TEXAS A&M TVMDL VETERINARY MEDICAL DIAGNOSTIC LABORATORY

Diagnostic Workforce for Disease Surveillance

BACKGROUND

The Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory (TVMDL) has been committed to providing superior and timely diagnostic testing services to the veterinary industry for nearly 60 years.

In addition to routine diagnostic testing, TVMDL is prepared to act in the event of a high-consequence animal disease outbreak. To continue this commitment, TVMDL's workforce must be fully staffed with trained, experienced veterinary diagnosticians who will recognize the first signs of a potentially devastating animal or zoonotic disease threat.

PROTECTING ANIMAL AND HUMAN HEALTH IN TEXAS AND BEYOND

Viruses will continue making the jump from animal (wild or domesticated) populations to humans, making robust surveillance of disease in animal populations critical. A robust surveillance program ensures the detection of critically important diseases that pose catastrophic threats to public health, animal health, food safety, and the economic viability of the $24 billion livestock industry in Texas.

This request will ensure TVMDL remains adequately staffed to fulfill our mission by making professional staff salaries competitive in the marketplace. Recruiting efforts for key positions throughout the agency in the past year have shown that our starting salaries are below average, even for newly graduated veterinarians who don't possess the additional training and skills needed to perform diagnostic medicine. In terms of recruitment, TVMDL is in direct competition with academia, private commercial labs, and other public diagnostic labs.

THE NEED FOR HIGHLY TRAINED, SKILLED DIAGNOSTIC PROFESSIONALS

In March of 2024, multiple dairies in the Texas Panhandle reported sick dairy cows, all with similar clinical signs, the most prevalent being decreased milk production. TVMDL's Canyon and College Station laboratories worked alongside dairy veterinarians to determine the unknown pathogen.

TVMDL's testing efforts discovered Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) was the virus affecting dairy herds, an unprecedented finding in ruminants. Although TVMDL was one of the first labs to detect HPAI in dairy herds, several Texas veterinarians submitted samples to other state diagnostic labs with a reputation for advanced molecular disease detection capabilities. TVMDL lags behind these labs with regards to equipment and expertise. As the virus continues to spread across the United States in multiple species, including humans, it's crucial TVMDL recruits and retains professionals with molecular disease testing expertise and upgrades the testing equipment needed to be on the cutting edge of molecular diagnostic capabilities.

EXCEPTIONAL ITEM REQUEST

$3.272 million

Over 2024-2025 funding levels

OBJECTIVES

- Make the salary adjustments necessary to recruit and retain a workforce qualified to detect current and emerging disease threats.
- Enhance the agency's next generation molecular disease testing capabilities.
- Recruit highly skilled FTEs to lead and support the agency's molecular disease detection efforts.