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Editor
USA Today

[note: this letter was sent via email]

Questions were raised today in your USA Today editorial (“A sickening spectacle,” February 19) about the appalling practices at a California slaughterhouse that violate federal law, as well as policies of the American Veterinary Medical Association.

The editorial states that “the USDA has 6,000 veterinarians stationed at slaughterhouses across the nation. They are there to prevent sick cows from entering the food supply.”

While USDA veterinarians are indeed part of the first line of defense when it comes to protecting our nation’s food supply from disease and contamination, their numbers are nowhere near the 6,000 you quoted. As a matter of fact, the entire federal government employs approximately one-third of that number; and less than 1,000 work for USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service. Other areas of veterinary medicine – from research to public health – are also feeling the strain of an overall shortage of veterinarians.

This sad reality is putting our nation at risk. The AVMA continues to urge our leaders on Capitol Hill and in our federal agencies in Washington, D.C., to act quickly and responsibly to right this wrong. For years, the AVMA has been actively pursuing passage of federal legislation to ensure that veterinary workforce issues are adequately addressed. By doing so, we can do our part to ensure the U.S. food supply remains one of the safest in the world.

The people who bear the burden for what happened at the California processing facility will have to answer for their egregious behavior. As a nation, however, all of us may have to pay the price if we don’t collectively recognize that more veterinarians are needed if we are to rely on a healthy and wholesome food supply.

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