Farm Bill Support for Veterinary Medicine and Academic Veterinary Medicine

The Agriculture Act of 2014 (PL 113-79) authorizes nutrition and agriculture programs in the United States for the years of 2014-2018. The new law continues some programs without change, makes modifications to others and establishes new programs that will have an impact on the veterinary profession, academic veterinary medicine, and animal health and welfare. By providing new funding streams for agricultural research in animal health, production and welfare, the new Farm Bill provides multiple opportunities for schools of veterinary medicine and the broader veterinary community.

Key provisions of include:

- a provision to crack down on the abusive practice of animal fighting;
- the establishment of the Veterinary Services Grant Program;
- authorization of a budget line for the National Animal Health Laboratory Network;
- a modified Animal Health and Disease Research/1433 Formula Funds program to increase research funding for animal health, feed and reproductive efficiency, vaccines, zoonotic diseases and food safety, stewardship of animals and the environment;
- the establishment of a Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research – $200 million in mandatory funding will become available for this new venture;
- a continuation of the Food Animal Residue Avoidance Databank; and
- added to the priority areas for research under the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative is the identification of animal drug needs; and the generation and dissemination of data for the safe and effective therapeu tic uses of animal drugs for minor species (such as sheep, goats, rabbits, guinea pigs, zoo animals, fish and shellfish, etc.) and minor uses in major species (i.e. dogs, cats, horses, cattle, swine, chickens and turkeys); and the study and development of surveillance methods; vaccines, vaccination delivery systems and diagnostics for pests and diseases, including epizootic diseases in domestic livestock; zoonotic diseases in domestic livestock or wildlife reservoirs that present potential public health concerns.

Veterinary Services Grant Program (Sect. 7104 of PL 113-79)

$10 million per year is authorized for a new competitive research, extension, education grant that is intended to relieve veterinarian shortage situations and to support veterinary services. The Veterinary Services Grant Program (VSGP) will help relieve veterinary shortage situations by supporting private veterinary practices engaged in public health activities and veterinarians who are participating in or have successfully completed a Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) contract or similar state program.
For more than a decade, the House and Senate Agriculture Committees have worked to resolve the serious shortage of veterinarians in rural communities. With the passage of the National Veterinary Medical Service Act in December of 2003, a program was authorized to encourage large animal veterinarians to practice in communities that USDA designates as veterinary shortage areas. While this assistance helps attract veterinarians to these communities, gaps remain in veterinarian recruitment, attracting and training technical support staff, and meeting the long-term costs of operating veterinary practices in these communities. VSGP addresses these needs and complements the loan repayment program by helping large animal veterinarians become established in these rural communities.

Qualified entities include for-profit or nonprofit entity or individual located in the U.S. operating a veterinary clinic in a rural area that is also a veterinarian shortage situation designated as such for the VMLRP; a State, national, allied, or regional veterinary organizations or specialty boards that are recognized by the AVMA; colleges or schools of veterinary medicine accredited by the AVMA; university research foundations or veterinary medical foundations; accredited departments of veterinary science and comparative medicine recognized by the U.S. Department of Education; State agricultural experiment stations; and State, local, or tribal government agencies. **Preferences will be given to entities that provide documentation of coordination with other qualified entities.**

Grantees **must** develop, implement, and sustain veterinary services; and/or substantially relieve veterinarian shortage situations; and/or support or facilitate private veterinary practices engaged in public health activities; and/or support or facilitate the practices of veterinarians who are providing or have completed providing services under VMLRP (or a similar state operated program).

Grantees **may** promote recruitment, placement, and retention of veterinarians, vet techs, students of veterinary medicine, and vet tech students. Allow veterinary students, veterinary interns, externs, fellows, and residents, and vet tech students to cover expenses other than tuition and fees to attend training programs in food safety or food animal medicine. Establish or expand accredited veterinary education programs (including faculty recruitment and retention), veterinary residency and fellowship programs, or veterinary internship and externship programs carried out in coordination with accredited colleges of veterinary medicine. Provide continuing education and extension, including veterinary telemedicine and other distance-based education for veterinarians, vet techs, and other health professionals needed to strengthen veterinary programs and enhance food safety. Provide technical assistance for the preparation of applications submitted to USDA for designation as a veterinarian shortage situation under VMLRP.

Grantees operating veterinary clinics may only use grant funds to establish or expand veterinary practices, including equipping veterinary offices; sharing in the reasonable overhead costs of such veterinary practices; or establishing mobile vet facilities in which a portion of the facilities will address education or extension needs.

Grants **may not** be used for acquisition and/or construction of a new building or expansion, remodelling, alteration of existing building; site grading and improvement; architect fees; or student loan repayment.
USDA has until February 7, 2015 to promulgate regulations for the new program. To facilitate this process, AVMA and AAVMC will solicit their members for input and ideas on how best to design and implement the program.

**National Animal Health Laboratory Network (Sect. 12105 of PL 113-79)**

$15 million per year is authorized for the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) which serves as our nation's most vital early warning system for emerging and foreign animal diseases. Funding for the NAHLN has been inadequate for years, largely because the NAHLN has not had its own budget line.

During the past 12 years the NAHLN, composed of federal, university, and state veterinary diagnostic laboratories, has established the framework of a surveillance and emergency response system (not research) that provides critical and ongoing resources for laboratory testing, surveillance, information management, quality assurance and the development and validation of new tests.

NAHLN was developed in response to the Public Health Security and BioTerrorism Preparedness and Response Act of 2002, and the Homeland Security Presidential Directive 9 (HSPD-9) of 2004 to “develop nationwide lab networks for food, veterinary, plant health and water quality that integrate existing Federal and State laboratory resources, are interconnected, and utilize standardized diagnostic protocols and procedures”.

Funding NAHLN at $15 million would result in improved compliance with HSPD-9 by: 1) expanding surveillance and surge capacity of the NAHLN by increasing the number and level of participating state laboratories; 2) additional development of the infrastructure for electronic transmission of data between sample collectors, laboratories and state and federal databases; and 3) increasing efficiency and effectiveness of laboratory personnel training and employment both regionally and nationwide.

**Sect. 1433 Formula Funds / Animal Health & Disease Research (Sect. 7111 of PL 113-79)**

$25 million per year is authorized for an expanded and enhanced Animal Health and Disease Research program. The existing capacity program (funds distributed by formula) remains and a competitive grants program is added to the program (with specific purposes) open to land-grants and non-land-grant colleges of agriculture (NLGCA). The law stipulates that the first $5 million appropriated will go toward capacity distribution; while funds above that level will be distributed 15 percent to capacity and 85 percent to competitive grants. The law also continues the existing capacity distribution formula. Added to the program are focal areas of research in food security, one health and stewardship. Grants can be used to conduct research to promote food security by improving feed efficiency; improving energetic efficiency; connecting genomics, proteomics, metabolomics and related phenomena to animal production; improving reproductive efficiency; and enhancing pre- and post-harvest food safety systems. Grants can also be used to support investigations into the relationship between animal and human health, such as by exploring new approaches for vaccine development; understanding and controlling zoonosis, including its impact on food safety; improving animal health through feed; and enhancing product quality and nutritive value; and developing and disseminating to the public tools and information based on the research conducted and sound science.
Food Animal Residue Avoidance Databank (Sect. 7308 of PL 113-79)

$2.5 million per year is reauthorized for FARAD, which supports the production of safe foods of animal origin through the prevention and mitigation of violative chemical (drugs, pesticides, natural toxins, and environmental contaminants) residues in food animal products. FARAD identifies, extracts, assembles, evaluates and distributes reviewed information about residue avoidance and mitigation to those involved in residue avoidance programs in the U.S. Information includes basic veterinary drug registration information, withdrawal times, indications for use, as well as technical information about the pharmacokinetics and toxicokinetics of drugs and chemicals in food animals. Also, FARAD serves as a training program for graduate students and clinical pharmacology residents.

Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research (Sec 7601 of PL 113-79)

The Farm Bill establishes the Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research (FFAR), a new charitable and nonprofit corporation to boost cooperation between industry, academia and private foundations, and research will focus on safe, efficient and sustainable food production, innovations to boost the economy and fight global hunger. FFAR will leverage private funding, matched with $200 million transferred from the Commodities Credit Corp which will remain available until expended. FFAR has been modeled after other federally established charitable and nonprofit corporations include the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Foundation, and the National Forest Foundation. The USDA, the National Academy of Sciences, the National Science Foundation and agricultural research stakeholders will play an integral role in FFAR.

Authorization vs. Appropriation of Funding

The provisions contained in the Farm Bill represent significant achievements. However, with the exception of the FFAR, the amounts are authorizations only. AVMA and AAVMC will need to focus resources and advocacy efforts on obtaining appropriations for the following programs during the annual budget process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AVMA/AAVMC Recommendations for federal appropriation in fiscal 2015</th>
<th>FY 2014 Omnibus</th>
<th>AVMA/AAVMC Recommendations</th>
<th>President’s Budget Request</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program</strong></td>
<td>$4,790,000</td>
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<td><strong>Veterinary Services Grant Program (new budget line)</strong></td>
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Note: The President budgeted $6,700,000 for the Food and Agriculture Defense Initiative (FADI). FADI includes baseline funding for the NAHLN. AVMA supports $15,000,000 for the new stand-alone budget line for the NAHLN.
Questions & Answers

1) **Does the few Farm Bill institute new matching funds requirement (Sec. 7128)?**
Yes, a new, uniform matching requirement for NIFA competitive grants is established. It requires at least a 100 percent match for grantees. Exempted from the matching requirement are land-grant institutions and their partners as well as the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS). The Farm Bill also authorizes the Secretary to waive the matching requirement for a year for research and extension grants “that the NAREEE Advisory Board has determined is a national priority.” The new requirement will take effect on Oct. 1, 2014.

2) **Did the Farm Bill include new annual budget submission criteria for USDA (Sec. 7513)?**
Yes, the Farm Bill provides statutory guidance to USDA concerning the annual budget submission for Research, Education, and Economics mission area agencies (ARS, Economic Research Service and the National Institute for Food and Agriculture). It requires submission of detailed spending plans to Congress in advance of the development of annual appropriations measures so that Congress and interested constituencies can weigh the merits of these allocations against evolving priorities.

3) **How long has it taken the Farm Bill to be passed?**
Congress has been working on reauthorization for the last three years. The current Farm Bill, The Agriculture Act of 2014, authorizes nutrition and agriculture programs in the United States for the next five years (2014-2018). Both the AVMA and AAVMC have been working to garner support for various provisions for the last several years.

4) **Is this different than what’s happened in the past? Does it always take this long?**
Each Farm Bill must overcome challenges. The last time the bill was up for reauthorization it took a couple of years. The final version last time was the Farm Bill, the Food and Energy Security Act. It finalized only after the Congress overturned a veto President Bush! The last two reauthorizations indicate that the Farm Bill will likely face a tortured path in the years to come.

5) **What made this time different?**
The legislative process has become increasingly plagued by partisan politics with members jockeying for position in advance of the next election. It is difficult for them to find common ground to do much of anything as so many lawmakers are trying to stave off potential primary challenges. As a result, the Democratic-controlled Senate and Republican-controlled House of Representatives are at logger-heads to do much without the usual brinkmanship and going from one crisis to the next.

6) **What happens now? How long after its signed will we start seeing any changes?**
Veterinarians have a clear stake in both the funding for and the implementation of the Farm Bill. They must do their part to prod and encourage Congress to provide the funding necessary to carry out the programs that they just authorized.

In addition, the USDA must begin the process of promulgating regulations for many of the Farm Bill’s new and complex provisions. The process is already underway with the Agency internally identifying and prioritizing across the titles what to tackle and in what order. Of course the USDA must keep Congress and stakeholders informed as it develops and seeks input and guidance on new regulations and other activities.
7) **What can AVMA and AAVMC members do now?**
Input from veterinarians will be required so that USDA implements the Farm Bill in an efficient, timely and responsible manner. Whether veterinarians are in practice or in academia and research, they ought to weigh in with USDA and their elected officials about funding and the implementation of the Farm Bill. Their expertise is needed to ensure that the provisions are implemented in the best way possible. The veterinary community can stay abreast of important issues by reading the AVMA Advocate and the AAVMC’s Vet-Med Educator, and being an active part of the AVMA Congressional Advocacy Network.

8) **Who can I contact if I have further questions about Farm Bill provisions?**

AAVMC contact: Kevin Cain, Director of Governmental Affairs, 202-371-9195, ext. 117, kcain@aavmc.org

AVMA contact: Gina Luke, Assistant Director, Division of Governmental Relations, 202-289-3204, gluke@avma.org