

United States Senate Committee on
Small Business & Entrepreneurship

Hearing:

“Main Street’s Top Dog: Growing the Small Business Pet
Economy”

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Testimony of

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Veterinary Practice and Small Business Owner

Introduction

Thank you, and good afternoon, Chairwoman Ernst, Ranking Member Markey, and Members of the Committee. I am Dr. Gary Brown, a born and raised West Virginian who proudly attended both Marshall University and West Virginia University and then obtained my Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from the University of Georgia. After graduating from veterinary school, I practiced as a mixed animal (50% large animal, 50% small animal) veterinarian in southern West Virginia from 1984-1990. Then, I started my own mixed animal veterinary practice in Princeton, West Virginia, eventually selling the practice in 2022. Recently, I transitioned to small-animal practice with an emphasis on surgery and a focus on Italian Greyhounds, while also starting an additional small business in pet cremation services. Over this time, I was heavily involved in organized veterinary medicine through the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), American Society of Association Executives, West Virginia Veterinary Medical Association, and many other associations and organizations. At the AVMA, I served as a Delegate, AVMA Vice President, and Board Vice Chair and Chair. As Vice President, I was honored with the opportunity to visit every single veterinary school in the United States and many international veterinary schools.

With this extensive experience across the veterinary profession, I can attest that veterinary practices are central pillars of communities across the United States. As a proud West Virginian, I feel this is especially true in smaller towns and rural communities, where the local veterinary clinic is often both an essential healthcare provider and a cornerstone small business.

Veterinary economy

Veterinary medicine is a relatively small profession, but we have a disproportionately large and positive societal impact. Across the United States, there are approximately 34,000 veterinary practices. The vast majority of veterinary practices, approximately two-thirds, are small businesses, with 50% having fewer than 10 employees. At their core, veterinary practices are community-based businesses that provide stable employment. These practices are committed to building long-term teams, investing in education and training, and retaining skilled employees who serve their communities for many years.

For each veterinarian, practices typically have four additional employees, including highly skilled veterinary technicians providing clinical support and veterinary assistants, along with administrative and client-service team members.

Veterinary practices also generate significant economic activity for their communities. The average companion animal practice generates more than \$1.5 million in annual revenue. Each full-time veterinarian generates a median gross revenue of nearly \$600,000, supporting local economies through employee wages, business purchases, and reinvestment in the practice.

Beyond employment, veterinary clinics are also capital-intensive healthcare facilities. Modern veterinary medicine requires sophisticated diagnostic equipment, surgical facilities, medical laboratory capabilities, and advanced medical technologies. Veterinary professionals continually adopt new innovations that allow them to prevent disease, detect conditions earlier, and provide higher standards of care for animals.

These investments support a broad network of industries—from medical equipment manufacturers and diagnostic laboratories to pharmaceutical companies, pet food manufacturers, and distribution networks.

Beyond their direct economic contributions, veterinary professionals also play a vital role in protecting both human health and the security of our nation's food supply. Working with livestock producers, veterinarians support animal health, biosecurity, and disease prevention across agricultural systems. Their work helps ensure that the food reaching American families is safe and wholesome.

The economic implications of this work are substantial. Disease outbreaks in livestock populations can disrupt food production, impact international trade, and impose major costs on producers and consumers alike. Veterinarians serve as an essential line of defense—detecting disease early, containing outbreaks, and helping maintain the stability and resilience of the agricultural economy. Veterinary oversight helps protect the health status of U.S. livestock populations, which is critical to maintaining international export markets.

Many infectious diseases that affect people originate in animals. Veterinarians are on the front lines of identifying, managing, and preventing zoonotic diseases—diseases that can be transmitted between animals and humans. Through vaccination programs, disease surveillance, diagnostic testing, and early detection, veterinary professionals help prevent outbreaks that could otherwise have significant public health and economic consequences.

In this way, veterinary medicine contributes not only to animal health and the well-being of pets and livestock but also to public health, food security, and the economic stability of communities across the United States. This work reflects the “One Health” framework, recognizing that human health, animal health, and environmental health are deeply interconnected.

Veterinary practices also play an important role in sustaining local communities. Particularly in rural communities, the veterinary clinic is a main-street business that helps anchor a network of local commerce. Alongside pharmacies, feed stores, restaurants, and other small businesses, veterinary practices help sustain the economic vitality of towns and rural regions.

Beyond their direct economic contributions, veterinary professionals are deeply embedded in their communities. Practices routinely support local events, provide education for pet owners and livestock producers, and contribute to community initiatives. This reinvestment strengthens both the social and economic fabric of the communities they serve.

Policies that support small businesses, such as tax provisions that encourage investment, access to capital, and small business lending—help veterinary practices continue to grow, hire, and invest in their communities. These policies allow veterinary clinics to expand services, acquire and adopt new medical technologies, and continue providing high-quality care while sustaining local economic activity.

For example, the reconciliation package passed last year included pass-through business deductions and an expansion of the ability for small businesses to expense business assets, that help support many veterinary practices across the country. Like many small

business owners, we were grateful that Congress reauthorized many of these important tax provisions.

Should Congress want to act further on tax items before the end of the year, I would encourage Congress to pass the Rural Veterinary Workforce Act. This bill would free up additional federal funds and allow more food animal and public health veterinarians to practice in the areas most in need while receiving educational loan debt relief. Also, the AVMA would also encourage the passage of the Association Health Plans Act, which would expand health care choices for small businesses and self-employed individuals through association health plans (AHPs)

Conclusion

When it comes to growing the small business economy, veterinary care is essential infrastructure for communities, particularly in rural America. Veterinary practices contribute not only to animal health and public health but also to the long-term economic vitality of communities across the United States.

On behalf of veterinary practitioners across the country, I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important matter. We appreciate the attention the Committee is giving to this issue and its commitment to a healthy U.S. economy. Thank you again, and I am happy to answer any questions.