

# Legislative Agenda for 118<sup>th</sup> Congress (2023-2024)

## Appropriations for FY 2024

### United States Department of Agriculture

#### **Veterinary Services Grant Program (Sect. 7104 of the Agriculture Act of 2014) - Currently at \$4 million, awaiting discussion with AVMA**

The program was funded for the first time in FY 2016, at \$2.5 million. The Veterinary Services Grant Program (VSGP) will help relieve federally designated 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. VSGP complements the VMLRP by helping large animal veterinarians become established in rural communities.

#### **Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) - Currently at \$10 million, also awaiting discussion with AVMA**

The Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) is a student loan repayment program for veterinarians who practice in underserved areas. Loan repayment is essential to address shortages of veterinarians practicing food supply medicine and public health.

VMLRP incentivizes specialization in food animal medicine, food safety and public health. Continued funding will permit the USDA to select veterinarians who will agree to practice food supply medicine and veterinary public health in federally designated veterinary shortage situations.

#### **Fighting Antimicrobial Resistance (waiting for S-FAR coalition numbers)**

- **CDC's Antibiotic Resistance Solutions Initiative (\$672 million):** This amount is vital to achieving the plan's goals, including a 20 percent decrease in health-care associated antibiotic resistant infections by 2025.
- **FDA's Combating Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria (at least \$20 million):** The Animal Drugs and Feeds Program will work to address public health safety concerns associated with antimicrobial drug use in animals and to better protect antibiotic effectiveness for both human and animal populations.
- Additionally, we ask that the FY24 Agriculture Appropriations bill include at least **\$385 million** for the **USDA** for antimicrobial resistance-related research, monitoring and surveillance.

## **Section 1433 Formula Funds for Animal Health and Research - \$10 million**

Animal Health and Disease Research funds provide essential support for research on diseases affecting food-producing animals. These funds are the most important source of research support for departments of veterinary science at U.S. universities.

In the Agriculture Act of 2014 (PL 113-79) this program was expanded to include a competitive grants component that focuses on food security, One Health, and stewardship. The AAVMC would like to see much more robust funding for this critical program expansion.

### **Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) - At least \$600 million (this number may change given our coalition partners)**

AFRI grants support research, education, and extension and integrated initiatives addressing issues of national, regional and multi- state importance to the safety, sustainability, and quality of American agriculture, including farm efficiency and profitability, ranching, renewable energy, forestry (both urban and agroforestry), aquaculture, rural communities and entrepreneurship, human nutrition, food safety, biotechnology, and conventional breeding.

### **National Animal Health Laboratory Network – At least \$35 million**

The National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) infrastructure plays a critical role in rapidly detecting and responding to foreign and domestic disease outbreaks and animal health emergencies that threaten our nation’s food supply and public health.

### **Food Animal Residue Avoidance Databank (FARAD) – \$2.5 million (this is the maximum current authorization, but we are working to double this in the Farm Bill)**

FARAD is a congressionally mandated risk-management program that is supported by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). FARAD's focus is limited to food animal species exclusively. The program is maintained by a consortium of universities, including University of California-Davis (UCD), University of Florida (UF), Kansas State University (KSU) and North Carolina State University (NCSU). FARAD's primary mission is to prevent or mitigate illegal or harmful residues of drugs, pesticides, bio-toxins and other chemical agents that may contaminate foods of animal origin.

### **National Institutes of Health – \$50 billion (this number will also depend on our coalition partners)**

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is the nation’s federal health research agency, and the premier government-funded research agency worldwide. Nearly ninety percent of NIH funding flows to universities and other research institutions in the form of competitive grants.

## **Health Resources Services Administration**

### **Title VII and VIII Health Professions Workforce Programs--\$1.51 billion (this number may change depending on our coalition partners)**

The health professions programs, authorized under Title VII of the Public Health Service Act provide education and training opportunities to a wide variety of health care professionals and students. By educating and training an array of health professionals in interdisciplinary, community-based settings, the Title VII programs enhance the supply, diversity, and distribution of the workforce and address the deficits in the supply of health professionals.

Academic veterinary medical Institutions benefit from Title VII and VIII public health and preventive medicine programs that help address the growing shortages of public health professionals. Additionally, a public health loan repayment program will provide incentives for students to pursue public health careers.

### **Section 3151, Title 7, PL 115-334 (Farm Bill)**

#### **Grants to enhance research capacity in schools of veterinary medicine**

This section was passed within the 2018 Farm Bill. The legislation states that “The Secretary shall conduct a program of competitive grants to States for the purpose of meeting the costs of renovation, improving compliance with Federal regulations, employing faculty, acquiring equipment, and taking other action related to the improvement of schools of veterinary medicine to ensure agricultural competitiveness on a worldwide basis.” To date, no funds have been appropriated for this section, though we continue to monitor the relevant committees, and advocate for funding. We are also pursuing reauthorization of this provision in the next Farm Bill.

***Current Status: FY 2023 Appropriations contained no funds for this program.***

## **Congressional Actions/Legislation**

### **HR XXXX/S XXXX, The America Grows Act – SUPPORT**

This legislation would authorize a five percent, inflation adjusted annual increase for the next five years for agricultural research at four USDA agencies: The National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA), the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

***Current status: The bills are expected to be reintroduced in this Congress within a few weeks.***

## **HR XXXX/S XXXX, Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program Enhancement Act - SUPPORT**

Each of these bills would amend the Internal Revenue Code to make VMLRP awards exempt from gross income and employment taxes. Awards are currently taxed at 37 percent. Those taxes are paid by USDA directly to the Treasury on behalf of the award recipient. Tax exemption for VMLRP awards would result in one additional veterinarian for every three based on current appropriations.

***Current Status: The bills are expected to be reintroduced in this Congress within a few weeks.***

## **HR XXXX, The Veterinary Education and Training Minimizes Educational Debt (VET MED) Act. -- SUPPORT**

This legislation would allow veterinary students in residency programs to be eligible for interest-free deferment of their student loans during their residency. The legislation was introduced by Rep. Kurt Schrader (D-OR). He is no longer in Congress, so we are looking for another sponsor for the bill.

***Current Status: We are hoping that the legislation will be reintroduced in the House within a few weeks.***

## **HR X, The Equality Act —SUPPORT**

The Equality Act would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include protections that ban discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex in the areas of employment, housing, public accommodations, public education, federal funding, credit, and the jury system. The bill was introduced by Rep. David Cicilline (D-RI) in the House, and Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) in the Senate in the 117<sup>th</sup>

***Current Status: Expected to be reintroduced in the House and Senate within a few weeks.***

## **HR XXXX, The Research Investment to Spark the Economy (RISE) Act – SUPPORT**

This bipartisan legislation was introduced as a direct result of the pandemic shutdown, and the impact that it has had on research facilities. The bill would authorize \$26 billion in emergency relief appropriations for federal science agencies during FY 2024 and FY 2025 and is available for expenditure for up to two years. It also affords temporary regulatory relief to science agencies until universities and non-profit research institutes can safely reopen research laboratories funded by federal appropriations.

***Current Status: May be reintroduced in the House within a few weeks, although the main sponsor, former Rep. Fred Upton, has retired.***

## **Farm Bill Legislation**

AAVMC will be monitoring this legislation as it moves through the House and Senate. We are particularly interested in provisions that reauthorize VMLRP and VSGP, and support doubling the authorization for FARAD from \$2.5 million to \$5 million.

## **Ongoing pandemic preparedness legislation – SUPPORT**

It is expected that the Biden Administration and House and Senate Democrats (and some Republicans) will introduce and support pandemic preparedness legislation, based on lessons learned during the COVID era. AAVMC will monitor and assess these bills as they arise. In the past, we have supported additional funds for NIH and USDA to make up for lost research, as well as funds to compensate animal laboratories that have expended funds on human testing. We are working on additional support for higher education institutions in general as they recover from Covid related restrictions and advance preparedness for future pandemics.

### **Executive Branch Activities**

#### **Implementation of USDA's Veterinary Services Grant Program (VSGP) and oversight of the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP)**

AAVMC currently has a quarterly conversation with Bob Smith and others who remain at USDA and currently manage these key programs. We have also engaged them on issues related to the application process for these programs, as well as the way that awards are designated.

We will continue to work with the agencies to keep the programs operating efficiently.

#### **Implementation of the PCAST Report on Antibiotic Resistance**

Several years ago, the AAVMC, together with the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), created the Task Force on Antibiotic Resistance in Production Agriculture. The goal of the task force was to advise the federal government on a research agenda and to help publicly disseminate information on the judicious use of antibiotics in production agriculture. The task force was a collaborative effort whose members were well-positioned to advise the Obama administration as it considered strategies for addressing the serious public health threat posed by antimicrobial resistance. The task force issued this report in late 2015: <http://www.aplu.org/library/addressing-antibiotic-resistance/file>

One of the direct outcomes of this task force was the creation of NIAMRRE, the National Institute of Antimicrobial Resistance Research and Education.

<https://www.nationalamrinstitute.org/>

AAVMC continues to be involved in assisting NIAMRRE staff and coordinating government relations activities with the Institute and its partners. Most recently, this cooperation resulted in a \$3 million appropriation for USDA/APHIS to create an AMR dashboard. It is expected that these funds will go to NIAMRRE to complete this work, and we are also working to make this an ongoing appropriation.

### **Support rational regulation for gene-edited food animals**

As a result of scientific advances such as CRISPR and other technologies, research into gene editing has been advancing at a fast pace, including at many AAVMC member institutions. As a result of concerns raised about the regulation of this research, AAVMC and APLU convened the first Summit on Gene Editing in Food Animals at the AAVMC offices on September 24-25, 2019.

<https://web.cvent.com/event/129b7fed-5f6a-4fce-8ac0-eb055cbe76d6/>

A joint AAVMC/APLU task force to further study this issue was created and met several times during 2020. As a direct result of the Summit, AAVMC and our partners have been invited to directly participate with FDA, BIO and others as they move forward on regulating this technology. The task force completed recommendations for the Biden Administration in the form of a white paper, and we have also submitted comments to the Administration as it seeks to improve regulation in this area.

### **Support the White House Global Health Security Agenda**

In 2014, 44 participating countries developed 11 Action Packages in support of the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA). They are designed to outline steps to prevent outbreaks, detect threats in real time, and rapidly respond to infectious disease threats. We believe strongly that academic veterinary medicine can and must play a central role in this agenda, which puts a priority on areas including combating antibiotic resistant bacteria, improving biosafety and biosecurity on a global basis, and preventing bioterrorism. There are three main areas of funding for this agenda, including: CDC Global Health Strategy, USAID Global Health Initiative, and the Fogarty International Center at NIH.

### **Educate Federal Agency Leadership on the Full Spectrum of Academic Veterinary Medicine**

The AAVMC works hard to ensure that its audience on Capitol Hill and federal agencies understand that the impact of veterinary medicine on human health and wellbeing is far greater than the provision of clinical care for food and companion animals. AAVMC members and representatives will continue to champion the “One Health Initiative” to expand

interdisciplinary collaborations in all aspects of health care for humans, animals and the environment.

AAVMC staff will also continue to work to establish stronger, ongoing relationships with staff within several federal agencies, concentrating on NIH but including other key science agencies as well. This will include working with the new leadership at the agencies, including the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) at the White House.

**Expand the pool of biomedical postdoctoral fellowships and ensure that veterinary biomedical postdoctoral researchers have the same opportunities for loan repayment afforded to other health professionals at NIH**

The AAVMC will work with NIH to expand the shrinking pool of postdoctoral training opportunities. The AAVMC will also work to ensure that veterinary graduates have the same opportunities to compete for the existing positions available to other health professionals. The FY 2016 Labor HHS Appropriations bills included report language directing NIH to continue to publicize the program to potential applicants throughout all the institutes and centers at AAVMC's request. We will be following up with NIH to reinvigorate this program.

**Increase opportunities for AAVMC members to participate in HRSA's diversity training programs**

AAVMC member institutions are eligible to participate in the Title VII diversity programs, including the Centers of Excellence (COE) program, the Health Careers Opportunity Program (HCOP), the Minority Faculty Fellowship Program and the Scholarships for Disadvantaged Students Program. These programs are critical to building workforce capacity, but AAVMC member institutions participate in these programs on a limited basis. The AAVMC educates HRSA leadership on the role the veterinary workforce plays in public health and preventing disease outbreaks. AAVMC will provide input to HRSA as guidance documents are developed and assistance to AAVMC member institutions in crafting high-quality applications.

**Explore opportunities to participate in the HRSA Public Health and Preventive Medicine programs**

Given the impact veterinary medicine has on public health and disease prevention, members should be connected to these programs. Both the Public Health Traineeships and Public Health Training Centers fund schools of public health and other programs that provide training in public health. We continue to address barriers to these programs with HRSA leadership.

**Other issues as they arise**

As in past Congresses, Kevin Cain, in consultation with the Advocacy Committee, will continue to evaluate legislation and other policies as they arise, and make recommendations to the Board for support or non-support.