

THE FOOD SUPPLY VETERINARY MEDICINE COALITION

Retention for FSVM Fact Sheet

“Job satisfaction, changes in occupational area, and commitment to a career in food supply veterinary medicine” was published June 15, 2006, in *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. It investigated why veterinary students and practitioners chose or did not choose to stay in or leave a food supply specialty in veterinary medicine.

The following outlines the basic findings of the three surveys conducted as part of this article.

Student Survey

Methodology

The survey was approved by the FSVMC and AAVMC, and e-mailed to 1,590 e-mail addresses for second through fourth year veterinary students in 32 veterinary schools in the United States and Canada. Responses were received from 759 students, representing a 47.7 percent response rate.

Questions

The survey sought to understand how frequently veterinary students switched from one occupational focus to another, and what factors motivated them to switch.

Demographics

- 32 percent came from suburbs or large communities
- 25 percent grew up on ranches or farms or in rural areas near a city
- 53 percent had undergraduate degrees in biological sciences
- 27 percent had undergraduate degrees in agriculture
- 80 percent were female
- 92 percent were Caucasian
- 43 percent were between 20 and 24 years of age
- 41 percent were between 25 and 29 years of age

Expectations

- 46 percent expected an annual income after five years of \$60,000 to \$70,000
- 25 percent expected an annual income after five years of \$80,000 to \$99,000
- On average, male income expectations were higher than females

Career Focus Switching

Students

Most veterinary students enter veterinary school knowing what specialty they want, and that largely remains unchanged.

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This survey found a low rate of switching. Overall, 18 percent of all respondents changed their career focus from what it was when they first entered veterinary school. There were no differences between those who did or did not change career focus on the basis of gender, size of town in which a student grew up, size of town in which a student desired to live after graduation, or marital status.

Types of switches in order of switching

- From academic career to different career focus (25 percent)
- Out of mixed animal (23.3 percent)
- Out of equine (21.6 percent)
- Out of food animal (18.5 percent)
- Out of companion animal (16.1 percent)

The students that switched out of a food animal predominant or food animal exclusive focus were most likely to change to a mixed-animal focus. Only 9 percent of those originally interested in food animal medicine who changed career area switched to companion animal medicine.

The overwhelming factor that generated changes in career focus was the development of a new interest as a result of course work.

When comparing food animal students who changed with companion animal students who changed, those changing from the food animal area were more concerned with time demands as a result of being on-call, being unable to make full use of their medical or surgical skills, and not making enough money to pay off student loans. Veterinary students and graduated food animal practitioners have differing perspectives on these issues. Employed food animal veterinarians reported that they were able to make full use of their medical or surgical skills and did not have issues with time management, compared with results for veterinarians employed in other occupational areas.

Recent food animal graduates

Surveyed 133 who reported they spent 50 percent or more of their current job working in FSVM.

Demographics

- Most grew up on a farm or ranch
- Most lived in a town with <5,000 people
- Most were between 25 and 34 years of age
- 50 percent were males
- 73 percent were married

Findings

- 93 percent were proud to be in the FSVM area and liked being a food supply veterinarian
- 75 percent had many desirable career options
- 80 percent had attractive job alternatives outside of FSVM
- However, 71 percent did not consider leaving FSVM and 90 percent had not applied for a position outside FSVM within the past year
- 83 percent indicated that they were satisfied with their current occupation in veterinary medicine
- When comparing FSVM to other areas of the veterinary profession, veterinarians involved in FSVM reported a high degree of satisfaction

Long-term veterinarians

Surveyed 2,482 veterinarians who graduated before August 1999. Includes food supply veterinarians and non-food supply veterinarians.

Demographics

- Most grew up on a farm, ranch, or in a suburban area
- Most were between 30 and 50 years of age
- 64 percent were male
- Most were employed as practitioners at companion animal exclusive practices, at a university setting, or in industry

Findings

- 17 percent had changed their occupational area during the past five years
- 10 percent of those were food animal veterinarians
- Of the food animal veterinarians who changed, 27 percent changed to companion animal and 25 percent changed to government
- Of the companion animal veterinarians who changed, 29 percent changed to government and 29 percent changed to industry
- The main reason that the long-term veterinarians left their former jobs was because they received a more attractive offer in an alternative employment setting
- The high praise for the life of a food animal veterinarian as reported by those who actually perform this occupation explained much about the low amount of employee turnover in the profession