

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SB 6187

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Higher Education

**Title:** An act relating to conditional scholarships for food animal veterinarians.

**Brief Description:** Creating the food animal veterinarian conditional scholarship program.

**Sponsors:** Senators Shin, Rasmussen, Schoesler, Morton, Murray and Kohl-Welles.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Higher Education: 2/21/08, 2/25/08 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Establishes a food animal (including poultry, cattle, swine, and sheep) veterinarian conditional scholarship for eligible Washington State University veterinary students who declare an intention to practice in Washington with an emphasis in food animal medicine.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Wallace, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Anderson, Ranking Minority Member; Hankins, Hasegawa, Jarrett, McIntire, Roberts, Schmick and Sommers.

**Staff:** Cece Clynch (786-7195).

**Background:**

Washington State University (WSU) offers a four-year doctor of veterinary medicine curriculum. WSU estimates each student's four-year budget (assuming 10 to 18 credits per term) at \$126,088 for Washington residents and \$220,456 for out-of-state residents.

According to a research study published in June and July of 2006 in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, it is projected that for every 100 food animal veterinary jobs available, there will be only 96 veterinarians available. This is because of

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decreasing numbers of veterinary students electing to practice in food animal specialties, as well as socio-economic trends including declines in rural populations.

The American Veterinary Medical Association found that the median starting salary of food animal veterinarians was \$60,500, which was \$11,000 less than that of small-animal veterinarians. The gap was seen to be even wider after 25 years, with \$98,500 for food animal veterinarians and \$122,500 for small-animal veterinarians.

Strategies for attracting and keeping a good supply of veterinarians include loan forgiveness programs and grants. States such as Kansas, Maine, Missouri, North Dakota, and Texas have established, or are in the process of establishing, such loan repayment or grant programs.

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### **Summary of Bill:**

The Food Animal Veterinarian Conditional Scholarship is created with the purpose of increasing the supply of food animal veterinarians through financial incentives. The scholarship program is to be administered by WSU. In so doing, WSU is to:

- select, through a selection committee, up to two eligible students per year to receive conditional scholarships;
- adopt rules and guidelines, including repayment rules;
- publicize the program;
- collect and manage repayments from students who do not meet program obligations; and
- solicit and accept grants and donations from public and private sources.

Veterinary students are eligible for the scholarship if they: (1) are registered for at least six credit hours; (2) are making satisfactory academic progress as defined by the WSU; and (3) have declared their intention to practice veterinary medicine with an emphasis on food animal medicine in Washington.

"Food animal" is defined as "any species commonly recognized as livestock including, but not limited to, poultry, cattle, swine, and sheep." A "food animal veterinarian" is one who devotes at least 50 percent of his or her practice time to "large production animal veterinary practice."

Scholarship monies may come from funds appropriated for the purpose, or from private donations or funds given to WSU for the purpose of the food animal scholarship program. The scholarship awarded to an eligible student may not exceed the cost of resident tuition, fees, room and board, books, and laboratory fees and supplies. An eligible student may receive the conditional scholarship for a maximum of five years.

A recipient of scholarship funds incurs an obligation to repay the conditional scholarship, with interest, unless he or she is employed as a food animal veterinarian in Washington for each year of scholarship received. Any money repaid is to be deposited in the Food Animal Veterinarian Conditional Scholarship Account (Account) and may be used by WSU for scholarships, maintaining necessary records, and to cover collection costs.

The Account is created in the custody of the state Treasurer and is to receive its proportionate share of earnings based upon the Account's average daily balance for the period. No appropriation is required for expenditures from the Account and the Account is not subject to allotment procedures except for monies used for program administration. The Account is to be self-sustaining and consist of funds appropriated by the Legislature as well as private contributions and repayments.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Washington is the most trade dependent state and many of its exports are food products. The nation and the state are facing a shortage of food animal veterinarians. In some areas, the ratio of patient-animals to veterinarians is 35,000 to one. This is less of a problem when many animals live geographically close to one another, but can be a hurdle to proper care when the veterinarian has to travel long distances between patients. Homeland Security is cognizant of the shortage and has voiced a need for 500 to 800 more food animal veterinarians to ensure food safety. Even right out of school, there is an earnings differential between those veterinarians treating household pets and horses versus those treating food animals such as cattle. There is a tremendous amount of hard, physical work involved in working with these large animals. Veterinary technicians may accompany the veterinarian and provide assistance. Ranchers often try to handle the needs of their animals on their own and call a veterinarian only in a catastrophe. The result is that cows may end up as hamburger.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Senator Shin, prime sponsor; and Jack Fields, Washington Cattlemen's Association.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.