

Crazy Mountain Veterinary Service

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To: Economic Affairs Interim Committee
Re: Rural Veterinary Workforce in Montana
From: Katie Rein, DVM

Background

I grew up on a cow-calf operation 34 miles northwest of Big Timber, Montana and attended a rural school in Sweet Grass County from kindergarten through eighth grade. I have practiced veterinary medicine in rural Montana for 21 years.

I own a veterinary practice with locations in Harlowton and White Sulphur Springs. Our vision is to cultivate a strong, caring team while advancing sustainable rural veterinary practice, and our mission is to empower ranchers to produce healthy, profitable beef while providing quality veterinary care to rural communities.

In 2025, our six veterinarians:

- Traveled 129,464 miles
- Covered 16 counties across central Montana
- Provided care for over 75,000 beef cows
- Completed 2,618 ranch calls or large-animal clinic appointments

We also serve sheep, horses, small animals, and 4-H and FFA livestock projects. One of our associate veterinarians has recently purchased land to build a clinic in Mosby, expanding veterinary access in central Montana.

The Challenge

Montana faces a significant shortage of large animal veterinarians, particularly in rural areas.

Our clinic received a USDA Veterinary Services Grant in 2020 due to our location in a designated veterinary shortage area. Through that grant, we provided hands-on training to producers and youth about common calving problems.

Since the grant ended in 2023, producer groups and extension agents have continued inviting us to teach these classes across Montana. We have conducted trainings in communities including:

Kalispell, Stevensville, Dillon, Whitehall, Alder, Bozeman, Great Falls, Malta, Glendive, and Miles City.



In these conversations with producers, we consistently hear the same concern: access to veterinary care is becoming increasingly difficult, especially in the far western and far eastern parts of the state.

Workforce Reality

I have served for three years on a USDA Veterinary Medical Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) selection panel, and one of our associates has received this award. Two more associates recently applied.

I have also mentored young veterinarians through the Montana Veterinary Medical Association Power of Ten Program.

When asked if they would commit to practicing in a specific rural location before even starting veterinary school, none indicated they would be willing to do so.

Additionally, when rural practices need veterinarians, the need is immediate—not four years in the future.

Potential Solutions

A state loan repayment program modeled after the USDA Veterinary Medical Loan Repayment Program could help address Montana's rural veterinary shortage.

Key features could include:

- The State Veterinarian designating shortage areas
- A selection panel reviewing applicants
- Loan repayment distributed over a multi-year service commitment

This approach incentivizes veterinarians after they choose to serve rural communities, which aligns better with how veterinary career decisions are made.

Another opportunity would be externship grants for undergraduate students interested in veterinary medicine, specifically for summer placements in rural veterinary clinics. These programs could help encourage more Montana students to pursue careers in veterinary medicine and eventually return to serve rural communities.

Conclusion

Rural veterinarians are essential to Montana agriculture, livestock health, and rural economies.

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Supporting policies that encourage veterinarians to practice in rural Montana will help ensure producers have the veterinary care they need to maintain healthy herds and sustainable operations.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective.

Katie Rein, DVM