



July 16, 2019

J. Scott Angle, PhD  
Director  
National Institute of Food and Agriculture  
United States Department of Agriculture  
800 9<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20024

**Re: Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP); Veterinary Services Grant Program (VSGP)**

Dear Dr. Angle:

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) are strong supporters of the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) and the Veterinary Services Grant Program (VSGP). Both programs are administered by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), which is in the process of relocating to the Kansas City region.

The VMLRP and VSGP play an important role in bringing critical veterinary services to USDA designated shortage areas throughout rural America. Between 2010 and 2018, USDA granted nearly 500 awards to veterinarians who committed to practice for a minimum of three years in designated areas. The VMLRP has been overwhelmingly successful in attracting and retaining veterinarians to practice in rural communities and underserved areas. Eighty percent of the veterinarians completing their service contracts in 2016 stayed in the area and continued to work closely with farmers and ranchers to promote the health and welfare of their animals, prevent animal disease outbreaks, and safeguard our nation's food supply.

**NIFA's management of VMLRP and VSGP by a veterinarian**

To maintain the effectiveness of the VMLRP and VSGP and the continued support of congress, it is essential that the USDA commit to the continuity and integrity of these programs. With the impending move, we are concerned about the management of the programs, including the recordkeeping and timeliness of the distribution of awards and grants. In the past, both programs have been impacted by changes in leadership and staff turnover. We understand the current program director, Dr. Michelle Colby, has chosen not to relocate to Kansas City. Who

will be assigned to manage VMLRP and VSGP through the transition to Kansas City and in the future?

Our organizations feel that it is important to have a veterinarian lead and manage both VMLRP and VSGP. We are committed to working with the USDA to assure a smooth transition and continued success of the programs. We seek to understand, and request that you share with our organizations, the succession plans developed by the Department to ensure appropriate personnel are hired, trained and expeditiously brought up to speed.

### **Disbursement schedule**

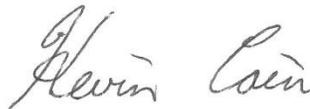
Grants and awards must be made by the fiscal year's end on September 30. Historically NIFA has alerted winners of VMLRP awards and VSGP grants by late September. Due to staff turnover and the government shutdown in early 2019, some awards were behind schedule causing consternation for those recipients. We seek your assurance that the awards will be properly distributed without delay. To that end, we request the opportunity to meet with you to express the importance of these programs in supporting access to veterinary care in designated shortage areas and the impact of VMLRP and VSGP in rural America.

AVMA and AAVMC collectively represent over 93,000 veterinarians in practice and in academia. We look forward to receiving your reply, scheduling a meeting to discuss the matter, and are eager to work with you to ensure these programs remain effective in delivering on their promise to alleviate veterinary shortages in rural America. Please contact AVMA's Dr. Mark Lutschaunig ([mlutschaunig@avma.org](mailto:mlutschaunig@avma.org), 202.289.3205) or AAVMC's Kevin Cain ([kcain@aavmc.org](mailto:kcain@aavmc.org), 202.371.9195, ext. 117) if you or your staff have questions.

Sincerely,



Mark T. Lutschaunig, VMD  
Director  
Government Relations Division  
American Veterinary Medical Association



Kevin Cain  
Director  
Governmental Affairs  
Association of American Veterinary Medical  
Colleges