FARMJOURNAL FOUNDATION
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Dear Dean Moore and Director Baldridge,

On behalf of the Farm Journal Foundation team, I am pleased to provide you with the assessment report and recommendations for the Ohio Rural & Food Systems Veterinary Shortage Solutions: State and Community Readiness Program. Thank you for your leadership on this topic and for moving Ohio forward on this critical issue.

The State and Community Readiness Program is but one part of the Farm Journal Foundation's systems solution approach to address this critical shortage of food animal veterinarians. Solving the challenges in the rural and food-systems veterinary sector will require a multifaceted approach that enlists support from diverse groups of stakeholders.

Collaborating with partners in the state of Ohio, we can develop solutions to better identify root causes contributing to shortage areas and build support for veterinary livelihoods. This approach will provide the framework for self-help readiness models that will support the financial sustainability of veterinary practices and the personal well-being goals of veterinarians in concert with the needs of the community.

The attached report summarizes the data collected and should be considered the starting point for conversations. The recommendations are designed to assist with advancing knowledge surrounding the issue, data needed to fill in the gaps and begin the development of a long-lasting plan of action.

We look forward to meeting with you to dive deeper into the content and address any questions you and staff may have. Thank you for this collaboration and building on the success of addressing the shortage.

Sincerely,

Maddie Skellie
Director of Rural Programs
Farm Journal Foundation

FARM JOURNAL FOUNDATION ASSESSMENT REPORT

Ohio Rural & Food Systems Veterinary Shortage Solutions

State and Community Readiness Program

The Farm Journal Foundation (FJF) is honored to provide this report to Rustin M. Moore, DVM, PhD, Dean of The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine and Brian Baldridge, Director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture.

The State and Community Readiness Program is designed to take a comprehensive, fact-based approach to identify the root causes of the shortage of rural and food-systems veterinarians and to develop a range of possible solutions to address those causes. Simply put: understanding the cause of the shortage is essential before it can be effectively addressed.

This report summarizes data and insights provided by key stakeholders in Ohio and should be considered the starting point for the conversations and further work to identify the causes of the rural and food systems veterinarian shortage. Contributing organizations include:

The data findings and assessment are reported in the following sections:

- Ohio farm and livestock data
- Available federal assistance programs
- Veterinary licensing and practice data
- Veterinary workforce and education data
- Closing and next steps

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

Ohio Department of Agriculture

The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine

KEY DATA POINTS

Ohio 4-H

Ohio FFA Foundation

Ohio Veterinary Medical Association

Ohio Veterinary Medical Licensing Board

The Ohio State University Extension

USDA NASS

POLICY & INSIGHTS

Central State University

Cooper Farms

DR. LONNIE KING
DR. MIKE DYER

Ohio Farm Bureau

New Pittsburg Veterinary Clinic

Ohio AgriBusiness Association

OHHA

OHPORK Ohio Pork Council

Ohio Poultry Association

Select Sires

SECTION 1: Ohio Farm and Livestock Data

USDA - NASS

Trends in Ohio's major food-animal sectors, alongside overall farm numbers, are summarized in Table 1. Total farm numbers have remained relatively stable over the past 20 years, though the distribution has shifted toward more small-acreage operations. Cattle farms and cattle inventories have both declined steadily since 2002, reflecting long-run consolidation and herd contraction. In contrast, hog and pig inventories have expanded substantially—nearly doubling between 2002 and 2022—even as the number of swine farms has decreased, indicating intensified production within fewer operations. Ohio's layer sector has grown in both scale and structure: the number of layer farms has more than doubled since 2002, while total bird numbers have increased markedly, solidifying the state's position as a national leader in egg production. Broiler production has followed a similar pattern of rapid expansion. Broiler farms have increased modestly, but the number of birds sold has surged more than fourfold since 2002, suggesting significant investment and growth within Ohio's poultry industry.

Table 1. 20-Year Comparison of Farm and Animal Numbers

		2022	2012	2002
Total Number of Farms		76,009	75,462	77,797
Farms by Size	1 to 49 Acres	36,556	31,016	30,732
	50 to 999 Acres	36,736	41,855	34,351
	1,000 and Over Acres	2,717	2,591	2,714
Cattle & Calves Inventory	Farms	21,126	25,501	28,672
	Animals	1,212,468	1,242,293	1,240,612
Hogs & Pigs Inventory	Farms	3,238	3,494	4,286
	Animals	2,752,063	2,058,503	1,422,966
Layers Inventory	Farms	10,695	8,548	4,419
	Animals	38,570,322	28,312,692	30,759,965
Broilers (Sold)	Farms	1,510	1,275	968
	Animals	123,982,907	62,527,924	28,764,494

Farm size patterns in Ohio over the past two decades mirror several nationwide shifts. The number of operations under 50 acres has grown substantially, adding nearly 6,000 farms between 2002 and 2022. Farms in the 50–999 acre range, by contrast, expanded through 2012 and then contracted, indicating some thinning out or restructuring among mid-sized commercial operations. Unlike states where growth has been driven largely by rapid expansion of very large farms, Ohio's 1,000-acre-and-larger operations have remained remarkably stable in number over the period, suggesting that structural change in the state has been driven more by the proliferation of small farms and adjustments within the mid-sized category than by consolidation at the top end.

SECTION 2: Available Federal Assistance Programs

Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP)

The USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture's Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) is the primary federal program designed to address shortages of food-animal veterinarians. The VMLRP assists qualified veterinarians in educational loan repayment in exchange for the individual's practice in a nominated shortage area. Ohio is currently allotted five shortage nominations annually based on state land area and total farm-gate value of animals and animal products. The Ohio State Veterinarian submits the nominations each year.

From 2010 to 2022, Ohio submitted 48 shortage nominations. USDA received 31 applications and issued 10 awards (new and renewal), resulting in a 32.3% award rate – slightly below the national award rate average of 38.6% during that time period.

In a review of the more recent period, 2022 through 2024, Ohio received 15 designations with 15 applications, 6 new awards, and 2 renewals. USDA placed a hold on the program for 2025, and it is expected that the 2025 allocations will be used for the 2026 applications.

Table 2. VMLRP applications and awards for the three most recent years available (2022-2024)

	Ohio			Total USDA		
	2024	2023	2022	2024	2023	2022
Allocations	5	5	5	257	250	257
Designations	5	5	5	240	237	226
Applications	9	3	3	166	136	130
New Awards	3	1	2	80	68	73
Renewals	2	0	0	34	20	16
Award Rate %	55.5%	33.3%	66.6%	66.7%	64.7%	68.4%

Veterinary Services Grant Program (VSGP)

Authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill, the Veterinary Services Grant Program (VSGP) is designed to address veterinarian shortage situations and support veterinary services. The program provides two types of grants 1) Rural Practice Enhancement (RPE) and 2) Education, Extension, and Training (EET). The RPE grants support establishing or expanding veterinary practices in rural areas. The EET grants are available to develop, implement, and sustain veterinary services through education, training, recruitment, placement, and retention of veterinarians, veterinary technicians, students, and technology.

Over the past five years, Ohio has received one award through USDA's VSGP. In FY21, Dr. Jacqueline Nolting and The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine secured a VSGP EET grant to support a three-year initiative aimed at strengthening the food-animal veterinary pipeline. The project, Moving from Meows to Moos, focused on exposing high-school students to food-animal medicine through hands-on learning, mentorship, and early career engagement.

Earlier, Stonehouse Veterinary Service, LLC, located in Belmont County, received a VSGP RPE grant in 2018 that was completed in 2021. As a result, the practice was able to enhance farm animal care in Southeastern Ohio by purchasing equipment, hiring support staff, and developing educational and preventive programs for farmers.

SECTION 3: Veterinary Licensing and Practice Data

Demographics of Ohio Licensed Veterinarians

One of the key factors in evaluating the current situation is the demographics of licensed veterinarians in Ohio. The following tables provide demographic statistics.

The Ohio Veterinary Medical Licensing Board (OVMLB) reports:

5,601

Total number of active licensed veterinarians in Ohio

4,382 or 78.24%

Number of active licensed veterinarians residing in Ohio (based on home address)

Nationally, over 20% of licensed veterinarians are age 65 or older, with approximately 17% between the ages of 55 and 64. Therefore, more than one-third of licensed veterinarians are within 10 years of retirement age.

Table 3. Overview of Age and Gender Demographics for Licensed Veterinarians Residing in Ohio

Decade of Birth	Number	Percentage of total licensees	Male Number/ Percentage	Female Number/ Percentage
1930-1939	9	<1%	9 (100%)	0 (0%)
1940-1949	133	3.04%	119 (89%)	14 (11%)
1950-1959	435	9.93%	270 (62%)	165 (38%)
1960-1969	678	15.47%	299 (44%)	379 (56%)
1970-1979	828	18.90%	257 (31%)	571 (69%)
1980-1989	1,033	23.57%	237 (23%)	796 (77%)
1990-1999	1,198	27.34%	233 (19%)	965 (81%)
2000-2009	68	1.55%	11 (16%)	57 (84%)
TOTAL	**4,382**		**1,435 (32.75%)**	**2,947 (67.25%)**

Interesting observations about Ohio's veterinarians:

- Age of eldest licensed: Male – 95 / Female – 84
- The mean age of a licensed veterinarian is 47.6. The mean age of a female licensed veterinarian is 44, while the mean age of a male licensed veterinarian is 54.9
- 699 or 16% of veterinarians are age 65 or older
- 719 or 16.4% of veterinarians are age 55 to 64, within 10 years of retirement age
- In total, 1,418 or 32.4% of veterinarians are at or will be at retirement age within 10 years

Each year, OVMLB has applications for new licenses from new graduates and reciprocity. Ohio offers licensure by reciprocity, meaning veterinarians who are already licensed and in good standing in another U.S. state can obtain an Ohio license without having to repeat the full examination or training process, provided they meet Ohio's eligibility requirements. OVMLB tracks these new applications.

Table 4. The Number of License Applicants from New Graduates and Reciprocity

Fiscal year ending	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Reciprocity	120	125	141	143	168
New Graduates	135	155	137	141	162
Total	255	280	278	284	330

OVMLB estimates that approximately 440 licenses expire each year.

SECTION 4: Veterinary Workforce and Education Data

The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine

As the need for rural and food-animal veterinary services has changed in recent decades, so have veterinary students. It is important to understand if their backgrounds, exposure, interests, and career plans align with the reality of rural or food-animal practices.

Since 2021, The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine (OSUCVM) has received a steady increase in applications from in-state and out-of-state applicants, while class size has remained consistent. The following table provides data on the total applicants and acceptance rates annually, and the same information for Ohio applicants.

Table 5. OSUCVM Total and Ohio Applications and Acceptance Rate for the Past Five Years

Graduation/Entry Year	2029 / 2025	2028 / 2024	2027 / 2023	2026 / 2022	2025 / 2021
Total Applicants to OSUCVM	3,191	2,922	2,661	2,482	2,417
Total Number Accepted to OSUCVM	168	165	165	164	165
Percentage of Total Applicants Accepted	5.26%	5.65%	6.20%	6.61%	6.63%
Ohio Applicants	370	370	345	319	322
Ohio Applicants Accepted	74	70	72	66	74
Percentage of Ohio Applicants Accepted	20.00%	18.92%	20.87%	20.69%	22.98%

Source: The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine.

Across the five most recent classes, OSUCVM received 13,673 total applications, admitting 827 students. Ohio residents submitted 1,726 applications and received 356 offers. Non-Ohio residents (including international students) accounted for the largest share of the pool with 11,947 applicants and 470 acceptances. International applicants represented a small but steady segment, totaling 475 applicants over the period, with 30 acceptances. Annual patterns remained consistent, with Ohio applicants more likely to be accepted than the broader pool each year and undergraduates matriculating from OSU secure between 30 and 42 acceptances per class.

Across the five most recent graduating classes at OSUCVM (2021–2025), a total of 813 DVM students completed the program. Of these graduates, 23.1% were male and 76.9% were female, reflecting the broader national trend of a predominantly female veterinary workforce.

Table 6. Gender of OSUCVM Graduates 2021-2025 (Five DVM Classes)

Number of Graduates	Male	Female	Male Percentage	Female Percentage
813	188	625	23.1%	76.9%

Source: The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine

During the course of their professional studies, students at OSUCVM have the opportunity to participate in externships. Externships allow exposure to a different practice type and species. They allow students to build skills and professional networks. OSUCVM reports the number of students participating in equine, farm animal, and mixed animal externships by school year.

The OSUCVM offers a broad set of elective courses that allow students to focus on their specific career areas of emphasis, including food-animal, equine, and mixed animal practice. These electives provide focused training in equine medicine and surgery, food-animal and dairy production medicine, herd health, reproduction, anesthesia, and intensive care. Pre-clinical electives emphasize foundational clinical skills and species-specific exposure, including bovine theriogenology, dairy herd management, equine lameness and colic, small-ruminant medicine, and food-safety systems, while clinical electives offer advanced, practice-oriented experiences such as a capstone rotation in dairy production medicine and applied food-animal symposium participation.

Table 7. Number of Equine, Farm Animal, and Mixed-Animal Externships Reported by School Year 2020-2025

School Year	Number of Externships
2020-2021	30
2021-2022	71
2022-2023	82
2023-2024	104
2024-2025	81

Source: The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine

Table 8 summarizes first post-DVM career pathways in food-animal, equine, and mixed practice for OSUCVM graduates from the classes of 2020-2024. A majority of graduates pursued formal post-DVM internships, with equine internships comprising the largest single pathway. In contrast, a smaller share of graduates entered food-animal, large-animal, or mixed-animal general practice directly without completing an internship, highlighting heterogeneity in early-career training and labor-market entry within the large-animal veterinary workforce.

Table 8. First Post-DVM Career Pathways for OSUCVM graduates in Food-Animal, Equine, and Mixed Practice, Classes of 2020-2024

Pathway Type	Number of Graduates
Equine Internship	22
Food-Animal Internship	6
Large Animal Internship	4
Food-Animal General Practice	8
Large Animal General Practice	4
Equine Practice	2
Mixed-Animal Practice (Food-Animal or Large Animal Heavy)	7
Total	53

Notes: Counts reflect first known placement following graduation. Internships refer to formal post-DVM clinical training programs.

Source: The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine

From the classes of 2022-2024, 63 graduates entered rural veterinary practice. Forty graduates remained in Ohio, reflecting strong in-state retention. Nine graduates indicated they were working in a rural practice in states adjacent to Ohio (Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Kentucky). The remaining 14 graduates entering rural practice went to other states. The strong concentration of rural placements within Ohio underscores the importance of in-state training pipelines for addressing rural veterinary shortages.

OSUCVM also tracks the number of graduates passing the North American Veterinary Licensing Exam (NAVLE). From 2020-2025, a total of 814 OSUCVM graduates took the exam. Please refer to Table 9 for the results.

Table 9. North American Veterinary Licensing Examination (NAVLE) Performance, OSUCVM Graduates, 2020-2025

Year of Exam	2024 - 2025	2023 - 2024	2022 - 2023	2021 - 2022	2020 - 2021	TOTALS
Students Taking Exam	165	167	164	165	153	814
Students Passing Exam	143	141	148	148	145	725
OSUCVM Percent Passing	87%	84%	90%	90%	95%	89%
National Percent Passing	89%	88%	86%	90%	92%	89%

Veterinarian student debt remains a major factor influencing career choices, often steering graduates toward private and small or mixed-animal practice. Nationwide, the typical cost of veterinary school exceeds $200,000. The following tables present data on debt levels and starting salaries of graduating students.

The debt reported by the AVMA Graduating Senior Survey for OSUCVM reflects only the educational debt accumulated during the DVM program and does not include any prior undergraduate or graduate debt. Average annual compensation is self-reported by graduates that expect to have full time employment and exclude salaries of those pursuing advanced education.

Table 10. Student Debt and Starting Salaries Nationally Among 2025 Graduates

	Nationally
Educational debt of indebted graduates	$212,499
Educational debt of all graduates (including those with no debt)	$174,484
Starting salaries	$133,066
Debt-to-Income ratio of all graduates	1.4

[1] This starting salary reports the average anticipated nominal income for new graduates entering full-time employment. New graduates were asked to provide either their starting salary for the first year (if compensated with a guaranteed salary only) or, if compensated through a base salary plus a production bonus, their base salary for the first year, along with their best estimate of the anticipated production bonus for that year. These values were then used in calculations of average annual compensation for those entering full-time employment.

[2] The debt-to-income ratio represents all graduates who secured full-time employment.

Source: American Veterinary Medical Association. (2026). 2026 AVMA Report on the Economic State of the Veterinary Profession. AVMA Veterinary Economics Division. ISBN: 979-8-9877127-9-5. Reprinted with permission.

Table 11. AVMA Graduating Senior Survey: OSUCVM Graduate Debt, Compensation, and Career Characteristics, 2021–2025[1]

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Total OSU respondents[2]	128	122	112	117	111
Average DVM Debt of all OSU respondents	$165,202	$166,078	$172,746	$144,957	$167,512
Average DVM Debt of only those OSU respondents with DVM Debt	$201,389	$191,147	$187,841	$171,313	$193,961
Number of OSU respondents with no DVM Debt	23	16	***	18	15
Average annual compensation of those OSU respondents in full-time employment[4]	$131,553	$130,515	$134,541	$109,372	$97,156
Number of OSU respondents indicating that they will/prefer to work in a rural community	26	25	20	24	19

Source: 2021–2025 AVMA Graduating Senior Survey. © American Veterinary Medical Association. Reprinted with permission.

[1] Data source: 2021 to 2025 AVMA Graduating Senior Surveys.

[2] All data in the table includes only OSU respondents to the AVMA Graduating Senior Survey in each year listed.

[3] Sample size below 10, replaced with ***.

[4] Average annual compensation data includes only those OSU respondents to the AVMA Graduating Senior Survey who indicated that they would be working full-time in private or public practice employment. New graduates were asked to provide either their starting salary for the first year (if compensated with a guaranteed salary only) or, if compensated through a base salary plus a production bonus, their base salary for the first year, along with their best estimate of the anticipated production bonus for that year. These values were then used in calculations of average annual compensation for those entering full-time employment.

Several patterns are visible across the five-year window. Average educational debt among indebted OSUCVM respondents rose from $193,961 in 2021 to $201,389 in 2025, crossing the $200,000 threshold for the first time in the reporting period. At the same time, between 15 and 23 respondents per year reported completing the DVM program with no educational debt from their DVM program, indicating that roughly one in seven respondents enter practice without a DVM loan burden.

Starting compensation for respondents entering full-time practice climbed from $97,156 in 2021 to $131,553 in 2025, a roughly 35 percent increase over four years. Compensation gains were most pronounced between 2022 and 2023, with reported figures holding above $130,000 in each of the three most recent years.

Interest in rural practice has remained a consistent feature of each graduating class. Between 19 and 26 OSU respondents per year indicated they would be working or preferred to work in a rural community, representing roughly 17 to 21 percent of respondents in every class from 2021 through 2025.

SECTION 5: Youth, Extension, and Veterinary Programming

FFA

The Ohio FFA offers an Animal Systems and Management program as well as several other programs that expose youth to animal science. For FY25, there are 55 Animal Systems and Management programs and overall, a total of 83,871 students are exposed to Animal Science and/or Veterinary Science for the FY25 school year. In FY24, there were 44 Animal Systems and Management programs and 35,855 students exposed to Animal Science and/or Veterinary Science. In FY23, there were 41 Animal Systems and Management programs and 34,452 students exposed to Animal Science and/or Veterinary Science. The increase in student exposure reported for FY25 reflects expanded data availability. FY25 counts include an additional 435 programs providing exposure to general Animal Science principles.

FFA members also participate in supervised agricultural experiences (SAE) that develop individual skills and career-based competencies. In FY25, Ohio FFA members participated in 8,960 animal-related SAEs. These areas include diversified livestock, poultry, equine, sheep production, swine production, beef production, dairy production, small animal, and specialty animals.

Ohio FFA has a state Veterinary Science Career Development Event (CDE). This event is part of a case-based education that allows FFA members to apply their knowledge and critical thinking skills. Questions are asked of members in a clinical setting and cover topics such as parasites, disease, clinical proceedings, and other topics. In 2024, 1,038 students participated in a Veterinary Science CDE.

4-H

Ohio 4-H delivers project-based programming in agriculture and animal sciences that builds technical skills, leadership capacity, and early exposure to animal and veterinary careers. Core components include:

- **Animal science projects:** Ohio 4-H offers 64 distinct animal-related projects spanning companion animals and market livestock. In 2025, more than 70,000 projects were completed across animal science project areas, including beef (10,472), dairy (2,591), goats (10,950), swine (10,463), poultry (15,480), equine (5,938), sheep (4,922), and companion animals and rabbits (18,159).
- **Veterinary science projects:** Ohio 4-H offers three structured veterinary-focused projects designed to introduce youth to animal health, body systems, and veterinary science concepts. In 2025, enrollment included 200 members in *From Airedales to Zebras* (Level 1), 92 members in *All Systems Go!* (Level 2), and 64 members in *On the Cutting Edge* (Level 3).
- **Youth Quality Assurance (YQA):** The Youth Quality Assurance program is the largest in-person animal-related program delivered by county educators and fulfills Ohio Administrative Rule 901-19-07. Programming covers medication use, proper administration, withdrawal times, and the veterinarian–client–patient relationship. In 2025, Ohio 4-H delivered 259 YQA programs with 18,873 youth and adult participants.
- **Species-specific clinics and trainings:** Ohio 4-H also supports in-person animal programming through locally driven species-specific clinics and trainings based on community needs and resources. In 2025, these included 55 equine-focused clinics serving 1,715 participants and 110 clinics across other species with 11,780 participants.

The Ohio State University Extension

OSU Extension provides animal health and management education across multiple livestock sectors, including beef cattle, equine, and poultry programming. Examples include Extension-led equine forage/webinar programming and poultry-focused outreach that addresses health risks and biosecurity practices. Tick management and tick-related outreach are also recurring topics within OSU's livestock education efforts, including resources for cattle producers and education around emerging tick risks.

Extension also maintains producer-facing resources on regulatory issues such as the Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) through programming.

Ohio Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA)

The Ohio Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA) supports veterinary students by partnering with member practices to provide funds for food-animal externships. This program is available to first, second, and third year veterinary students. This allows veterinary students to explore food-animal practice and find mentors.

The OVMA provides leadership development opportunities for veterinarians at any stage in their careers through the Power of 10 program. The Power of 10 provides over 22 hours of continuing education (CE), assists participants in developing their leadership style, and allows participants to learn more about the intersection of veterinary medicine and public policy.

The OVMA provides veterinarians and veterinary technicians with other opportunities for CE. The OVMA hosts the Midwest Veterinary Conference. The conference has a hybrid format. In-person sessions include topics such as food-animals, equine, small ruminants, and public health. The food-animal and equine tracks are recorded so participants may attend virtually to receive CE.

Current State Programs to Address the Veterinary Shortage

The OVMA, OSUCVM, and other stakeholders have actively been implementing programs to address the shortage of rural and food-system animal veterinarians. Protect OHIO is a workforce initiative led by OSUCVM and enabled by increased state support for the college. The initiative is explicitly framed around addressing Ohio's veterinary shortage, especially in rural and large-animal practice, by expanding the number of Ohio students trained each year (up to 35 additional Ohio students per class), increasing faculty and student support, and expanding large-animal hands-on training and rural community immersion opportunities. Protect OHIO also aims to strengthen the long-run pipeline by partnering with youth development and education organizations (including 4-H and FFA) to build interest among Ohio students in large-animal and rural veterinary careers.

Ohio has two programs that provide financial assistance to veterinarians who have educational loans. Resource Shortage Loan Program is administered by the Ohio Veterinary Medical Licensing Board (OVMLB). The program is intended to incentivize veterinarians to work in veterinary resource shortage areas identified by the board, including large-animal and public health–related shortage needs. Current veterinary students and veterinarians within three years of graduation can apply. A letter of contract for placement in a qualifying job/area is necessary to receive funds. Repayment is capped at $10,000 per year and $20,000 in total.

Ohio also operates a distinct Charitable Services Student Loan through OVMLB. This program provides reimbursement for a veterinarian providing charitable veterinary medical services. To be eligible, the applying veterinarian must be practicing or instructing in Ohio for more than 6 months prior to submitting an application. The veterinarian must also be providing charitable veterinary services (i.e., to a humane society or nonprofit organization). To receive debt assistance, the veterinarian must agree to work in Ohio and perform 12 hours of charitable veterinarian services per year of the contract. The contract may be up to two years long. This program is administered in the odd years.

Agriculture and Stakeholder Organization Input and Perspective

During data collection, FJF contacted 27 organizations identified as key stakeholders not previously included in this report to gather their input and perspectives, receiving 12 responses. Building on these responses, the following feedback provides insight into specific challenges.

Two organizations reported policies addressing the shortage of veterinarians. These policies call for increased investment in the enrollment of large-animal veterinarians and vet technician students, incentives to encourage students to remain in food-animal practice, and measures to address the overall shortage.

Most organizations indicated they had recently been engaged on the topic, either through discussions (internal and external), along with supporting the Protect OHIO initiative.

Stakeholders were asked to rank on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the greatest concern) how their organization viewed the veterinary shortage issue currently, and their expectations over the next 10 years. The current average ranking was 7.9, but the ranking increased to 9.1 when asked about the next 10 years.

FJF received additional comments including:

- A need for a poultry veterinarian at the state level to interact with backyard and small-scale flocks.
- Concerns about how the shortage affects small, limited-resource farmers.
- A need to emphasize to prospective students the importance of rural and food-system veterinarians.
- Consideration of new pathways for applicant selection and enrollment in veterinary colleges.
- Ohio is at a critical stage due to a veterinarian shortage, with references to "veterinary deserts."
- An effort to get producers to utilize veterinarians, questioning whether there is a demand issue rather than a supply or access issue.

Support among these organizations is strong, demonstrating a willingness to advance the conversation and work toward solutions.

SECTION 6: Closing and Next Steps

The efforts across the country, and within Ohio, have clearly demonstrated that there is not one or two simple answers to address the veterinarian shortage. It will take several approaches, programs, and organizations, along with time, to address a problem that has been developing for more than a decade. Without question, there is a role for state and federal governments to assist in solving this issue. However, other solutions can be termed as self-help, with the veterinary and agriculture communities working together, in some cases on a case-by-case basis or in local efforts.

- Advance the knowledge of the key statistics and factors impacting the veterinarian shortage,
- Identify gaps in programs and resources,
- Identify technical assistance opportunities,
- Build on the great work that has already been accomplished and develop a long-lasting plan of action to resolve the shortage.

Scan to learn more about our work, partners, education resource hub, ambassadors, and state partners.

Or contact us:

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Farm Journal Foundation Recommendations
Ohio Rural & Food-Systems Veterinary Shortage Solutions:
State and Community Readiness Program
May 4, 2026

The Farm Journal Foundation (FJF) is honored to provide the following recommendations to accompany the assessment report. These recommendations are designed to guide the next steps in the State and Community Readiness Program.

Our goal is to develop recommendations with long-term sustainability and impact in mind. While state and federal governments have a role to play in addressing this issue, many solutions may fall under the category of self-help. These types of solutions may emerge through collaborative, community-led efforts between the veterinary and agricultural sectors.

Overview of the Ohio assessment:

1. Ohio is actively implementing programs to address the shortage of rural and food-system veterinarians. From data tracked on the classes of 2022-2024 at the Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine (OSUCVM), 63 graduates entered rural veterinary practice with 40 remaining in Ohio and nine in states adjacent to Ohio (e.g., Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Kentucky). The strong concentration of rural placements within Ohio underscores the importance of in-state training pipelines for addressing veterinary shortages.
2. Ohio has high levels of engagement in its stakeholder network. Whether working with the university on advancing and strengthening the pipeline for veterinarians in the state or being committed as an organization to working towards a solution, all stakeholders we surveyed agreed that this is a pressing need.
3. No other peer state has a funded workforce initiative like Protect OHIO. Through this program, Ohio is proactively building the pipeline of future veterinarians by adding Ohio students to the class size, expanding support for faculty and students, and partnering with organizations like 4-H and FFA.
4. In comparison to other states in the FJF Readiness Program, Ohio doesn't appear to have as many financial incentives for veterinary students/early career veterinarians at the state level.
5. Historically, Ohio seems to be leaving money on the table in the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program and Veterinary Services Grant Program.
6. Deeper demand analysis is recommended regarding the increasing number of small farms. Ohio mirrors national trends, but veterinary service needs for this segment are not known.

Near-term recommendations

Leverage this report in two areas to advance an initiative that deepens understanding, elevates statewide engagement, and launches a discussion to develop solutions.

Communications:

- Determine the appropriate method and timeline for disseminating the Assessment Report.
- Determine what information will be shared with stakeholders and the public.
- Be committed and intentional to the next steps.
- Release and promote the Assessment Report across the veterinary, education, and agricultural communities, paired with the announcement of a Summit or Conference.

Solutions Mapping:

- Host a Summit or Conference to review the Assessment Report, and initiate a structured process to identify challenges, gather additional input, and develop solution-oriented actions.
- Establishment of a Working Group or Task Force, supported by Rustin M. Moore, DVM, PhD, Dean of The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine (OSUCVM), and Brian Baldridge, Director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA).

Our approach is pragmatic in order to build momentum for long-term success. It is important to start with the easiest and lowest-cost solution steps.

Recommendation: A Summit or Conference with Planning / Agenda

1. FJF recommends that the OSUCVM and ODA host a Summit or Conference after the public release of the State and Community Readiness Assessment Report.
2. A successful Summit will require participation from three stakeholder groups: the veterinary sector, the education system, and the agricultural community. Securing a representative cross-section of these groups is essential, as these individuals and organizations will subsequently form the Working Group or Task Force.

3. The primary goal of the Summit is to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based look at the circumstances impacting the rural and food-systems veterinary sector and the agricultural communities reliant on them. The secondary goal is to initiate a public conversation aimed at developing actionable solutions.
4. We recommend the following agenda and format for the Summit or Conference.
    a. Dean Moore and Director Baldridge: Welcome and remarks about the State and Community Readiness Program
        i. Why do rural and food-system veterinarians matter?
        ii. What are the biggest obstacles?
        iii. What is the risk if the shortages are not solved?
    b. Review of Farm Journal Foundation's Assessment and Recommendations Report
        i. Compare Ohio's data against other states and national data
        ii. Highlight areas of concern or potential need
    c. Sprint Discussions: Workforce Pipeline
        i. High School Teacher/Student/ Extension
        ii. Undergraduate/Pre-Veterinary
        iii. Veterinary Student
        iv. Early Career Practitioner
    d. Sprint Discussions: State Readiness and Engagement Programs and Resources
        i. For High School Teachers/Students/Extension
        ii. For Undergraduate/Pre-Veterinary
        iii. For Veterinary Student
        iv. For Early Career Practitioners
    e. Panel Discussion #1: Veterinarians and Agricultural Producers
        i. The dynamics of their relationship and mutual expectations
        ii. The evolving business model between producers and veterinarians
        iii. The critical role private practitioners play in protecting our food supply
    f. Panel Discussion #2: College of Veterinary Medicine Students and Early Career Veterinarians
        i. What is needed to be successful in a rural and food-system practice?
        ii. Personal examples of the challenges they have faced?
        iii. What are your long-term career goals? How can the agriculture and veterinary sectors help veterinary students and early career veterinarians reach their goals?
    g. Now What? Review the ideas from the audience's written forms*
    h. Close with a request for commitments and announcing the establishment of a Working Group or Task Force

NOTE: The presenters participating in 4 b–f should be asked to place an emphasis on producers, agricultural leaders, and those not directly involved in the veterinary sector. We have found this information critical in helping these stakeholders build a foundation of understanding of the many factors driving the shortage. This information is also vital for increasing knowledge before moving towards a Working Group or Task Force.

*It is recommended that each participant receive a card at the beginning with two questions: 1) What did you learn today that you didn't know or a perspective you had before today that stands out as a significant issue causing the shortage? 2) What is your best idea or solution to address the shortage? These would be taken up after Panel Discussion #2 and used by the moderator in "Now What?" to wrap up the discussion.

Recommendation: Perform a complete review of federal programs available and Ohio's participation in those programs

1. Federal Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP)
    a. As identified in the Assessment Report, the number of applications was below the designations in 2022 and 2023 but increased significantly in 2024. Nevertheless, the number of new awards and renewals continues to rank below USDA averages. Ohio is potentially missing out on federal funds that could help address the shortage. To address this, Ohio should, during the review, develop a specific action plan to improve the quality of applications and promote the VMLRP in order to increase the number of applicants and awards.
2. Federal Veterinary Services Grant Program (VSGP)
    a. In recent years, only one Education, Extension, and Training (EET) grant application and award was identified during the data collection, along with one Rural Practice Enhancement (RPE) grant dating back to 2018. As part of a review of federal programs, Ohio should:
        i. Identify if barriers exist to VSGP applications in Ohio for both the EET and RPE grants.
        ii. Identify ways to promote and encourage applications to VSGP.
3. Explore providing technical assistance to veterinarians for the application, financial management of the award, and the reporting responsibilities of the RPE grants and other grants that become available in the future.
4. The plans recommended above should outline concrete steps, responsible parties, timelines, and measurable goals to increase access, usage, and success in securing federal resources.

Recommendation: Collect additional data points to identify critical shortage areas

1. Building better data: Data is key to identifying trends and solutions to address the shortage. Unfortunately, data doesn't always exist. If data is being collected, it isn't always the right data to answer questions around the shortage of veterinarians.
2. FJF recommends the Ohio Veterinary Medical Licensing Board (OVMLB) begin tracking expired or non-renewed licenses and attempt to identify the type of practice those performed in Ohio. The purpose is to track the loss of rural and food-system veterinarians.
3. FJF recommends that OVMLB improve on established processes to increase data collection on the demographics of currently licensed veterinarians. OVMLB is the organization best positioned to collect data on new and current licensed veterinarians. This data could be gathered as part of the requirements for new and renewed licenses. Information collected by OVMLB should include:
    a. What year did they receive their DVM and from which school
    b. Do they practice part-time or full-time
    c. Location of their clinic and county (or counties) served
    d. Detailed information on the type of practice and the percentage of time spent annually in each species area
    e. For rural and food-systems veterinarians, collect additional data on:
        i. Type of animal seen in practice
        ii. Number of producers (clients) and animals
        iii. Average and furthest distance to the producers' operations
        iv. Do you operate from a physical location or a mobile clinic only
        v. Define service area (by county or driving distance)
        vi. Do they believe there are sufficient veterinarians in their current service area to service the demand
    f. For veterinarians 55 and over, survey questions concerning retirement plans, and if they have a transition plan for their practice
4. OSUCVM provided detailed information on graduates, including intentions to practice in rural areas and food-system practices. This type of information is beneficial to understanding career plans, reasons, and changing dynamics in veterinary medicine. We recommend that OSUCVM continue to build on this important data and work with the OVMLB to identify and develop future data points, collection methods, and data sharing processes that can build a solid foundation of information as the Ohio initiative moves forward.
5. The support of the Ohio Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA) is critical to successful data collection of licensed veterinarians. Every effort should be made to involve OVMA in

conversations to build better data and its collection methods, ensuring a collaborative approach and long-term success.

6. The data and information collected to date and from the above recommendations can help identify a pool of veterinarians who are eligible or could be interested in utilizing federal and state programs or other efforts to address the shortage.

Recommendation: Establish a Working Group or Task Force

1. Dean Moore and Director Baldridge should announce at the Summit the formation of a Working Group or Task Force to advance ideas and solutions. This group will further analyze the information from the assessment report, the presentations and discussions at the Summit, and potential data collected after the Summit. This group will be tasked to develop solution models.
2. Dean Moore and Director Baldridge should solicit nominations, one representative from each of the major stakeholder groups/organizations impacted by the issue. It is recommended that the group have no more than 25 members, and a committee structure be used to involve additional individuals with expertise in areas of need.
3. OSUCVM and ODA leadership, with assistance from FJF, are to develop goals, a timeline, and a structure to present at the first meeting of the group for consideration and approval. These may include:
    a. The group's overall charge is to further identify and develop actions to address the veterinarian shortage.
    b. To identify and develop solutions for urgent needs and items that can be accomplished within a year, recognizing that other actions will take longer to develop and implement.
    c. Divide the shortage issue into smaller, manageable topics to facilitate a committee structure. Each topic can be explored more thoroughly, focusing on specific areas outlined below.
4. The topics and committee structure to examine and develop solutions should consider each of the three stages of an individual's path to becoming a rural or food-systems veterinarian, and a fourth area of remaining in that practice. The following examples provide a starting point and should be adjusted as leadership determines:
    a. Building the rural and food-systems Veterinary Pipeline.
        i. Goal: Bridge the information gap between high school students and veterinary medicine careers
        ii. Expertise to involve beyond Working Group members; 4-H and FFA members, and staff, high school guidance counselors, and college pre-vet advisors.

iii. Identify and study programs that may already be in place.
iv. Review the FJF high school and undergraduate education resource modules and determine how to best implement them.

b. Supporting rural and food-systems students.
   i. Goal: Build and broaden the relationships between veterinary students, their school, and Ohio's agricultural community
   ii. Expertise to involve beyond working group members; OSUCVM students, their advisors, commodity organization leaders, and veterinary sector leaders.
   iii. Explore potential outreach and support that can establish partnerships needed to connect students with opportunities in rural and food-systems practices.
   iv. Review and study the FJF veterinary student education resource module, how agricultural organizations can support student chapters, preceptorships and externships, and internships.

c. Connecting Graduates to rural and food-system practices.
   i. Goal: Identify and develop opportunities to connect graduating veterinarians with rural and food-system practices and other key organizations and assist with transition.
   ii. Determine expertise to involve beyond working group members. Examples could include, but are not limited to, agricultural leaders, veterinarians who have made this transition recently, community leaders, and government officials.
   iii. Ascertain the role local agricultural operations and communities should play in the recruitment and sustainability of rural and food-systems veterinarians.
   iv. Examine current loan repayment and support programs for early career veterinarians and identify additional avenues of assistance.

d. Ensuring long-term success for rural and food-systems veterinarians.
   i. Goal: Examine the status of today's rural and food-systems veterinarians to determine the issues and identify solutions to maintaining a sustainable career.
   ii. Expertise to involve beyond working group members: producers with strong relationships with their veterinarian, veterinarians practicing for five or more years, and agricultural, community, academic, and government leaders.
   iii. Explore the issues and identify solutions for early career veterinarians to own and maintain a profitable, sustainable practice. Areas to consider are location, demand from enough clients, education needs, and risk tolerance, among others, as determined by the group.

iv. Review the FJF education resource module for Building Capacity for Rural Veterinarians through Early Career Support, along with other initiatives implemented by other states.
v. Study the relationship between producers and veterinarians, the business model, opportunities for veterinarians to improve efficiencies, and ways to incorporate technology to improve the outcomes for producers and veterinarians.

5. The working group should complete its work in 8 to 10 months.

Recommendation: Publish and communicate what work will be done, and by who

The final product of the Working Group or Task Force should be a written report with goals, benchmarks, and achievable recommendations that can be accomplished on state and local levels. This collaborative effort will unite the veterinary community with commodity groups and producers, which will contribute to the development of a more robust and sustainable Ohio for all involved.

Closing perspectives

Many of the actions outlined in the report can begin with no-cost or low-cost enhancements to existing systems. Improving communication across sectors, strengthening data collection within current licensing processes, increasing participation in federal programs, and expanding opportunities for student engagement are all examples of interventions that require limited spending but offer meaningful impact. Ohio already has strong assets, including committed stakeholders, effective youth, and Extension programs, and the Protect OHIO initiative led by OSUCVM that can be aligned more intentionally toward shared goals.

The most promising solutions will arise through collaborative innovation. Meaningful progress will depend on the veterinary community, agricultural producers, educational institutions, and state partners working together. By prioritizing practical steps, using existing resources more effectively, and maintaining a spirit of partnership, Ohio can build a more resilient and sustainable rural and food-systems veterinary workforce. These efforts will address current shortages and strengthen the long-term health, productivity, and economic vitality of Ohio's agricultural communities.