



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Washington, DC 20415

The Director

February 12, 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR HEADS OF AGENCIES AND DEPARTMENTS AND
CHIEF HUMAN CAPITAL OFFICERS

FROM: KATHIE ANN WHIPPLE
ACTING DIRECTOR

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kathie Ann Whipple".

SUBJECT: Governmentwide Direct-Hire Appointing Authority

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has approved Direct-Hire Authority (DHA) governmentwide for Veterinarian Medical Officer (VMO) positions at the GS-701-11/15 grade levels nationwide.

OPM has determined there exists a severe shortage of candidates for VMO positions under the requirements in 5 CFR 337.204. OPM's justification is based on the following supporting evidence:

(1) *The results of workforce planning and analysis.* In the course of regular assessments of their veterinarian workforces for routine program activities, four of the five agencies that employ veterinarians—USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS), Food Safety and Inspection (FSIS), and Agricultural Research Service (ARS), and the Department of the Army--have identified existing or potential shortages of individuals to fill VMO positions.

- ARS veterinarians research critical endemic and foreign animal diseases. In FY 2008, ARS fell short of its VMO employment goal (filled 57 out of 65 vacancies). They have experienced similar shortages throughout the past 5 years.
- Army reports that it has filled its 446 authorized active-duty veterinarian positions, but that its veterinarian reserve corps is not at full strength. In 2008, Army was 12% short in its reserve positions. The reserve veterinarians commit to part-time training and to full time deployment when needed.
- FSIS veterinarians inspect animals at slaughter plants to help ensure the safety of meat and poultry products, and oversee the humane treatment of animals during slaughter. FSIS officials say they have never been fully staffed. It currently has a goal of hiring 1,134 employees to carry out its mission of ensuring the safety of meat and poultry products. As of the end of FY 2008, they hired 968 VMOs, but were still experiencing a 15% shortage.
- APHIS veterinarians protect the health of American livestock and poultry during production. APHIS predicts 30% of its veterinarians will be eligible to retire by the end of FY 2011.

(2) *Employment trends including the local or national labor market.* According to the Government Accounting Office, “there is a growing shortage of veterinarians nationwide, particularly veterinarians who care for animals raised for food, serve in rural communities, and have training in public health.”

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) indicates that 494 counties located primarily in the southeastern and mid-west region of the United States have more than 5,000 livestock, including dairy cows and animals bound for slaughter, but no veterinarian in those counties to serve them. AVMA indicated “we’re in a crisis situation.” According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-2009 Edition, there are a limited number of veterinarians graduating from college each year. Approximately 2,500 to 2,700 veterinarians graduate annually from 28 accredited schools. While demand for veterinarians is expected to increase by 35% from 2006 to 2016 (according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook report), the veterinarian shortage is expected to worsen.

(3) *The existence of nationwide or geographic skill shortages.* As indicated in (2) above, there is a severe supply v. demand issue both nationwide and at those geographic locations where the Federal government performs the majority of its agricultural and food inspections. This coupled with an increasing number of veterinarians choosing to live in metropolitan areas and pursue more lucrative practices specializing in pet care, has resulted in a shortage of veterinarians who treat farm animals or work as government inspectors. The scarcity is most severe in the U.S. Farm Belt, the lightly populated rural areas in the Midwest that produces much of the nation’s meat. The Federal government employs approximately 2,000 veterinarians—USDA’s share is approximately 85%. The Department of Defense has approximately 1,000 uniformed service veterinarians, making the total veterinarian force close to 3,000 governmentwide.

(4) *Agency efforts, including recruitment initiatives, use of other appointing authorities and flexibilities, training and development programs tailored to the position, and an explanation of why these recruitment and training efforts have not been sufficient.* The largest Government employers of veterinarians have used a wide range of recruitment initiatives and hiring flexibilities to address the severe shortage. Despite these efforts, these agencies continue to experience challenges in meeting their overall employment goals based on the severe shortage of qualified applicants. Initiatives include:

- APHIS:
 - Provides training opportunities to help overcome some of the projected skills gaps.
 - Recruits at all vet colleges; works with universities to help them include relevant training in their course offerings.
 - Uses bonuses to attract and maintain workforce (during first 9 months of FY 2008, they gave 1 retention bonus and 1 relocation bonus).

- FSIS
 - Awarded 35 recruitment bonuses during first 9 months of FY 2008.
 - Used an internship program to increase awareness and generate interest in veterinarian work with the agency. Over the past 5 years, they established agreements with 10 veterinarian schools to provide volunteer training opportunities to students with an interest in food safety and public health. In FY 2008, 26 participants in the program; 2 have accepted full-time employment (only 1 student participated in the program in 2003).
 - Paid internship program – Since 2002, 77 students have participated and 6 have become full-time employees.
 - In July 2008, OPM granted FSIS a dual compensation waiver delegation to hire a limited number of annuitants without the salary offset.
 - In November 2008, OPM granted a direct-hire authority for up to 150 VMOs based on a severe shortage. This authority was to be used in conjunction with those job announcements where recruitment, relocation and retention incentives were utilized along with job announcements held open for a minimum of 21 days.
- ARS
 - Provided 6 recruitment or retention bonuses during the first 9 months of FY 2008.
 - Created a tuition program in 2003; participation has been limited (only 4 hired; 2 remained with the agency). Veterinarians without PhDs are hired and tuition is paid for them to acquire the PhD.
- Army – Military
 - The success of the active-duty veterinarian workforce is due to a scholarship program. It targets pre-veterinarian students and pays their tuition and fees to veterinary school in exchange for a service commitment. In FY 2008, they had 106 qualified applicants for 47 scholarships.
- Legislation includes:
 - 2003, Congress enacted the National Veterinary Medical Services Act directing the Secretary of USDA to carry out a program to help repay school loans for veterinarians who agreed to work in those areas of greatest need such as the slaughter houses.
 - 2008, Congress passed the Higher Education Opportunity Act, which has provisions intended to increase the number of veterinarians in the workforce.

According to the OPM centralized personnel data file (CPDF), the following agencies provided recruitment and retention incentives.

Agency	2006	2007	2008
USDA			
-recruitment	62	86	36
-retention	9	7	4
HHS			
-recruitment	1	0	1
-retention	2	6	4

(5) *The availability and quality of candidates.* There are 28 accredited veterinary colleges within the country which can graduate about 2,500 to 2,700 students a year combined. This graduation rate has been consistent for the past 30 years. As a result, regardless of how highly qualified the individuals are who graduate, there simply will not be enough graduates to fulfill the current and increasing demand for veterinarians who treat farm animals or work as government inspectors. As indicated in (2) above, the Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts the demand for veterinarians will increase by 35% from 2006 to 2016; from 62,000 full-time jobs to 84,000.

While the Federal government represents a small percentage of those numbers (we employ approximately 2,000 plus 1,000 military), the Federal government has difficulty competing with private industry and academic institutions for the very limited applicant pool, especially given the type of work that is performed (farm animal inspection), in the locations performed (rural and slaughter houses), and the Federal government salary rates. For example, according to Central Personnel Data File data, the mean annual salary for FSIS veterinarians in 2007 was \$77,678. In the private sector, veterinarians' mean annual salary was \$115,447 (according to data from the American Veterinary Medical Association).

(6) *The desirability of the geographic location of the positions.* Many of the positions are located in remote and rural areas where employment opportunities may be lacking for spouses of VMOs.

(7) *The desirability of the duties and/or work environment associated with the positions.* Within FSIS (the largest Federal employer of veterinarians), the majority of the veterinarians work in slaughter plants. This is necessary in order to meet USDA mission requirement to ensure the safety and quality of meat and poultry products and the humane treatment of livestock during slaughter. As a part of OPM's classification review of veterinarians, OPM visited these slaughter facilities and discussed the work with the veterinarians. Most indicated that they do not want to work in these unpleasant environments – the jobs can be physically and emotionally grueling; many of the slaughterhouses are in remote and sometimes undesirable locations; and they do not believe their salaries sufficiently compensate for the working conditions.

Effective immediately you may appoint individuals into the Veterinarian Medical Officer (VMO) occupational series as identified in the attached document at the GS-11 through the GS-15 grade levels and its equivalency governmentwide based on a severe shortage of candidates. You are required to conduct any applicable pre-employment background and security clearance investigations to ensure clearance and security requirements are fully met.

Agencies may give these individuals competitive service career, career-conditional, term, or temporary appointments, as appropriate, without regard to provisions of 5 U.S.C. 3309-3318 or 5 CFR part 211 and part 337, subpart A. These appointments are subject to public notice requirements in 5 U.S.C. 3327 and 3330 and 5 CFR 330, including the displaced employee procedures in 5 CFR part 330, subpart G, and requirements in 5 CFR 332.407. In addition, you must comply with all relevant laws to the extent that they are not exempted from such laws pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 3302(a)(3). Further, I ask that you continue to make employment offers to qualified candidates with veterans' preference whenever possible.

We will monitor its use as well as the continued need for it, and may modify or terminate the authority as appropriate. OPM may request reports regarding the use of this authority.

Attachment

Attachment

Veterinary Medical Officer (VMO)

This authority issued on the date of the approval memo, for Veterinary Medical Officer positions at the GS-11 through GS-15 grade levels (or equivalent) nationwide to include overseas territories and commonwealths including Puerto Rico, Guam, and Virgin Islands, may be used indefinitely or until OPM terminates this authority. This authority is based on a severe shortage of candidates. In accordance with 5 CFR 337.206(c), OPM may request information from agencies on their use and implementation of this direct-hire authority. On a periodic basis OPM will determine if continued use is supportable. The legal authority code for SF-50 item 5-E is "BAG."