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SECTION 1 – Letter from the Minister

Mr. Ron Kostyshyn
Box 109
Ethelbert MB R0L 0T0

Dear Mr. Kostyshyn:

This letter is to invite your participation as chairperson of a three-member task force to complete a broad review and make recommendations on veterinary services currently available in Manitoba.

Enormous challenges exist in providing veterinary services and assuring livestock producers across the province have timely access to veterinarians. In addition, there is the threat of a foreign animal disease that could have very serious consequences for our livestock industry.

We need to ensure that Manitoba has a strong veterinary infrastructure to meet these challenges. To this end, I am forming a task force to review all facets of veterinary services available. This will include the current legislation, existing provincial programs, review of services available in other jurisdictions and finally, making recommendations on options to meet the current and future demands for veterinary medicine by all provincial livestock producers.

Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives will be providing direction and support through the department’s Livestock Knowledge Centre. Brent McCannell, Director, may be contacted at (204) 945-7650.

Your input as chair of the task group will be appreciated and I would like to thank you in advance for participating. I look forward to reviewing the recommendations with you.

Sincerely,

Rosann Wowchuk
Minister
Honourable Rosann Wowchuk  
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives  
Room 165, Legislative Building  
Winnipeg MB R3C 0V8

Dear Minister Wowchuk:

The Veterinary Services Task Force was appointed August 10, 2007 to review veterinary services in Manitoba. I was very pleased to be asked to chair the three person task force with appointees, Dr. Paul Schneider and Neil Hathaway.

The mandate of the Task Force was to complete a broad review of veterinary services in Manitoba and to make recommendation to the Minister. The review was to include all facets of the industry, legislation, existing government programs and services available in other jurisdictions.

The Task Force has completed a thorough review of veterinary services in Manitoba and I’m very pleased to provide the Task Force report (draft) on Veterinary Services. The Task Force felt it was crucial to get the input of livestock commodity groups and stakeholders across Manitoba. The review included:

- 3 days of meetings with the commodity groups including Manitoba Pork Council, Manitoba Cattle Producers Association, Manitoba Sheep Association, Manitoba Turkey Producers, Manitoba Chicken Producers, Farm Animal Council, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Veterinary Services Commission, Veterinary Diagnostic Services Laboratory, Manitoba Veterinary Medical Association, Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, Animal Science – University of Manitoba and the Assiniboine Community College. Follow up meetings were held with the Veterinary Service Commission, Manitoba Cattle Producers Association and a group of veterinary practitioners.
- 5 one day Community Stakeholder meetings across Manitoba held at Eriksdale, Dauphin, Souris, St. Claude and Oak Bluff
- A review of the current provincial legislations and legislations of other jurisdictions
- A review of the current programs and funding for veterinary services, infrastructure and veterinary students
- A report on veterinary services in Saskatchewan and Alberta prepared by Dr. Murray Jelinski
The Task Force felt there were three general areas or pillars in veterinary services and the review and recommendations has focused on the three areas.

1. Veterinary Services - The current models
2. Animal and Human Health
3. Future Trends – models to meet the future demands

I would like to recognize the efforts of the members of the Task Force, Dr. Paul Schneider and Mr. Neil Hathaway for their dedication and exhaustive efforts in the completion of the review and the formation of the Ministerial recommendations.

A special thank-you goes to the members of the commodity groups for their participation in the review and to those that attended and participated in the community meetings.

I would also like to thank Manitoba Agriculture Food and Rural Initiatives staff for their support and assistance. They include Ann Johner, Brent McCannell, Alan Carson, Dr. Wayne Tomlinson, Dr. Wayne Lees and the Growing Opportunity team staff that assisted the Task Force with the community meetings.

Again I am very pleased at this time to present the draft report and recommendations on Veterinary Services in Manitoba.

Respectfully submitted

Ron Kostyshyn,
Chair Veterinary Services Task Force
Section 3 – Executive Summary

Introduction
Rosann Wowchuk, Minister of Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives appointed the Rural Veterinary Services Task Force in August 2007. The intent was to complete a broad review of veterinary services in Manitoba and to make recommendations to the Minister. The review was to include all facets of the industry, legislation, existing government programs and services available in other jurisdictions.

Process
The Rural Veterinary Services Task Force held its consultations in early 2008.

The Task Force felt it was crucial to get the input of livestock commodity groups and stakeholders across Manitoba. In February the Task Force met with a number of leading commodity associations as well as interested stakeholders.

These included:
- Manitoba Pork Council
- Manitoba Cattle Producers Association
- Manitoba Sheep Association
- Manitoba Turkey Producers
- Manitoba Chicken Producers
- Farm Animal Council
- Canadian Food Inspection Agency
- Veterinary Services Commission
- Veterinary Diagnostic Services Laboratory
- Manitoba Veterinary Medical Association
- Canadian Veterinary Medical Association
- Animal Science – University of Manitoba
- Assiniboine Community College

In March, 2008 the Task Force held public consultation in the following communities:
- Eriksdale - March 3
- Dauphin - March 4
- Souris - March 5
- St. Claude - March 6
- Oak Bluff - March 7

Additional consultations were held with the Veterinary Services Commission, MCPA and private (veterinary) practitioners in June.
In addition, the Task Force reviewed:

- current provincial legislations and legislations of other jurisdictions
- current programs and funding for veterinary services, infrastructure and veterinary students
- a report on veterinary services in western Canada prepared by Dr. Murray Jelinski.

The Task Force also received a number of written submissions during the consultation process.

The consultation process focused on, but was not limited to issues within the three pillars that the Task Force developed:

- Veterinary Service Challenges
- Animal and Human Health
- Future Trends

After meeting with stakeholders and reviewing feedback from the public consultations, the Task Force reviewed all of the public input and began to formulate common themes and messages that were heard during the consultation process.

This report reviews the issues that the Task Force identified during the consultation process. For each issue, the Task Force analyzed the public input and finally developed recommendations for the Minister’s consideration. While some recommendations may be fairly straightforward to implement, many of the recommendations will continue to require active participation of governments and stakeholders.

The Task Force considered all of the input that was received and the appendices to this report provide summaries of the consultations and other documents that were reviewed.
SECTION 4 – The Task Force

Ron Kostyshyn, Chair
Ron and Judy live in the R.M. of Mossey River approximately 16 km west of Hamlet of Fork River. Ron’s main occupation is operating a mixed farm operation, primarily in cow/calf since 1985. Ron was a Municipal Councillor in the R. M. of Mossey River from 1989-2006. He is presently the Reeve in R.M. of Mossey River and has been involved with the Ethelbert District Veterinary Board since 1989 and is currently the Chair.

Other positions held by Ron: Intermountain Conservation District – Board member 1997-2007; Vice Chairman 1999-2004; Chairman of the Board from 2004-2006; Garland/Point Sub-district #103 member from 1997 to present; Manitoba Conservation District Association representative from January to present and Chairman from 2005 - 2008. Ron currently sits on the Conservation District Commission as past Chairman of MCDA; Farm Stewardship Association of Manitoba – Board member February 2007 to present; Chair person of Centennial Celebration, R.M. of Mossey River from 2004-2006.

Neil Hathaway
Neil was born and raised on the family farm at Dand in the Deloraine area. They operated a mixed farming operation of grain, beef cattle, hogs, poultry and sheep since 1964. Dairying became the main focus until 1994 when injury forced his retirement. In 1998 he and Barbara started a herd of Cashmere goats imported from Nebraska which were dispersed in 2006.

In 2005, Neil was appointment to the Veterinary Commission for the Province of Manitoba. He is currently active in the Turtle Mountain Souris Plains Heritage Association, trying to preserve and promote the culture and heritage of the First Nations people, the Métis and the Settlers. Their aim is UNESCO world heritage designation for the Turtle Mountain area as it is an acknowledged trade route/meeting place.

Dr. Paul Schneider
Since graduation from the Western College of Veterinary Medicine in 1982, Dr. Schneider has been involved in veterinary practice in rural Manitoba. He started in mixed practice in St. Pierre and Steinbach and later focused on swine medicine providing veterinary service to the Elite Swine producer group. In late 2007 he left swine practice to devote his time to animal health projects across Canada and to aid and development work in Asia.

Dr. Schneider has served on various committees with the Manitoba Veterinary Medical Association and held various offices on the Council including president of the Association in 1990. He is past president of the Western Canadian Association of Swine Veterinarians, served on several committees and project teams for the American Association of Swine Veterinarians and has presented research and applied medicine papers at swine conferences around the globe. In 2006, he was the recipient of the Allan D. Leman Science in Practice Award.
Development of the Pillars
The Task Force developed the concept of three pillars during the organizing meetings held in December 2007. The mandate of the Task Force was to complete a broad review of veterinary services in Manitoba and to make recommendation to the Minister.

Veterinary Service Challenges was identified as the first pillar. It reflected a principle objective of the Task Force to identify issues that affect providing veterinary services to rural Manitobans and making recommendations to strengthen the delivery of veterinarian services. Issues that were to be considered included the supply of veterinarians, the management and operation of the Veterinary Service Districts, as well as a review of legislation and the approach taken in other jurisdictions.

Animal and Human Health was identified as the second pillar. This pillar is very broad and includes issues such as food safety, the role of veterinarians in not only the treatment of but also the prevention of disease, surveillance and identification of new diseases and the increasing public responsibility for protecting human health.

Future Trends was identified as the third pillar. It focuses on how the livestock industry has changed and is expected to change in the future, as well as how future global trends might impact on the livestock industry and the role of veterinarians. Issues affecting the Veterinary Diagnostic Services Laboratory were also included in this pillar.

Development of presentations
The Task Force asked representatives from MAFRI to develop brief (20 minute) presentations on each of the three pillars. The intent of these presentations was to facilitate discussion during the public consultations. Draft presentations were provided to the Task Force and were finalized with the input of the Task Force.

Development of consultation process
The Task Force considered several approaches for the public consultations and determined that the best approach would be to provide key commodity associations and stakeholders to meet with the Task Force and then to sponsor a series of public consultations throughout rural Manitoba.

In February the Task Force met with a number of leading commodity associations as well as interested stakeholders.

These included:

- Manitoba Pork Council
- Manitoba Cattle Producers Association
- Manitoba Sheep Association
- Manitoba Turkey Producers
- Manitoba Chicken Producers
- Farm Animal Council
- Canadian Food Inspection Agency
In March, 2008 the Task Force held public consultation in the following communities:

- Eriksdale - March 3
- Dauphin - March 4
- Souris - March 5
- St. Claude - March 6
- Oak Bluff - March 7

Additional consultations were held with the Veterinary Services Commission, MCPA and private (veterinary) practitioners in June.

In addition, the Task Force reviewed:

- current provincial legislations and legislations of other jurisdictions
- current programs and funding for veterinary services, infrastructure and veterinary students
- a report on veterinary services in western Canada prepared by Dr. Murray Jelinski

In addition, the Task Force received a number of written submissions during the consultation process.
SECTION 5 – Veterinary Service Challenges Pillar

Highlights from presentation
Since its inception, the province of Manitoba has been involved with agriculture and Veterinary Medicine. In the very early years there were programs dealing with horses and their diseases. In more recent times the Manitoba Government recognized the importance of having veterinarians in rural areas to meet the needs of producers and consumers.

The first initiative aimed at attracting veterinarians to rural Manitoba was in 1947 with the Veterinary Sciences Scholarship. In exchange for scholarship money given by Manitoba, veterinary students agreed to practice in rural Manitoba after graduation. This program still exists today with average scholarships ranging from $750 to $1,100 per student per year. The money is forgiven over a five year period.

In 1963, Manitoba and the other three western provinces agreed to build the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM). In 1965, the first class at WCVM started and Manitoba had 10 seats or students per year. Cost of educating a student would be split 3 ways; 50% would be born by the federal department of agriculture, 40% would be the responsibility of the student’s home province and 10% by the student. The provinces portion in 2007/08 was approximately $64,000 per student per year.

In 1970, Dr. Jack McPhedran started the Rural Manitoba Hospital Program. In partnership with local municipal governments, veterinary districts were formed and veterinary hospitals built. The key elements of the plan were:

- to build these hospitals across Manitoba at a distance of approximately 60 miles apart so all producers would have access to veterinary care
- the veterinary hospital is maintained by a district board
- in exchange for use of the facilities, a veterinarian will follow a province wide pre-arranged fee schedule and agree to provide regular and emergency service
- cost of operating and maintaining the clinics is shared by the province and the municipalities
- the Veterinary Service Commission, an independent body that was formed to oversee the veterinary districts

Over the years, 32 hospitals or clinics were built. There are currently 27 veterinary service district clinics. These clinics are found in the western part of the province and the Interlake as well as at Vita and St. Pierre. The 27 veterinary service districts are complimented by 35 private veterinary clinics or practices. The private practices are mostly located around major centers, areas of highly concentrated livestock and a few near where the veterinarian was either raised or calls home.
In the 1990’s, Manitoba went from 10 to 12 students per class at the WCVM. In 2005 a 13th Manitoba seat per class was added at the WCVM. Finally the latest announcement by the Province of Manitoba is its’ intent to increase the number of seats at the WCVM in the fall of 2008 by two, bringing the total number of graduates to fifteen per year by April 2012.

Manitoba started the Veterinary Technical Enhancement Grant in 1999. In the first year there was $300,000 for infrastructure upgrades and $300,000 for new equipment for the veterinary service district clinics. The grant was reduced to $300,000 in 2000 and currently there is $200,000 available to the districts for new equipment. The balance of $100,000 has been allocated to the Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSE) Lab.

In 2005, the Large Animal Veterinary Retention Scholarship was started. The program offers 10 students in third and/or fourth year at WCVM a $5,000 scholarship per year. The student agrees to return and practice veterinary medicine in rural Manitoba for one year for each year that they receive the scholarship.

**Issues/Public Discussion:**

**Structure/Financing of Districts/Municipal Support**
The provincial/municipal partnership model has worked well and should be continued. Stakeholders said that 60 minutes one way drive to a clinic is the maximum time for a producer to travel and still have adequate access to a clinic.

The Task Force heard that the level of funding needs to be reviewed, with an objective of ensuring that it meets the needs of the Districts. There were concerns that the level of funding has not kept pace with increasing costs and that there are increasing pressures to upgrade equipment etc.

Stakeholders indicated that some large clinics with multiple veterinarians need additional funding while at the same time small, one practitioner clinics also require additional support.

**Numbers/Skills of New Graduates**
The Task Force heard that there are concerns about the supply of veterinarians, especially in light of increasing demands and that the number of spaces available at the WCVM needs to be continually evaluated to ensure that there is an adequate supply of new graduates. There is also potential to attract non-Manitoba students to come to Manitoba.

The Task Force heard many new ideas for increasing the level of skills of new graduates. The common theme of these recommendations is to develop and provide mentoring programs for new graduates. Suggestions ranged from developing an
apprenticeship program to utilizing current or recently retired veterinarians to provide mentoring. Key components of the mentoring program would be to move beyond the academic skills to develop applied veterinarian skills and to develop skilled managers who have the confidence and skills to operate and maintain their own practices.

There is a concern that while new graduates may start their careers in a rural mixed or large animal practice, they may not have a long term commitment to stay in these areas and are often attracted to larger centers and/or work in small companion animal practices. A range of ideas were provided as to how to deal with this concern, which range from increasing the size and length of the refundable loan and scholarship programs, encouraging rural communities to sponsor students and providing tax incentives for veterinarians to maintain large/mixed animal practices in rural Manitoba.

**Supply of Veterinarians from Other Countries/Provinces**
There is potential to increase the supply of veterinarians by increasing the supply of either immigrant veterinarians or by attracting veterinarians from other provinces.

The Task Force heard that there is a need to review the criteria and regulations affecting immigrant veterinarians and the potential to attract more veterinarians from outside Manitoba could be achieved in part through promotion of Manitoba's advantages – e.g. cost of living, life style, Veterinary Service District model etc.

**Veterinarians Desire to Work in Rural Manitoba**
There are concerns that work hours required under the Form 2 Agreement and the general working conditions for large animal veterinarians are issues that affect the willingness of young veterinarians to join and to commit to rural practices.

Key suggestions on how to address these concerns centre on the theme of reducing the total number of hours that veterinarians are required to be on call in the District.

A number of ideas were suggested including:
- having districts work together
- veterinarians from different districts coordinating on-call schedules
- utilizing floater veterinarians
- encouraging veterinary partnerships
- increase the skill levels of veterinary technicians so that they can assume a greater level of responsibility and handle calls during selected times

**Role of Veterinary Technicians**
At public consultations, the Task Force heard that there is a need to expand the role of supporting professionals in rural veterinary practice. Rural veterinarians deserve some time off, a certain quality of life. Veterinary assistants or technologists could have increased responsibilities in order to help the veterinarian achieve that quality of life.
Assiniboine Community College (ACC) views this expanded role of technicians/assistants as a challenge and an opportunity. A course could be developed with meeting the needs of rural veterinary practice in mind. ACC already has a strong school of agriculture and would look forward to be the home of such a program.
SECTION 6 – Animal/Human Health Pillar

Highlights from presentation
There is a new reality, the world is shrinking. Due to technological advances, people
and animals move about the world at an ever increasing rate of speed and frequency.
The rapid deliberate movement of people and animals exposes different populations to
different diseases. This is compounded by the fact that new or emerging diseases are
on the rise. Since 1980, thirty five new infectious diseases of humans have emerged.
This same pattern is also seen in animals. Even in Canada we are not immune, BSE
and West Nile Virus were unheard of only a short time ago.

Most of the emerging diseases are not restricted to a single species and many are
zoonotic. Zoonoses are diseases that go from animals to man or vice versa. Zoonoses
and emerging diseases are a threat to man, animals, food safety and food security.
Diseases are going to come from unexpected quarters and the infection pressure is
going to be constant.

Farming has changed. There are fewer family farms, more part time farmers and more
Corporate farms. Veterinary medicine is also changing. There are more veterinarians
tending to pets and there are less dealing with food production, food safety, public
health and ecosystem health. As a result, we have an increasing risk from disease and
a decrease in the number of people in the field to monitor that risk.

The strategic vision for the office of the (Manitoba) Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) is
“Protecting Animals, Food and People.” The strategy of the CVO applies to health and
welfare of animals under the control of people, to food products offered to the public, as
well as veterinary public health hazards resulting from exposure to animals or animal
products. The intent of the CVO is to help protect people from zoonotic disease, protect
food safety and security, as well as animal health and welfare and thus protect trade.
The CVO office needs an effective early warning and surveillance system. Along with
early warning, bio-security and traceability make up our risk mitigation tools. The office
of the CVO and the private sector will need to be involved in risk prevention and risk
mitigation.

Society:
• demands safe and healthy food free from toxins, pesticides and bacterial (such
  as E. coli) contamination
• is concerned with antimicrobial use in animals that may be contributing to
  resistance of some bacteria to antibiotics
• wants the environmental impact of agriculture reduced
• wants animals to be well treated throughout all aspects of the production process
• demands that the risks from zoonoses are kept to a minimum
Stakeholders said that as a result of the increasing demands from society, there is an increasing need for veterinary public health services. Programs are needed in order to have trained professionals (veterinarians) protecting human and animal health by having a sophisticated surveillance network in place.

**Issues/Public Discussions:**

**Surveillance/Traceability/Disease Prevention**
The Task Force heard that there is a need for increased public awareness of the importance and benefits of surveillance, traceability and disease prevention. The need for these is in part driven by the public and should be funded from public resources, not downloaded on producers.

The private sector has developed, or is developing certification programs such as the Verified Beef Program and Quality Assurance Program. Stakeholders indicated that MAFRI could build on and partner with these programs by developing a Manitoba Quality Assurance Program and among other things, would focus on herd health.

A Manitoba Quality Assurance program would be certified and administered by certified private veterinarians. Producers who participate in this program would be able to demonstrate that they meet certain production criteria/standards by adding value to their livestock and developing approaches for disease prevention, traceability and surveillance at the same time. This would also help to develop a positive image and brand for Manitoba livestock products.

The public consultations identified that there is a need to increase the awareness of the value of post mortems. Increased funding for post mortems may need to be considered.

MAFRI’s GO Offices have direct contact with farmers and provide opportunities for increased surveillance and extension regarding production practices, animal welfare and other issues. To accomplish this, stronger linkages need to be made between the GO Offices and the veterinary clinics.

**Zoonotic, Foreign and General Animal Diseases**
The number of diseases and the potential economic impact of these diseases are increasing over time. BSE provides a good example of how much economic impact an outbreak of a new disease can have.

New and emerging diseases and the trend towards larger farms have made bio-security much more important. This is an issue for clinics which will require increased bio-security in order to meet the needs of producers who want to bring animals into the clinic for diagnosis and/or treatment and also will create pressure for more treatments to occur on farm, as opposed to at individual clinics.
There is a need to improve public awareness of these diseases. A more knowledgeable public would reduce the risk of introducing diseases to Manitoba through the importation of exotic species (illegal pet trade) by traveling and not following adequate protocols for the prevention of the spread of disease.

**Drug Residues/Cost of Drugs**
The public consultations identified a number of concerns regarding the supply and cost of veterinary drugs. More education is required about issues such as drug residues and drug resistance. In addition, there are concerns about the cost of drugs, with some drugs being less expensive in the United States and proper advice on drug use is not always available from the dealer.

In addition to veterinary clinics, the Manitoba public has the option to obtain medications for their animals from other provinces, from other countries mainly the US and from outlets in Manitoba such as veterinary drug retail stores, feed and equipment suppliers and pharmacies.

Some of these veterinary drug sale outlets within MB work with veterinarians and attempt to follow regulations and guidelines regarding medication dispensing. They employ staff that are knowledgeable in the products and maintain detailed records of sales. They adhere to the legislation and principles of dispensing prescription medications. However there are examples where the medication procurement and dispensing practices of some outlets fail to meet the veterinary and pharmaceutical standards of Manitoba and Canada.

Veterinarians indicated that revenues from drug sales were declining and that the lost income from drugs was being replaced with income from treating small/companion animals where this was a possibility.

**Animal Welfare**
The Task Force heard that animal welfare is an important issue and that there is a need for increased education about animal welfare and for increased penalties for animal welfare violations.
SECTION 7 – Future Trends Pillar

Highlights from presentation
The importance of the livestock sector to the provincial agriculture economy has been steadily increasing since the change to grain freight rates (Crow Rate) in 1995-96. In 1990 the grains and oilseeds sector was predominant. In 2005 the livestock sector contributed more then 50% of agricultural sales. This has dropped somewhat today with strong grain and weaker livestock prices however livestock balances crops in their importance to the agriculture economy of Manitoba.

Within the livestock industry, swine production is the largest sector followed by cattle using farm gates sales as a measuring base. The swine industry produces 8 million hogs annually and has two major packers for processing within the province. The industry is very dependent on the US market, especially for iso-wean and feeder pigs. The cattle industry has 600,000 cows and produces top quality calves and back grounded calves. There is a small feedlot industry reliant on processors in the US or other provinces. These sectors are the major agricultural user of veterinary services in Manitoba although sheep, goats and pleasure horses are growing. Veterinary services are mostly private services to the swine industry and publicly supported services (provincial and municipal) for cattle and other livestock.

A growing non-agricultural industry heavily dependent on veterinary services is pets/companion animals. It is estimated that 63% of all households in the US have a pet and 34% have a child. There are 135 million pets in the US and the number is growing. The growth is also prevalent in Canada and the demand for veterinary services for companion animals is increasing both for routine diagnostics and the complexity of tests. The diagnostic demands mirrors the types of tests for human health although includes many different species.

The demand for diagnostic testing from veterinary practitioners is provided by the Provincial Veterinary Diagnostic Services (VDS) laboratory. It is operated by MAFRI and is a fee for service laboratory. Food producing, animal tests are charged at 25% cost recovery and companion animals are 100% cost recovery. For the 2006/07 fiscal year a total of $3.7 million was expended in Manitoba to provide veterinary diagnostic services. There were $1.4 million in revenue generated over the same period.

The demand for veterinary diagnostic testing has more then doubled from 2003 to 2007 going from 100,000 tests to over 200,000 tests and is projected to be over 300,000 tests by 2010. This demand comes from a rapidly expanding livestock sector (now slowing) and from demands for existing and new production limiting disease tests, an increase in active surveillance programs e.g. avian influenza and an increasing demand for companion animal tests (pets).

The world population is at approximately 6.5 billion people. By 2050, the world population is expected to reach 9.2 billion people. By 2030 more than 60 per cent of the world’s population is expected to live in large cities.
Consumer trends will continue to focus on convenience; health, pleasure and getting value from the products that they are consuming.

China, India will continue to lead growth in the global economy and will consume increasing amounts of higher value foods (e.g. meat). The trend towards global trade will continue but will be challenged with increasing costs of transportation associated with high energy costs. The impact of rising energy costs has the potential to offset many of the reductions in tariffs that have come about as a result of free trade agreements.

Climate change has the potential to result in disruption and dislocation of agriculture growing regions. Availability of water for crops, processing and human consumption are expected to be an increasing challenge.

World internet usage will continue to expand, creating opportunities for improved communication and information exchange. This will be complemented by ever improving and lower cost technology which has the potential to revolutionize the way work is done.

**Issues/Public Discussion:**

**Livestock Trends**
Participants felt that the trend towards larger farms is expected to continue into the future and that larger farms have less need for veterinarians to deal with individual case situations and are more focused on herd health.

Manitoba will continue to have economic and other advantages for producing livestock. The current economic and regulatory environment may result in some declines in hog production and beef cattle production may increase.

Goat and sheep production has the potential to increase significantly while production in the supply managed sectors will grow in concert with Manitoba’s population.

Production models for swine, poultry and dairy are generally relatively intensive which enable these sectors to be served by a small number of veterinarians. The production model for beef cattle, sheep and other ruminants is generally less intensive and requires more veterinarians and clinics. The trend in veterinary services has been to move away from individual animal health to herd health, especially in swine and poultry.

**Veterinary Diagnostic Services (VDS) Laboratory**
The VDS laboratory is the backbone for all veterinary services in Manitoba providing diagnostic testing and results to field veterinarians on livestock and companion animal diseases. It is of critical importance that the province has the capacity and resources to meet the demands for diagnostic testing. Veterinarians have emphasized the
importance and their reliance on the veterinary diagnostic laboratory for the diagnostics testing required to serve their clients.

**Demographics and Global/Environment**
Farmers are aging, especially beef producers which will impact on the future numbers and future needs of the beef production sector.

Aging populations will increase the number of companion animals and the trend of more veterinary services for these animals will continue. Hobby farms will increase in numbers as well as horses and exotic species which tend to receive relatively more individual animal veterinary care.

Youth are less inclined to return to agriculture as a result of a desire for an urban lifestyle and as a result of the uncertain economics of agriculture, especially for livestock production.

Increased populations along with increasing incomes in parts of the developing world will provide opportunities for growing markets for meat products.

The potential for climate change, concerns about water, possibility of higher freight costs associated with higher fuel costs and increasing concerns regarding wildlife will continue to affect the growth opportunities for livestock production in Manitoba.

**Technology**
Improvements in communication technology provide opportunities for veterinarians to move from an in person model to a model that uses cameras linked with computers for diagnostics and treatment of animals.
SECTION 8 – Task Force Recommendations

Pillar 1 Veterinary Services Challenges

The Veterinary Service Districts have provided veterinary services to rural Manitoba for more than 30 years. The main elements that have led to the success of the Veterinary Service Districts are:

- shared funding model between the province and municipalities
- leadership and oversight provided by the Veterinary Services Commission
- local input and leadership provided by individual Veterinary Service Districts

Recommendation:

1. The Task Force has heard from stakeholders and strongly recommends that any future models for the VSDs must maintain these key elements.

Structure/Financing of Districts/Municipal Support

The needs in the veterinary districts are different:

- Veterinary districts are quite different across Manitoba in their geographical size, the volume of the livestock species within them and the number of veterinarians serving the district.

- Some districts are very large geographically with lower livestock densities and others are smaller with larger livestock numbers. Some may have work associated with moving livestock across an International border; some may have a sizeable companion animal business given the size of the urban population within the district.

- Some districts have a single person practice with challenges for coverage, others are in a multi person practice either from a single clinic or satellite clinics with human resource and scheduling challenges.

Recommendation:

2. Given these differences, the respective legislation and regulations need to be reviewed and changed, empowering the Vet Services Commission and the districts to develop and implement plans that best serve their local district.

This would include encouraging VSDs and veterinarians to work together to provide for more flexibility regarding hours of work, as well as providing flexibility in the Form 2 Agreement to meet local needs (such as supporting more than one practice) in the VSD.
The changes would include sufficient approvals and monitoring to ensure provincial and municipal funds are used properly to best serve the needs of the district.

3. There is a lack of a shared strategic vision for animal health in Manitoba and therefore, consideration should be given to forming a provincial animal health committee made up of livestock industry leaders, in collaboration with human health, to develop a strategic plan for animal health for the province.

4. In order to catch up with rising costs, to ensure that all districts are able to maintain a core list of equipment and infrastructure and to provide the best service possible to stakeholders, the matching grant levels to the Districts should be increased and a long term commitment for providing these funds should be made by the province and municipalities.

5. The fee schedule for VSDs’ veterinarians, should be kept current and relevant to meet the needs of both veterinarians and livestock producers.

6. In the event that a VSD clinic closes, other VSDs and then other Manitobans should have the first opportunity to acquire the equipment and facility in order to ensure that taxpayers who provided the infrastructure and equipment are able to continue to receive value for their investment.

7. To improve the linkages between Growing Opportunity Offices and Veterinary Service Districts, especially with regards to animal health extension, education and public awareness issues.

**Numbers/Skills of New Graduates**

8. To continuously evaluate the appropriate number of spaces available for Manitoba students at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine.

9. To provide new provincial funding, to develop mentoring, training and development programs that would increase the skills of new veterinarians. These mentoring programs could include:

   a) increased financial support (e.g. providing pay scales similar to other provinces) in order for more summer students to be able to work with Manitoba veterinarians;
   
   b) business skills for recent graduates and new immigrant veterinarians;
   
   c) opportunities for recent graduates and immigrant veterinarians to improve their applied veterinarian skills.
10. To include courses in business and in agricultural economics in pre-veterinary training and/or in the veterinary program to increase the business skills of new graduates.

11. To ask the Western College of Veterinary Medicine to review the specific course requirements in the pre-veterinary curriculum and to allow applicants from a wider range of academic tracks to be eligible for acceptance to the College which would result in more diversity of veterinary students and graduates.

Supply of Veterinarians from Other Countries/Provinces

12. Lobby the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association to review timelines and processes for immigrant veterinarians to take the Canadian national board exams, including shortening the time for retesting in order to address the need for more veterinarians in rural practices.

13. To lobby the federal government so that they recognize the shortage of veterinarians in rural areas and to provide more support for immigrant veterinarians, including language training and technical skill development.

Veterinarians Desire to Work in Rural Manitoba

14. To build on and expand the scholarship programs to promote and encourage more new graduates to work in Rural Manitoba. The Task Force recommends:

a) Explore with the Department of Advanced Education and Literacy, the possibility of expanding the number of eligible scholarships in the Large Animal Veterinary Retention Program to correspond with the increasing numbers of students at the WCVM and to increase the value of the scholarships from $5,000 to $6,000 or more per student per year.

b) Encourage VSDs and commodity associations to participate in the student mentoring and scholarship programs in order to provide for higher levels of funding.

c) The period of time for scholarship write-offs could be expanded up to 4 years.

15. To promote veterinary careers in rural and urban junior/high schools in order to attract more students who will be committed to practice veterinary medicine in rural practices.

16. To conclude the Veterinary Sciences Scholarship and to reallocate the funds to develop programs to attract Canadian and foreign graduate veterinarians to rural Manitoba. VSDs and commodity associations should be encouraged to participate in these new incentive programs e.g. provide salary top-ups, tax incentives and/or write-offs of student loans for any who work in rural, large animal practices;
Role of Veterinary Technicians

17. Look for ways to increase a veterinary technician’s responsibility and develop a second level of technician, a Veterinary Practitioners Assistant (VPA) so that veterinarians don’t always have to be the first call and to relieve some of the physical stresses in large animal practice and ultimately allow them to be more productive.

Pillar 2 Animal/Human Health

The Task Force recognizes the increasing need for veterinarians to provide more public services, including disease surveillance, public awareness, animal welfare and other emerging issues. At the same time stakeholders clearly indicated that the public has a responsibility to pay for public services and that these costs should not be downloaded onto producers. It is also clear that the role of public veterinarians is to compliment service of private veterinarians and not to compete with private veterinarians.

Recommendation:

18. With MAFRI’s lead, other government departments such as Health should be the principle funder, to provide a comprehensive program to improve animal and public health and the safety of food products.

Surveillance/Traceability/Disease Prevention

19. Develop public awareness educational programs regarding the linkages between animal and human health, as well as the risks to health associated with trade and travel and to include private practitioners in the delivery of these programs.

Zoonotic, Foreign and General Animal Diseases

20. Develop programs to provide surveillance, traceability and prevention of zoonotic and other animal diseases. Integral to these programs would be:

- A strong public extension veterinary group with sufficient resources to lead the health programs and provide service to the all animal sectors to address the risk of foreign animal diseases, zoonotic diseases and food safety. This is of special importance for animal sectors that are currently not well served by private veterinarians.

- The availability of resources to allow for enlistment of practicing veterinarians for surveillance and other programs.
21. The development of on-farm herd health programs to assist producers to improve the health and welfare of their animals on their farms and ensure the safety and security of livestock and livestock products.

The program would focus on livestock health, animal welfare and public health requirements and would build upon the current food safety programs implemented by the livestock sector.

- Consultation with all stakeholders is essential for effective planning, communication and implementation of the programs.
- Participating veterinarians would be trained and certified for the programs.
- These programs as well as those of the livestock producer groups could be pulled together in a certifiable Manitoba Quality Assurance Program that would be recognized by consumers and trading partners as a provincial “brand” exemplifying a safe, healthy and secure animal industry.

22. To develop a system to facilitate the communication of disease outbreaks with veterinarians and other interested parties.

23. To continue and to build on programs for post mortems and diagnostics such as the TSE and small poultry flock funding programs in order to provide surveillance and to find new and emerging diseases.

Drug Residues/Cost of Drugs

24. To develop education and public awareness programs directed at livestock producers and companion animal owners and veterinarians regarding the importance of proper drug use to protect animal and human health.

Veterinarians by the merits of their training and by federal and provincial statutes are the stewards of safe and effective use of veterinary medications. There is currently limited monitoring or policing to ensure drugs are stored, dispensed and used properly in Manitoba.

Recommendation:

25. Consult with the Manitoba Veterinary Medical Association regarding the proper storage, dispensing and use of drugs to ensure the safety of animal and human health.
Animal Welfare

26. To develop education and public awareness programs regarding the importance and value of proper approaches to animal welfare.

27. Provide adequate funding to the office of the C.V.O. so that it is not only capable of investigating and prosecuting cases of neglect and abuse but has the resources to help prevent such occurrences.

Pillar 3 Future Trends

Manitoba’s livestock production has increased and the production models have changed substantially since the VSDs were established. While it is unclear as to how the livestock sectors will evolve in the future, the VSDs must have the flexibility to address not only the current but also the future needs of Manitoba’s livestock producers.

The VDS laboratory is the backbone for all veterinary services in Manitoba providing diagnostic testing and results to field veterinarians on livestock and companion animal diseases. It is of critical importance the province has the capacity and resources to meet the demands for diagnostic testing.

The role of veterinarians will also continue to change but at the same time technology must be part of the solution not part of the problem.

Livestock Trends
(Refer to Veterinary Services pillar)

Veterinary Diagnostic Services

28. To increase provincial funding, with new budget allocation, for infrastructure, operating and staffing at the VDS laboratory to ensure the capacity to meet industry needs including:
   - The increasing demands for diagnostic services for production limiting diseases
   - The ability to investigate and research new and emerging diseases
   - The capacity to increase test volumes should there be a FAD outbreak in the province
   - The capacity and ability to respond to increased disease surveillance testing
   - The capacity to upgrade to international standards e.g. ISO 17025 to ensure the laboratory meets all laboratory accreditations to meet provincial, national and international standards for disease diagnostics testing
- A review of pathologists' salaries to ensure Manitoba is competitive and able to attract pathologists to the Veterinary Diagnostic Services Laboratory

- The ability to provide education support to veterinarians to take a pathology diploma or degree and return and work in Manitoba

29. To continue to provide the funding for cost recovery testing services. This would include 25% cost recovery for food producing animals and surveillance testing and 100% for companion animals and out of province tests.

Demographics and Global/Environment

30. To review the veterinary service program within 5 year periods to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of stakeholders.

31. Work with veterinarians and the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, to ensure that veterinarians are able to meet the needs of not only traditional livestock producers, but also the potential needs of organic, minimal input and alternative production practices.

Technology

32. Provide new funding for communication equipment and tools such as web casts, digital cameras and computers and for the training of veterinarians and pathologists to use these tools for more efficient service between practitioners and the Veterinary Diagnostic Services Laboratory.

Knowledge Transfer

The professional and technical staff of the VDS laboratory provide services beyond those associated strictly with diagnostics. They also serve as a key source of information, mentoring and consultation on animal disease to practicing veterinarians.

Recommendation:

33. The Task Force recommends that resources are made available to allow the VDS laboratory staff to expand the role of the VDS laboratory as a knowledge centre on animal diseases serving Manitoba veterinarians and the general public.