

2023 Large animal veterinary wellbeing research: The reality might be more positive than the perception.

Taylor Tillery, DVM
Merck Animal Health Veterinary Academic & Industry Liaison

Keywords: Satisfaction Wellbeing, Burnout Mental Health

Merck Animal Health recently completed the 4th biennial veterinary wellbeing survey in the United States, shedding light on burnout, wellbeing and mental health in the veterinary profession. The latest study offered insights revealing that veterinarians are generally more satisfied with their careers, with 77% expressing extreme or moderate satisfaction. Despite this, veterinarians perceive their colleagues to be less content, with only 43% reporting similar levels of satisfaction. Furthermore, when compared to the general U.S. population, veterinarians demonstrated higher career satisfaction. Among the 4,634 veterinary respondents, only 2% identified as food animal veterinarians. To gain insights into this specific cohort, we analyzed and compared them to their veterinary peers.

The profile of food animal veterinarians differs from that of general veterinarians. They have a higher proportion of males and are more likely to live in rural areas, particularly in the Midwest. Additionally, food animal veterinarians include a larger representation of both Baby Boomers and Generation Z. Food animal veterinarians reported higher levels of career satisfaction (83% extremely or moderately satisfied) compared to other practice types such as companion and equine practices. They also exhibited lower burnout rates, improved wellbeing, and experienced less mental health distress. Moreover, food animal vets were less likely to leave the veterinary field altogether.

On average, food animal vets worked 25% more hours (50 hours) compared to companion animal vets, despite earning a comparatively lower income. However, they managed to find similar amounts of leisure time as other veterinarians. They were more likely to socialize with friends and engage in volunteer activities than other practice types. It is worth noting that while Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) have seen an increase in adoption since our previous study, food animal veterinarians are less likely to have access to EAPs and mental health coverage compared to their companion animal counterparts.

Personality types can be a predictor of mental health and wellbeing. People all exhibit some level of each personality type, and no personality type is bad. The Big 5 personality types are: Agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, extraversion and neuroticism. Personalities high in neuroticism has been found to be more strongly associated with diminished wellbeing in our previous and current studies. Food animal veterinarians in our study were less neurotic when contrasted with veterinarians from other practice types and the general US population.

Our study emphasizes the importance of having a healthy stress coping mechanism, as those who reported having one experienced lower burnout and improved wellbeing. Fortunately, food animal veterinarians were more likely to have healthy methods for dealing with stress compared to the overall veterinary population. We acknowledge that our study's findings are based on a sample of individuals, and the averages may not apply universally. Additionally, we found that young veterinarians are particularly vulnerable. For more details on our findings and a comprehensive list of recommendations for individuals and employers to enhance veterinary wellbeing, please visit our website at www.vetwellbeing.com.

Merck Animal Health Wellbeing Study Authors:

John O. Volk, BS1*; Ulrich Schimmack, PhD2; Elizabeth B. Strand, PhD, LCSW3,4; Addie Reinhard, DVM5,6; Joseph Hahn, DVM7; Julie Andrews, MBA8; Kevin Probyn-Smith, MS9; Robert Jones, PhD1

¹Brakke Consulting, Greensboro, NC

²Department of Psychology, University of Toronto, Mississauga, ON, Canada

³College of Social Work University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN

⁴College of veterinary Medicine, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN

⁵MentorVet, Lexington, KY

⁶College of Veterinary Medicine, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, TN

⁷Kynetec, St Louis, MO

⁸Kynetec, Guelph, ON Canada

Acknowledgements:

There were many organizations that partner to make this study possible. They include: AVMA, NAVTA, VHMA.

Funding Statement:

Funding from this study was provided by Merck Animal Health.

DRAFT