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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

AVMA Workforce Study Important Step for Veterinary Medicine

Washington, D.C., April 23, 2013--The American Veterinary Medical Association's (AVMA) recently released workforce study, "2013 U.S. Veterinary Workforce Study: Modeling Capacity Utilization" is an important step among many taken in recent years to help the veterinary medical profession achieve a more appropriate state of economic equilibrium, according to the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC).

"We commend the AVMA for commissioning this study," said Dr. Deborah Kochevar, dean of the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University and president of the AAVMC. "This is a very useful and important achievement for the profession."

The highly anticipated study described an overall 12.5 percent excess-capacity in the profession and asserted that if present trends continue, that imbalance will persist through 2025. The study noted that gaps between capacity and demand vary among geographic regions and specific sectors of professional practice. For example, the study identified an 18% excess capacity in small animal practice, but noted that the demand

for veterinarians employed in public health, food safety, research and regulatory affairs appears to be equal to the supply.

The study also distinguished between need and demand. Although there may be a need for more veterinarians to work in food production, especially in some rural areas, there may be insufficient demand to make veterinary practices in these areas financially viable.

“We view academic veterinary medicine and the nation’s practice environment as fully integrated, constantly interacting and co-dependent systems,” said Kochevar. “We look forward to active collaboration with the AVMA and other organizations in veterinary medicine to educate the profession on how to resolve its economic issues.”

The AAVMC and the AVMA have historically worked closely together in providing leadership for the profession. The AAVMC lauded the AVMA’s October 2011 decision to commit \$5 million to support a comprehensive, multi-year economic strategy program designed to address persistent challenges such as low salaries and high educational debt-loads.

In recent years, the two organizations have held several joint economic meetings designed to assess the profession’s operating environment and collaborated on numerous other programs designed to foster the quality of the profession. Dr. Eleanor

Green, the Carl B. King Dean of Veterinary Medicine at the Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, serves as a member of the AVMA's Workforce Advisory Group, which provided insight and guidance to the study team.

Changing market conditions and characteristics have stressed the economic wellbeing of the veterinary profession for the past 25 years. These include imbalances rooted in the way society will pay for human-quality clinical care for companion animals, the high cost of medical education, internet era changes in the way goods and services are sold to consumers, changes in agricultural production practices, a lack of funding for necessary public health jobs and other factors.

The Great Recession, which reduced consumer demand for both discretionary and advanced veterinary clinical services, substantially increased the pressure of these conditions on veterinary economics. While those long-term characteristics of the profession's operating environment persist, the nation's economic recovery appears to be gaining momentum and that bodes well for the veterinary profession.

Expanding the "demand" side of the equation will also be an important part of solving this problem. Broader public understanding of the importance of preventive healthcare for companion animal care should expand markets, Kochevar said, citing the importance of emerging programs such as the Partners for Healthy Pets Initiative.

In the early to mid-2000s, there was a great deal of discussion in the profession about an impending under-capacity, especially in public health related areas of veterinary medicine. That led to broad support for the Veterinary Workforce Expansion Act of 2005, which was introduced in the U.S. Congress.

In response to that concern, several established U.S. schools have enlarged their class sizes over the past six or seven years, which has led some to blame the colleges for contributing to the current over-capacity described in the study. “Colleges of veterinary medicine make individual decisions regarding class size based upon their mission and the population they serve,” said AAVMC Executive Director Dr. Andrew Maccabe. “Enrollment patterns are not coordinated or mediated by any agency or organization.”

Market forces are critical determinants of capacity and demand in an economic system and periods of friction and stress often occur as professions work through supply and demand cycles. “Our goal is to ensure that our efforts to prepare new generations of veterinarians remain in strategic alignment with the needs and expectations of the society we serve” Dr. Kochevar said.

Rising tuition and student debt load are significant problems that affect the wellbeing of the veterinary profession. These problems are magnified by widespread recognition of the larger economic challenges threatening all of higher education.

Despite the highly publicized concerns regarding economic stress in the veterinary profession, there has been no reduction in the quantity or the quality of the applicant pool seeking admission to colleges of veterinary medicine, according to Dr. Maccabe.

“The evidence demonstrates to us that thoughtful, well-informed students continue to make rational decisions to attend veterinary school, despite the recent rise in uncertainty associated with appropriate salaries and employment opportunities,” he said.

In early 2013, the AAVMC established a Financial Literacy Task Force designed to create a national approach to providing students with the financial information and counseling they need to make the best decisions about their educational programs and career development.

The Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) is a nonprofit membership organization working to protect and improve the health and welfare of animals, people and the environment by advancing academic veterinary medicine. Its members include all 33 veterinary medical colleges in the United States and Canada, eight departments of veterinary science, eight departments of comparative medicine, 12 international colleges of veterinary medicine, and three affiliate members. On the Web: <http://www.aavmc.org>

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