**RESOLUTION # 13**

**ANIMAL HEALTH AND VETERINARY CARE**

**WHEREAS,** preventing animal diseases from entering New Jersey’s livestock populations, and responding to disease outbreaks when they do occur, is a primary mission of both the Department and its Division of Animal Health (DAH); and

**WHEREAS**, a large part of that responsibility is ensuring that importation of livestock into New Jersey from other parts of the nation or the world does not also bring animal diseases that could spread to animals already in the state; and

**WHEREAS**, the DAH must continually prepare to prevent diseases from entering the state, not only via animals that may be imported to New Jersey, but also through wildlife that cannot be controlled for testing; for example, working with USDA and fellow state agencies during 2022 and 2023 to respond to instances of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) that arrived in several backyard flocks via wild birds (mainly black vultures) and which, on the larger-outbreak scale, resulted in the euthanasia of millions of birds throughout the nation; and

**WHEREAS**, the COVID-19 pandemic brought into sharp focus the issue of how “zoonotic” diseases in animals can jump to infect humans under certain circumstances, adding an element of concern for people who work or live around large numbers of animals that they might personally come into contact with; and

**WHEREAS**, a strong first line of defense in helping DAH prevent and fight animal diseases in New Jersey livestock is a robust livestock veterinary corps regularly serving the animals owned by livestock operators; and

**WHEREAS**, there is a need for livestock and food-animal veterinarians in New Jersey, shown through surveys done by the NJAES Board of Managers livestock committee; and there is a need for more of these doctors to enable the livestock owners to develop strong client/doctor relationships and to serve operations in New Jersey for improved animal care; and

**WHEREAS**, reports of shortages of such doctors are actually a critically worsening statewide problem, wherein some livestock owners report transporting an animal several hours into another state in order to be seen by a veterinarian; and

**WHEREAS,** the Rowan University School of Veterinary Medicine, the first such program in New Jersey, and the 34th veterinary school in the nation, will open in New Jersey with the first class being accepted in 2025; and there exists a need to establish a location, system, and funding for practicum in New Jersey, perhaps at Rutgers or other location where necessary facilities already exist, as students who go out-of-state for this final portion of their education are likely to stay in that other state once their practicum is completed; and

**WHEREAS**, State budget resources directed toward subsidizing or reimbursing tuition for students at the new Rowan University school or at other veterinary schools outside New Jersey, could be used to incentivize young veterinarians locating and staying in New Jersey for a given number of years, bolstering the number of large-animal and livestock vets in the state; and

**WHEREAS**, surrounding states also are experiencing livestock veterinary shortages, with the Pennsylvania House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee recently holding a brainstorming session with industry representatives on ideas to address the shortage in that state; and

**WHEREAS**, Rutgers NJAES has suggested the idea of New Jersey livestock operators and the available livestock veterinarians in this state forming alliances with counterparts in surrounding states to explore and create regional approaches to solving this issue; and

**WHEREAS**, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has moved forward with removing certain veterinary medicines from availability over the counter (OTC) and made them available only through a new and separate prescription system that requires a veterinarian to visit and inspect the animal before prescribing those medications; and

**WHEREAS**, the lack of livestock veterinarians in New Jersey can add two to three days to the time between a livestock operator noticing an animal displaying disease symptoms and the time a veterinarian can see the animal (if they can find a veterinarian to come at all), or transporting the animal to a neighboring state for care, thus raising the risk that the disease could spread to other animals on that farm or to nearby farms.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that we, the delegates to the 109th State Agricultural Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 7-8, 2024, do hereby support legislation for veterinary medicine loan-redemption programs, as well as a matching grant program provided through legislation for veterinary students, primarily from New Jersey and bordering states who practice livestock medicine in this state for a minimum of five years after graduation.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the State Board of Agriculture and the Department to work with the veterinarians in New Jersey to inform all practices regarding grants available to the rural and underserved areas to provide financial assistance to set up services.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the NJDA and the administration of the new Veterinary School at Rowan University to work collaboratively to protect animal health and train veterinary students by efficient cross-utilization of the State resources at the Rowan veterinary school and the NJDA’s Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratory.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the State Board of Agriculture and the Department, in cooperation with Rutgers NJAES, to explore all options for an in-state and/or a multi-state approach with bordering states to address the shortage of livestock veterinarians in this region, including but not limited to: lack of available support staff, better utilization of existing vet technician positions with higher pay (may require legislation to clarify “under the direction of a vet” to include in the field), allowing advanced technology through telemedicine, manage student debt, and expand recruitment and retention.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the New Jersey Congressional Delegation to continue working on changing FDA regulations to once again make certain veterinary medications available over the counter instead of by prescription only, as the delays in getting a veterinarian to physically inspect an animal can seriously increase the risk of the disease spreading to other animals in a flock or herd.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that a program be explored that trains and authorizes producers to have direct access to the most recently restricted medications.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the administrators of the new veterinary school at Rowan University to encourage that school’s students to explore the opportunities available to them if they concentrate on livestock medical care, especially the first couple of classes to go through the school, who will have the opportunity to address the dearth of livestock veterinarians that currently exists in the state.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the State Board of Agriculture, NJDA, in cooperation with Rutgers NJAES to investigate helping to establish a location, system and funding for veterinary practicum in New Jersey, to avoid losing vet students educated here to other states where they would otherwise have to go for practicum.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge access to online publications and videos, as well as in-person educational seminars, be provided to 4-H members and small livestock owners by NJAES and the NJDA about pertinent information in the areas of nutrition, disease, and parasite prevention, and made available to producers as well as feed stores and fairs, places frequented by small farmers who raise livestock.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** that we request assistance from all interested groups and agencies to help students and veterinarians to access the Veterinary Services Grant Program through USDA (designed to relieve veterinary shortage situations and support veterinary services), which include two types of grants: EET (Education, Extension, and Training) and RPE (Rural Practice Enhancement).

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge NJDA and Rutgers to work collaboratively to create a contact list for all small backyard operations and all livestock farms, to be used for notification of emergencies, dissemination of educational information, and upcoming workshop sessions.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that NJDA and NJAES, and the Rutgers Board of Managers, agricultural education groups, veterinarians and producers from the involved livestock commodity groups come together on at least an annual basis in a working group to create a relationship to move forward in assisting the Department of Agriculture and NJAES in assessing the needs of the producers in regard to education, services, and veterinarian care.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that practica must be established and be administered by professionals and to include liability protections and indemnifications for the students involved and host or sponsoring organizations to protect those organizations from liability.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that livestock veterinary students seeking reimbursement for their tuitions be assisted through the State (NJDA) and to have those applications be streamlined as much as possible, and to address underserved populations first, and to urge counties to provide additional reimbursement, where applicable.