Workgroup Final Recommendations

In its second year, the workgroup made the recommendations detailed below.

- 1. Workforce development and training.** The workgroup recommends the establishment of a career pathway for rural farming and community youths to receive training and national certification as large animal veterinary assistants. This recommendation includes expanding educational opportunities by developing funding for additional seats for Virginia students at the state veterinary school and expanding LVT educational programs to increase large animal education externships.
- 2. Strategic partnerships and data-driven planning.** The workgroup recommends development of a partnership among key organizations, specifically local agricultural economic development offices, the TRRC, county Farm Bureau offices, and Virginia Cooperative Extension. This partnership would conduct periodic surveys and analyze data to identify regions most affected by large animal veterinarian shortages. Additionally, the workgroup recommends collection of data from practicing large animal veterinarians to assess current needs and to inform loan repayment incentive programs and grant opportunities to attract new veterinarians to underserved areas. Finally, the workgroup recommends the creation of a stakeholder board or partnership to facilitate ongoing dialogue and maintain an information repository to track evolving needs and shortages.
- 3. Infrastructure and incentives.** The workgroup recommends continuation of funding for the Grant Program to support veterinarians in shortage areas. The workgroup further recommends renewal of the Governor's AFID grant to match TRRC funding for LAVIP, supporting haul-in facilities. The workgroup recommends incentivizing large animal practice through existing grants and future funding sources in an integrated practice model that addresses environmental considerations, opportunities for LVTs, shared resources, early education in large animal medicine, and alignment with funding sources. This large animal veterinary practice model would be rooted in the local community, serving both agricultural producers and rural residents with high-quality, accessible care. It would serve not only as a clinical service hub for local ambulatory veterinarians but also as an educational and workforce development center by introducing youth to the veterinary profession through mentorships, externships, and hands-on learning opportunities, fostering early interest in large animal medicine. LVTs would play a central role in the practice model, contributing expertise to patient care, client education, and team-based service delivery. By integrating professional support staff and youth engagement, this practice model could strengthen the rural veterinary pipeline and build lasting connections within the community.
- 4. Retention and long-term support.** The workgroup recommends development of support systems to ensure continued practitioner engagement and retention of rural veterinarians after loan repayment obligations are fulfilled. The workgroup further recommends integration of LVTs into the practice model for haul-in veterinary establishments to support

large animal veterinarians.

IX. Conclusions and Next Steps

The workgroup determined that success in addressing the large animal veterinarian shortage in rural areas requires a multifaceted approach and an ongoing commitment to continue funding for established programs. This approach includes providing opportunities for students to learn about large animal veterinary medicine in primary and secondary education, offering diverse public and private financial assistance during veterinary school, linking incentives to rural practice, and developing infrastructure and resources for long-term success in underserved communities.

The workgroup acknowledged the shortage of LVTs in Virginia. This issue, however, does not align with the mandates for this study. Additionally, LVT title protection is outside of the scope of the workgroup. The Board will review data collected from the annual renewal survey to determine next steps to address shortages.

Outreach and community engagement are key to increasing awareness of shortage areas and trends as well as available resources. The Board's development of a public newsletter and resource repository, the HWDC's published annual veterinary profession reports, and VDACS's news releases highlighting application periods and criteria all serve to increase awareness of opportunities for large animal veterinary licensees, applicants, and the public.

