

Reports detail why veterinarians enter, leave rural practice

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Two special reports appearing in the April 15 edition of the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Assn.* (JAVMA) offer insight as to why veterinarians choose to practice in rural settings – and why some of them choose to walk away.

Rural communities are finding it more difficult to attract and retain veterinarians. The JAVMA reports identify factors that lead veterinarians to choose a career in rural veterinary practice, as well as those that contribute to them leaving.

The first report, “A survey of reasons why veterinarians enter rural veterinary practice in the U.S.,” shows that survey respondents put the rural lifestyle at the top of their list. Rounding out the top-five reasons for entering rural veterinary practice were working in animal care at the herd level; working with individual animals; the location of family and friends, and the desire to practice where a community need for veterinary care exists.

“Factors reported by the highest proportions of respondents as being of high importance in their decision to actually pursue a career in rural veterinary practice reflected both personal and professional concerns, with rural lifestyle ranked as being of high importance by the highest proportion of respondents,” the authors wrote.

When the researchers explored the reasons why veterinarians left rural practice in the second report, “A survey of reasons why veterinarians leave rural veterinary practice in the U.S.,” it was clear that quality-of-life issues played a central role. While survey respondents indicated that emergency duty and time off ranked low in importance in their decision to take a job, the tide turned when it came to those same veterinarians deciding to leave the field.

In fact, emergency duty and time off were the top two reasons cited by veterinarians who left rural practice. Filling in the rest of the top-five reasons were salary, practice atmosphere and family concerns.