UNH and State Department of Agriculture Commit to Keeping Veterinary Lab Open

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DURHAM, N.H. – After more than seven months of work to make up lost revenues, state and university officials have identified one-time funding that will keep the New Hampshire Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory open for the next year and a half. State funding for the lab was reduced in this fiscal year and the next through cuts made to both the state agriculture department and the university.

The anticipated budget shortfall for fiscal year 2013 will be covered by a contribution from the state Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food – which must seek approval of the Executive Council and the legislative Fiscal Committee for a transfer of funds -- and one-time funds the university identified within its existing budget. For fiscal year 2014 and beyond, the goal is for the lab to be able to produce a balanced budget through a series of steps initiated over the last several months that include an improved business model, an increase in external funding through increased fees, expanded services and private giving, and a continuation of the funding partnership from the state and the UNH College of Life Sciences and Agriculture.

“We have been committed since the legislature cut funding early last summer to finding a way to keep the lab open because we knew the impact it would have on veterinary services throughout the state as well as the effect this would have on our students, particularly those in the pre-vet program, but also those pursuing pre-medical education and other majors that draw upon the expertise and experiences made available through the lab,” said Jon Wraith, dean of the university’s College of Life Sciences and Agriculture. “What we heard from students in these programs confirmed that and only made us more determined to bridge the gap. In partnership with the commissioner’s office and the Veterinary Diagnostic Lab staff, we have identified and developed a good start on new revenue streams, but we were still far short of the needed amount. This bridge funding gives critical breathing room to continue that work. With continued help from our stakeholders I am confident in our ability to succeed.”

UNH Provost John Aber echoed that feeling. “The students we met with clearly and compellingly described the value they receive from the hands-on opportunities the lab provides.”

Both Wraith and Lorraine Stuart Merrill, state commissioner of agriculture, stressed that this additional funding to cover the deficit is one-time only and that the focus will continue to emphasize working with lab personnel to ensure a sustainable model for the future.

“The outpouring of support from students, parents, faculty, farmers, and veterinarians confirmed the vital importance of the lab to academic programs, as well as to the state’s agricultural and veterinary businesses,” said Merrill. “Their support was vital during this process, but we still have work to do to ensure that the lab remains available to the state and to the university’s students beyond June 2014.”

The NH Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory is a partnership among the state, the public, and the university, and is housed on the UNH campus. Its diagnostic services serve crucial animal and public health needs of the state, veterinary and livestock businesses and organization, and others. Having it located on campus allows the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture to integrate the lab’s veterinarians and staff members into the university’s pre-veterinary advising program.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state’s flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.