



October 20, 2017

Honourable Marlin Schmidt
Minister of Advanced Education
403 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Schmidt,

RE: Removal of Alberta Funding to the Western College of Veterinary Medicine

I am writing on behalf of Alberta Beef Producers (ABP) to express our concerns about the decision to remove Alberta funding to the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM) at the University of Saskatchewan. ABP is the democratic and representative organization that speaks and works on behalf of over 18,000 cattle and beef producers in Alberta. These producers are from all areas of the province and all sectors (cow calf, backgrounding, feeding) of the cattle and beef industry. Our mission is to strengthen the sustainability and competitiveness of the beef industry for the benefit of beef producers in Alberta.

ABP strongly supports the enhancement of veterinary medicine education in western Canada. We have, and will continue to have, a strong relationship with both the University of Calgary's Faculty of Veterinary Medicine (UCVM) and the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM), which includes close collaborations with a number of UCVM faculty members, as well as the creation of the Alberta Chair in Beef Cattle Health and Production Medicine at WCVM in 2006. When the initial discussions took place around the formation of UCVM, both the beef industry and the veterinary community made it extremely clear that there was support for UCVM, as long as the funding commitment to WCVM remained intact.

While we support the decision to expand the veterinary program at UCVM, we are very concerned that this expansion is occurring at the expense of Alberta funding to the WCVM. We believe this decision could have significant impact on the WCVM and the opportunities available to aspiring veterinary medicine students from Alberta. We are unaware of any industry consultation on this decision and this is extremely disappointing. If there had been industry consultation, we would have been able to explain why we need funding for both programs and elucidate a number of unintended consequences that may arise from this decision.

This decision has a significant impact on WCVM's budget, and we believe that two years is not sufficient lead time in order to ameliorate these budgetary impacts. Further, we believe that there could be impacts on the University of Saskatchewan's Livestock and Forage Centre of Excellence (LFCE) if WCVM is

forced to reduce their capacity in the face of budgetary pressure. The significant infrastructure investments through the LFCE have been broadly supported, with significant investments from both federal and provincial governments alongside industry.

We would like to be very clear that while we believe both institutions are excellent overall, they do have different strengths. For example, WCVM has a state of the art teaching hospital, while UCVM takes advantage of their Distributed Veterinary Learning Community. The differences in facilities, faculty, and teaching approaches mean these two institutions are not identical, but rather may appeal to one type of student over another. Removing this choice for Alberta students is not fair to those who feel that WCVM better matches their career goals and learning style. We do not see this as a benefit for the veterinary education community.

The announced cost savings resulting from this decision are not well understood. We would expect that the growth in the student body at UCVM would require increased costs in maintenance, overhead, and expansion of laboratory and classroom space, as well as costs associated with 20 more student placements per year in the Distributed Veterinary Learning Community. We also are concerned about the potential duplication of facilities given the new infrastructure investments that are in place and under construction to support student development at WCVM. We would appreciate clarification on where the cost savings will be realized and whether any cost savings will be reinvested into agricultural and veterinary research or capacity building efforts.

Contrary to what has been portrayed in many of the media releases, we do not see this as an enhancement of veterinary education in the context of the entire industry. We derive benefits from both UCVM and WCVM, and it is in the beef industry's best interests for both institutions to be strong and thriving. Expanding one program at the expense of another does not create a net benefit for the industry or for students. Simply shifting seats from one institution to another does not increase the number of Alberta students who will become veterinary graduates, it merely restricts where they can receive that education.

ABP supports actions that would increase the number of veterinary graduates who establish food animal practices in rural areas. However, graduates from both WCVM and UCVM are currently serving the cattle and industry in Alberta and we do not think that the institution where these graduates receive their education has a significant impact on their choice of practice type or location. In our view, removing the opportunity for Alberta students to attend the WCVM is not going to make more veterinary graduates available to our industry. We are also concerned that instead of fostering a collaborative relationship between both institutions, as has been realized in the recent past, this decision will create a situation where the institutions compete for research and infrastructure funds.

As you see, the lack of industry consultation and the significant impacts of this decision have raised many questions for us. We would appreciate receiving a response from you explaining the process through

which this decision was made and the considerations that were involved in the decision. We would like your response to our questions and concerns about the impact on the WCVM, the reduced opportunities for Alberta veterinary medicine students, the amount and investment of any cost savings, and where the net benefits for our industry will come from this decision.

In summary, we would urge you to proceed with the plans to enhance UCVM's capacity, but at the same time reconsider the decision to transition the current Alberta funding away from WCVM. Increasing the capacity at UCVM will have a clear benefit for the beef industry, but not if it diminishes WCVM and eliminates student choice at the same time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bob Lowe', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bob Lowe
Chair

Cc: Honourable Oneil Carlier, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Dr. Baljit Singh, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Calgary
Dr. Douglas Freeman, Western College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Saskatchewan