

Weekly Article

1-16-2023

I Know Where The Beef Is but Where Are the Vets?

Hello, my name is Richard Purdin with OSU Extension, Ag and Natural Resource Educator, and Community Development Educator for Adams County. I hope to better inform local producers and the public of the latest news in the world of agriculture. It is the middle of January and 63 days away from Spring (March 20th) but who is counting? If you are like me, you are likely dreaming of the longer warmer days of spring, but every season has its purpose even winter! Wintertime is a good time for planning and prepping for a new growing season. Winter is also a time when nature is supposed to keep a hand on some of our hard-to-control plant and insect species that like to feast on our crops, gardens, livestock, and humans. As our winter season continues to feature above-normal temperatures and higher humidity levels, invasive plants such as bush honeysuckle and Japanese honeysuckle continue to thrive, and other pests such as termites, ladybugs, stink bugs, and cockroaches are not phased much by the winter winds. Another pest to be aware of during the winter is ticks, yes, some species of ticks are winter-hardy and can be a risk for livestock, pets, and humans. The black-legged tick is one that can be very active during the winter months attaching to its prey and vectoring diseases such as Lyme disease. Don't let your guard down, check yourself after working outside or taking a winter hike. Another threat to livestock and their stewards does grow in our pastures or suck our blood but instead could hurt your bottom line when livestock get sick. What I am referring to is the lack of large animal veterinarians. The other day I came across a well-written article by Clinton L. Neill PH.D. an assistant professor in veterinary Economics for the Cornell Center of Veterinary Business and Entrepreneurship. The title of the article is Addressing the Persistent Shortage of Food Animal Veterinarians and Its Impact on Rural Communities. I would recommend you read the article for yourself but here are the key points I would like to share.

1. In 2021 the USDA identified 200 shortages across 500 rural counties that had no access to food animal veterinarians, and many have been vacant for 5+ years.
2. Only 3-4% of new veterinarian science graduates actually become food animal veterinarians in the last 20 years.
3. Three key factors affecting the food animal veterinarian shortages include increasing student debt, a slightly lower number of students enrolling in food animal veterinarian science courses and graduating, and the rapidly growing companion animal sector offering higher wages with less labor.
4. 40 years ago, 40% of veterinarians focused on food animal-related practices.

5. 41% of food animal veterinarian graduate students graduate with \$200,000 in student debt. The average debt-to-income ratio is 2.6 with an average salary of \$84,000- \$110,000 a year (earn every bit of it).
6. Factors such as higher cost of living, consolidation of livestock farms, less labor force, and lower revenue streams have prevented new veterinary start-up businesses in rural communities.

Some potential fixes

Mr. Neill offered some potential solutions or at least helpful suggestions that could go a long way in restoring the growing problem of food animal veterinary shortages.

- Expand funding for the veterinarian Medical Loan repayment program established in 2003.
- Provide loan repayment tax-free awards to veterinarians who agree to work in public sectors and rural areas
- Establish low-interest business loans for food animal private practices.
- Support schools by enhancing training opportunities and actively recruiting students from rural backgrounds.

This article was a great reminder of how important food animal veterinarians are not only to food security but for our small rural communities that still rely on the services of food animal veterinarians. With new antibiotic regulations and increasing pressures of producing healthy animals more efficiently, I truly believe it is more important than ever for young people to pursue a career in food animal veterinary science. If you have a young family member interested in pursuing a career in food animal veterinary services, support them all the way!!

Dates to remember

- 2023 Pesticide/Fertilizer Applicator recertification training 1-26-2023 at The Ohio Valley Career and Technical School 175 Lloyd Road West Union, Ohio 45693 5:00 –9:00 pm Call to register (937) 544-2339
- February 1, 2023 – Meet your local farm agencies- At the Ohio Valley Career and Technical Center from 6:00 to 8:00 pm. Call (937) 544-2339 to register

Ag Educator Words of encouragement – “Agriculture not only gives riches to a nation but the only riches she can call her own” Samuel Johnson