

FARMJOURNAL
FOUNDATION



Veterinary Workforce Solutions Program

Addressing the Critical Shortage of Rural
and Food-Systems Veterinarians in America



SUMMARY

The U.S. faces a significant shortage of rural and food-systems veterinarians, threatening agricultural livelihoods, rural economic growth, disease control, animal health, and public health. Farm Journal Foundation proposes a systems solution approach to address this critical issue and drive measurable impact towards building an adequate, sustainable, and inclusive pipeline of food-animal veterinary professionals to lead and support our dynamic food value chain.

Building upon the success of our coalition work in the past two years, Farm Journal Foundation will:

- Scale the reach and impact of successful pilots to increase the percentages of undergraduate students, veterinary students and early career veterinary professionals who choose this career path
- Leverage the knowledge of a curated and growing number of multi-stakeholder leaders who are committed to our Veterinary Solutions Mapping Coalition
- Educate national-level policymakers about opportunities for positive systemic change to support the veterinary profession, through our successful Veterinary Ambassadors Program

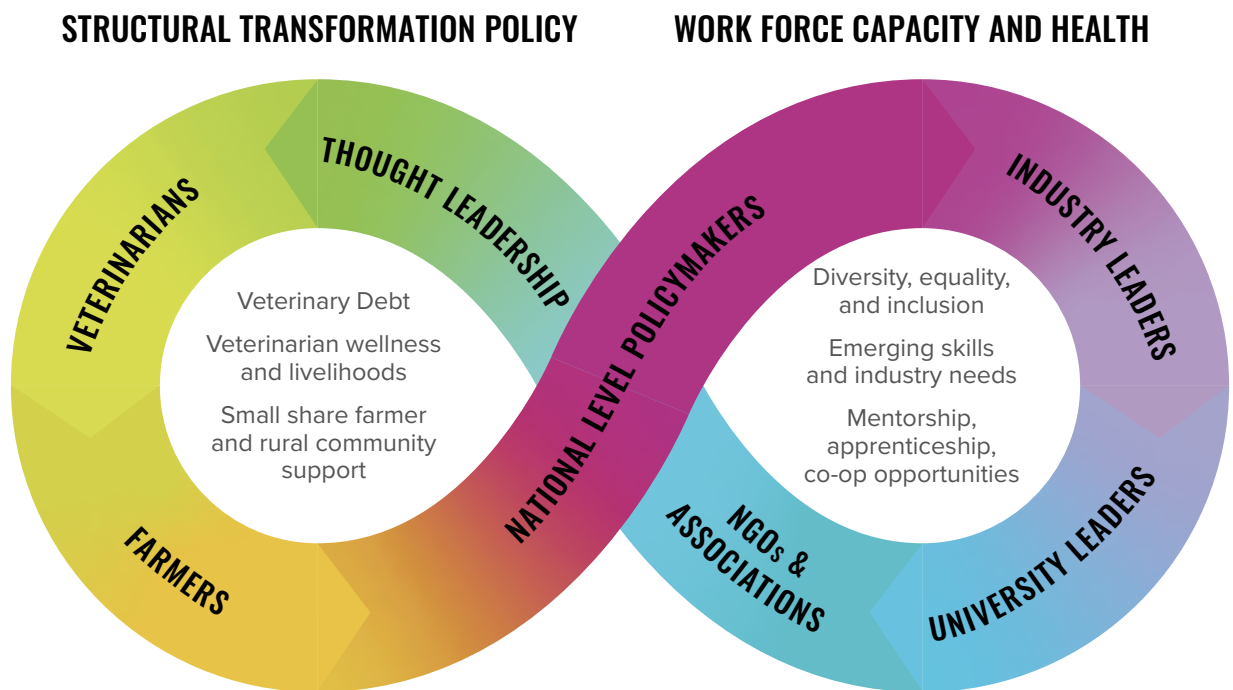
Addressing the Need

Food systems veterinarians are vital to maintaining a safe food supply in the U.S., and they play a critical role in protecting public health. They also contribute to the economic prosperity of their communities. Yet the United States is facing an alarming shortfall of food animal veterinarians, especially in rural areas.

Veterinary businesses, including clinics and diagnostic labs, serve numerous functions for rural communities, yet fewer than 12% of veterinary businesses are located in counties with 20,000 people or less. This critical shortage is driven by a number of factors. Students embarking on veterinary careers often are discouraged from specializing in food-animal treatment and working in rural areas due to higher earning prospects in companion-animal practices in urban and suburban areas. High levels of student debt, demanding work schedules, and lack of business training and support also serve as barriers to young professionals against building long-term careers in rural areas. Ultimately, the decline in food-animal and public service veterinarians in rural areas has significant repercussions, heightening concerns about food safety, potential disease outbreaks, the risk of diseases passing from animal to human populations, and a decline in rural economic growth.

Scaling for Impact

Through this concept, Farm Journal Foundation proposes a series of tangible solutions to address the structural challenges facing the food-animal veterinary industry, including expanding the role of universities and partners to increase opportunities for supporting a robust pipeline of veterinary professionals. Above all, the underlying spirit of this proposal and project framework is based upon centralizing knowledge and resources to enable collaboration across sectors.



The above graphic summarizes the key issues that create barriers to sustainability for food animal veterinarians, and Farm Journal Foundation's vision for a virtuous cycle that addresses these challenges through a coalition of mission-aligned, multi-stakeholder partners and the education of national-level policymakers.

PROPOSAL:

Expanding the Veterinary Workforce Solutions Program

Over the past two years, Farm Journal Foundation has collaborated with stakeholders in the creation of the Veterinary Workforce Solutions Program, which seeks to address systemic challenges within the veterinary sector and drive long-term change – ultimately creating a healthier, more vibrant industry that supports veterinary professionals and the farming communities that rely on them.

Our previous and current work has already produced tangible and successful results. Through support and stakeholder input, we have developed a new Veterinary Education Pipeline Program of professional development content for aspiring veterinarians, to encourage them to embark on careers in the food-systems sector and support them in building strong rural practices. We have also engaged more than 40 stakeholders from across the veterinary, agriculture, and education sectors in our Veterinary Solutions Mapping Coalition, building deeper awareness about veterinary shortages across multiple industries and encouraging action among key stakeholders. In addition, our Veterinary Ambassador Program, which works with thought leaders to educate policymakers about the impact of veterinary shortages in rural America, has helped create new, influential champions for this cause.

Veterinary Workforce Solutions Program: Economic Impact

Each rural veterinarian contributes approximately

\$340,000

in economic impact to their county and creates 4-5 additional jobs

There are

711 COUNTIES

across the U.S. designated by the USDA as having a shortage of rural veterinarians

Filling these shortage areas would create an additional

\$242.2 MILLION

in economic impact in rural America and 3,200 new jobs

The Veterinary Workforce Solutions Program already has strong momentum, and we look forward to expanding this work in the coming year. In the next grant cycle, we propose work in three programmatic areas, to drive further impact:



1. Veterinary Education Pipeline Program: Launching and Scaling the Pilots

Over the past year, Farm Journal Foundation has constructed an educational platform to support undergraduate students on their journey toward establishing or joining food-animal veterinary practices. This work has included initiating three interactive learning modules:

**Planning for Success in
Veterinary Medicine During
Undergraduate Education**

**Building Business Basics
as a Veterinary Student**

**Engaging the Future
as an Early Career
Veterinarian**

The bedrock of these learning modules are a series of case studies, written by Dr. Clint Neill, a veterinary economist at Cornell University. The cases are structured around the stories of current university students and practicing veterinarians, they address many of the major barriers to entry and business success of food-animal veterinarians through their authentic voices and stories.

Each module will be integrated into classroom learning with strategic partners and allow for independent study. Modules will be presented through a web-based platform that creates an interactive interface through experiential learning moments of users. This encourages a personalized journey with the content and critical thinking about the subject matter. Resources include the ability to view subject-complimentary video content of the case study subjects, from industry thought leaders and livestock producers. In addition, this learning platform is built in a flexible manner to support uptake and scale across a diverse range of academic institutions and government agencies.

Learning materials are organized at the introductory-to-intermediate stage of knowledge and experience, with worksheets, veterinarian examples, and a wide variety of manuals and resources. At the end of each module, additional resources and contact information are available to help continue the user's career journey.

Clinton L. Neill, Ph.D.



Clinton Neill, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in Veterinary Economics for the Cornell Center of Veterinary Business and Entrepreneurship. Dr. Neill's research primarily focuses on the broad scope of issues that face the veterinary industry. Before coming to Cornell, Dr. Neill was an Assistant Professor in Food Systems Economics at Virginia Tech. Dr. Neill completed his bachelor's and master's degrees in agricultural and applied economics at Texas Tech University, and received his Doctorate in Agricultural Economics from Oklahoma State University. In addition to conducting research, Dr. Neill focuses on bringing the research to real solutions for the veterinary and animal health industries.



Looking ahead, we propose to scale this platform to students through a cohort of academic partners. Farm Journal Foundation proudly proposes to partner with Tuskegee University as the official launch partner of the Veterinary Education Pipeline Program. Through this partner, the full educational program will be formally tested and evaluated within their undergraduate and veterinary school student populations.

Official Pilot Partner: Tuskegee University

Farm Journal Foundation is proudly proposing partnering with Tuskegee University as the official launch partner of the Veterinary Education Pipeline Program. Through this partner, the full educational program will be tested and evaluated within their undergraduate and veterinary school student body.



Tuskegee University is an independent and state-related institution of higher education. Its programs serve a student body that is coeducational as well as racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse. With a strong orientation toward disciplines which highlight the relationship between education and workforce preparation in the sciences, professions, and technical areas. We are excited to have the direct leadership of Dr. Olga Bolden-Tiller, Dean of the College of Agriculture, Environment and Nutrition Sciences, and Dr. Ruby Perry, Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine, for this program.



Dr. Olga Bolden-Tiller
Dean – College of Agriculture,
Environment and Nutrition
Sciences



Dr. Ruby Perry
Dean – College of
Veterinary Medicine

In addition to Tuskegee, members of our Veterinary Solutions Mapping Coalition (discussed further below) have been involved in the ideation of this platform since its inception; academic members of our coalition group, including those from Auburn University, Kansas State University, Oklahoma State University, Iowa State University, and Texas Tech University are deeply invested in this concept and introducing it to their students. For the 2024 grant cycle, we propose the following deliverables:

2024 Veterinary Education Pipeline Program: Proposed Deliverables

- Launch the pilot of the Veterinary Education Pipeline Program at Tuskegee University, using educational platform materials created in 2023.
- Develop partnerships with three additional universities to scale the program and impact more students. New partners may include University members of the Solutions Mapping Group, which have participated in the development of our educational platforms.
- Establish a user feedback loop for students and faculty for improvement revisions.

Identifying Expanded Opportunities for Scale

Through the process of meeting with stakeholders across multiple sectors, Farm Journal Foundation has discovered great interest in this work from various mission areas of U.S. Department of Agriculture that rely on veterinary science, state Departments of Agriculture, and associations that support regional economic development for rural communities. These sectors can both provide platforms for reaching a larger number of engaged students and early practice veterinary participants and provide supportive resources for institutions that adopt the Veterinary Workforce Solution Program.

As part of this grant cycle, we propose intentional engagement within these sectors, through a series of focus groups, to develop a new layer of scaling opportunity for this work. These focus groups will:

Engage select USDA mission areas (APHIS, FSIS), states, and regions to map the following scale opportunities:

Expanded pathways for engaging a greater number of students and participants in the program

Assessing availability of supporting resources for undergraduate students, veterinary students, and early career veterinarians

Identifying technical assistance opportunities to establish missing programs or resources

Enabling participating partners to be self-supporting

2. Veterinary Solutions Mapping Coalition: Convening Influencers

Over the past two years, we have successfully engaged more than 40 partners across the veterinary medicine, education, government, and agricultural sectors in ongoing conversations about solutions to support food-animal veterinarians. A focused subset of this group, representing 12 institutions and organizations, comprise the Veterinarian Solutions Mapping Coalition. In total, we have held 11 coalition working meetings (three in-person, eight virtual). These advisors are central in informing our strategies and decision-making process as we fulfill this partnership's mission.



The group of organizations listed above represent those newly engaged by Farm Journal Foundation over the past year in conversations and active advisory support in building an adequate, sustainable, and inclusive pipeline of food-animal veterinary professionals.

Farm Journal Foundation proposes to expand the work of this coalition within the 2024 grant cycle. To leverage the depth and breadth of this talented group, we plan to host in-person convenings and virtual discussions, to help build out pipeline-focused working groups that we have established in the past year, focusing on the individual challenges of undergraduate students, veterinary students, and new practicing veterinarians.

Our working experience with this coalition over the last two years has produced outcomes through a combination of engagement. Our team has held one-on-one meetings, in-person group convenings, and virtual working group sessions to create a richness of community. This model builds a sense of shared value and commitment to the coalition, which produces best-in-class direction and outcomes. Additionally, as a result of these coalition relationships, our Farm Journal Foundation team has been invited to participate and co-present with various working group members on thought leadership panels, industry events, and speaking engagements. These opportunities elevate this critical issue, further the conversation and provide learning sessions to increase our understanding of need for resource for the food-animal systems veterinary profession.

For the 2024 grant cycle, we propose the following deliverables:

2024 Veterinary Solutions Mapping Coalition: Proposed Deliverables

- Conduct three stakeholder coalition meetings (two virtual, one in-person) to review pilot user feedback and continue to facilitate expanded solution mapping to the multifaceted challenges facing the food-animal systems veterinary sector.
- Leverage the commitment of the coalition group members to build out support systems that launch the education pilot modules.
- Continue to grow the group of coalition members by expanding engagement through industry conferences, professional organizations, and utilizing our Veterinary Ambassadors.

3. Veterinary Ambassador Program: Expanding and Deepening Reach

Farm Journal Foundation's Veterinary Ambassador Program educates national-level policymakers about central challenges related to the food-animal veterinary profession and has created numerous opportunities to have meaningful dialogues on pathways for improvement.

Since its inception, the program has already created a positive impact. Over the past year, our Veterinary Ambassadors hosted an educational briefing for more than 30 legislative staff on Capitol Hill, met with a wide range of Senators and members of Congress, and led meetings with leadership at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The work of this group can be directly correlated to the formation of the Senate Veterinary Medicine Caucus by Senators Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN). Over the past two years since the Veterinary Ambassador Program was launched, members participated in training events in Washington, D.C., hosted the launch of a peer-reviewed paper, and spoke about the veterinary shortage issue in the media.



To build upon the success of our Veterinary Ambassador program, Farm Journal Foundation would propose to extend and expand this work into the next grant cycle. In the year ahead, we would like to deepen our bench of Veterinary Ambassadors, potentially doubling the number of Ambassadors from three to six, and diversify the group to include members from different regions of the U.S. and who are in different stages of their veterinary careers.

In addition, our Veterinary Ambassador Program has quickly become an impactful leadership development program for the industry, creating the opportunity for Ambassadors to become champions for important issues among their peers. In the next grant cycle, we will work to build this reputation by creating additional opportunities for Veterinary Ambassadors, such as through the facilitation of speaking engagements, media interviews, and op-eds in national and regional news outlets. For the 2024 grant cycle, we propose the following deliverables:

2024 Veterinary Ambassador Program: Proposed Deliverables

- Double the size of our Veterinary Ambassador Program from three to six.
- Focus Veterinary Ambassador recruitment on diversity to ensure broad representation and inclusion of careers across the food-animal sector.
- Continue meetings with national-level policymakers in Washington, D.C.
- Increase communications support, focusing on events, media placements, and op-eds.

CONCLUSION

Our Veterinary Workforce Solutions Program work in 2022-23 has created tremendous momentum and we look forward to this success in the coming years. We are seeking additional pre-competitive support in order to continue to build the solutions model for long-term system change that will bring positive impact on veterinarians and veterinarians, farmer producers and food systems veterinarians for many years to come.



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