

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 15, 2007

The Honorable Mike Johanns
Secretary
US Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Johanns,

We write you to address our concern with the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) slow implementation of measures to address the mounting shortage of large animal veterinarians practicing in rural America. This crisis speaks directly to the United States' continued vulnerability to devastating disease outbreaks and possible agro-terrorism attack.

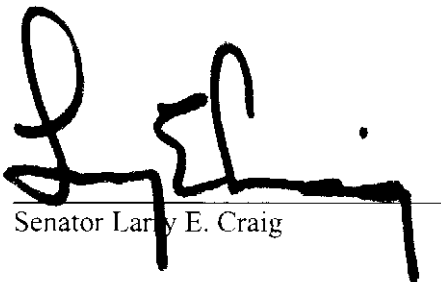
As you know, the economic and human health of our country depends on our first responders to prevent the current threats of prominent diseases like avian influenza, foot-and-mouth, and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). While we all know this threat to be real, common sense steps to avoid this possible catastrophe are languishing.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) estimates that fewer than 4,500 veterinarians focus on large animal livestock and constitute roughly 10 percent of all private-practice veterinarians. In addition, past studies have concluded that 75-percent of emerging diseases in humans were transmitted from animals. In combination, these factors contribute to a "perfect storm" waiting to reach our shores and cross our borders.

In 2003, we led an effort in Congress to pass the "National Veterinary Medical Services Act" (NVMSA) to address this crisis. The NVMSA's purpose is two-fold: to dramatically improve our readiness in the event of a disease outbreak within our animal populations or a terrorist attack upon our food supply; and to provide a student loan repayment program as incentive to increase the numbers of large-animal veterinarians acting as a first responder in rural areas in the event of a federal emergency situation.

President Bush signed the NVMSA into law and Congress appropriated funds in the FY06 and FY07 appropriations bills to initiate the implementation of the program. We respectfully request you to also prioritize the NVMSA and accelerate its implementation to address this shortage and bolster our defenses to animal disease outbreaks and agro-terrorism.

Sincerely,



Senator Larry E. Craig



Senator Sam Brownback