



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

MAR 02 2007

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The Honorable Tom Latham
U.S. House of Representatives
2447 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-1504

Dear Congressman Latham:

Thank you for your letter of January 11, 2007, to Secretary Johanns supporting the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) implementation of the National Veterinary Medical Service Act (NVMSA).

As you know, USDA believes strongly in supporting the next generation of American farmers and ranchers and ensuring that they have an abundant supply of healthy food animal resources. In this regard, we appreciate your support for the NVMSA and recognition of the important role that veterinarians have in ensuring animal health. We agree that having skilled veterinarians throughout rural and other areas of the United States is important to maintaining agricultural animal health and securing the availability of food animal resources. The loan repayment programs authorized by the NVMSA, once established and implemented, will help relieve the veterinary shortage in certain areas and provide additional veterinary support during emergency situations.

We are pleased to report that three USDA agencies—the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), the Food Safety and Inspection Service, and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service—have contributed to the development of a plan to implement the NVMSA for which CSREES has the lead implementation role. Developing the plan was a complex undertaking that took considerable time and involved close interagency collaboration within USDA. This effort also involved seeking external guidance from the Department of Health and Human Services to understand how that Department implemented its much larger medical debt repayment program.

The NVMSA implementation plan is currently under review. We assure you that we are working as expeditiously as possible to complete the review and to finalize the plan. In the meantime, we have communicated regularly with the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) to provide updates on NVMSA implementation and have arranged to have the AVMA

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post updated information in its journal and on its Web site, <http://www.avma.org/>. Once established, the program will be a great tool for meeting veterinary needs in underserved areas and during emergency situations. As the lead USDA Agency for NVMSA implementation, CSREES has \$495,000 available in no-year funding for NVMSA activities. No-year funding will allow maximum flexibility to use the funds as appropriate to implement the NVMSA. We assure you that USDA will make the most judicious use of available resources to do so.

We hope this information is helpful.

Sincerely,



Bruce I. Knight
Under Secretary
Marketing and Regulatory Programs