

# Washington gets a new state veterinarian

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Dr. Amber Itle can drop the “interim” from her title. She is the new state veterinarian at the Washington Department of Agriculture.

Itle first joined WSDA in 2013 as a field veterinarian and was appointed assistant state veterinarian in 2017. Last summer, she was named interim state veterinarian upon the retirement of Dr. Brian Joseph.



Dr. Amber Itle

“I am confident that Dr. Itle will be an exceptional state veterinarian. She has years of experience in animal agriculture, is well regarded by our state’s livestock industry and cares deeply about animal health and welfare,” WSDA director Derek Sandison said in a press release. “Dr. Itle has been doing a terrific job these past few months and I look forward to working with her in this permanent role.”

Itle spent 10 years as a livestock, equine and sale yard veterinarian in the private sector before joining WSDA.

“I always tell people, ‘You can’t regulate an industry you don’t understand,’” Itle said. “The only way to understand an industry is to either grow up in it, or work in it.”

One thing that Itle says keeps

## Itle addresses shortage of large-animal vets

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

The shrinking number of large-animal veterinarians for food animals and equines remains a concern, said Dr. Amber Itle, the new Washington state veterinarian.

“We certainly are experiencing a shortage like we’ve never seen before,” she said.

Itle sees a paradigm shift in the overall profession.

“It’s very difficult work,” she said. “Folks are having to travel farther to do that work, and let’s just be real, livestock veterinarians don’t make as much money as veterinarians who go into small animal (practices). ... It’s a lifestyle. You have to love getting out there and being with the cows and being with people.”

The industry must recruit into veterinary school people who come from an agricultural background, Itle said.

“When you’re born and raised with it, (that’s) the best way to understand it,” she said. “I have never been disappointed by any job I’ve ever had in the field of agriculture, nor have I been disappointed by anything I’ve ever tried in the field of veterinary medicine.”

Itle successfully identified four shortage areas in the state, two in central Washington, one in southeast Washington and one on the Olympic Peninsula, for the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture’s Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program.

The goal is to attract livestock veterinarians to those areas.

The program pays up to \$25,000 each year toward qualified educational loans of eligible veterinarians who agree to serve in a NIFA-designated veterinarian shortage situation for three years.

Another shortage area would be helpful in the Okanogan area, Itle said.

her up at night is making sure Washington remains an economically viable place to be a rancher, dairy farmer or otherwise involved in animal agriculture.

“Leaning into that challenge and thinking about those social sci-

ences — what is the public perception, how have the public’s values changed over time and how do we need to respond to that as an agricultural community?” she said.

Itle’s father and sister are also veterinarians. Her father celebrates

50 years as a practicing food animal veterinarian this May and still works full-time.

“If that doesn’t inspire someone, I don’t know what does,” she said. “Growing up, seeing the passion he has for agriculture in his work really had an impact on me.”

Her extended family is in the dairy industry.

“Getting to be part of that whole process, from shoveling the poop out of the stalls, to milking the cows, to delivering the products, it changed my life,” she said. “Not only did I have the perspective of what the producer endures and deals with, but also what does the consumer want on the other end?”

Itle commended Washington’s cattle industry for embracing animal disease traceability and supporting efforts to build infrastructure, including adopting RFID tag technology.

“Our mission is to protect animal health and welfare, but part of that is being able to respond, contain, eradicate diseases, and then to be able to recover from that,” she said. “Having that traceability piece on the front end is going to help us do that better.”

Next steps include exercising response plans to maintain continuity of business in the event of a disease to sustain international trade opportunities, she said.

Itle praised the “amazing, forward-thinking, collaborative” leaders in the state’s agricultural industry.

“Once I get a project or an idea, I’m going to take the bull by the horns and I’m not going to let it go until we get it done,” she said. “So if folks out there have things they want to do, come float some ideas my way. I love working with people to get where they want to go.”

Itle wants to partner with ranchers to be part of the solution.

“As soon as I feel like I’m not part of the solution any more, I’m quitting this job,” she said. “At least I can be a placeholder to protect our industry from somebody who doesn’t understand our industry. But we can do so much more than that. We can be more proactive, lean in, see what’s coming down the pike and be prepared.”

Asked her biggest piece of advice for Washington ranchers, she turned the question around.

“I would ask them to tell me what they need,” Itle told the Capital Press.

Itle rattled off the strains ranchers face in general: regulations, wolves and other predators, supply chain disruptions, higher cost of production and the weather.

“I think there’s just so many challenges the ranchers have to deal with day to day that I don’t think I’m in the position to tell them what their problems are,” she said. “I think they have a lot of challenges, and what I would be looking for from those ranchers are ‘What can we do at the state vet’s office to help you overcome one of those challenges?’”

# Idaho Senate panel narrowly backs new version of vet loan-aid bill

By BRAD CARLSON  
Capital Press

BOISE — The Idaho Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee March 10 voted 5-4 to advance a replace-

ment proposal to help veterinarians pay education expenses if they work in rural areas with livestock.

The committee sent Senate Bill 1380 to the full Senate with a do-pass rec-

ommendation. It replaces SB 1344, which died in committee.

The new bill keeps its predecessor’s participation and loan-repayment limits. Up to 10 veterinarians per

year could receive a maximum of \$25,000 a year to repay education expenses for up to three years, as long as they are not already enrolled in another repayment program.

Also like the earlier proposal, qualifying veterinarians would agree to devote at least half their practices to caring for livestock in rural areas.

The new bill adds a requirement that the veterinarian sign a contract to spend at least four years in production animal care in a rural area.

Sen. Michelle Stennett, D-Ketchum, the bill’s sponsor, said the four-year commitment is envisioned as allowing the practice to become established while not overburdening the vet if he or she needs to relocate earlier. A vet who does not fulfill the contract would be required to repay the final year’s grant amount.

The bill would task the Idaho State Department of Agriculture to form an in-house committee to screen and select applicants and monitor participation.

The earlier proposal called for a grant-review



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press File

**A new bill aimed at keeping more veterinarians in large-animal practices has been sent to the Idaho Senate floor.**

board of appointees. Having a board was deemed potentially too cumbersome and heavy-handed, but a motion to have the Senate amend the bill to instead use a department committee did not advance.

The new bill, like its predecessor, would establish a fund to which federal money and private donations could be added.

“I’m disappointed the industry didn’t come to the table with an initial contribution,” said Sen. Lori Den Hartog, R-Meridian. “I’m not sure this is the way to solve the problem.”

Several committee members opposed paying for the program mainly with the state general fund.

Livestock industry representatives stressed the industries’ substantial contribution to annual farm gate receipts and the state economy overall. The industries pay fees into state Department of

Agriculture funds dedicated for industry-specific purposes.

David Claiborne, an attorney for the Idaho Dairymen’s Association, said the group since 2008 has made substantial annual contributions to the Northwest Bovine Veterinary Experience Program.

There was widespread agreement that livestock industries are major economic contributors and that there is a shortage of production-animal veterinarians — largely because treating pets pays more. Meanwhile, there are more required cattle vaccinations a vet must administer.

“I question whether this is going to greatly help that or not,” said Sen. Doug Ricks, R-Rexburg.

An incentive program probably is not enough to keep vets in rural areas and focused on large animals, and there are other potential approaches that are not government-driven, he said.

# S. Idaho Livestock Hall of Fame to honor inductees

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — The Southern Idaho Livestock Hall of Fame will honor its newest inductees on April 12 at the Turf Club during the organization’s 61st annual banquet.

The 2020 inductions were delayed two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Those inductees to be honored this year are: cattle producers Guy and Sherry Colyer of Bruneau, sheep

producers Don and Patricia Pickett of Oakley, former Idaho State Brand Inspector Larry Hayhurst of Nampa and dairyman John Reitsma (posthumously) of Jerome.

The banquet will open with social time at 6:30 p.m. followed by dinner at 7 p.m.

Tickets for the prime rib dinner are \$30 and can be reserved by calling Eric Bennett at (208) 320-5769.

For more information, visit <https://www.facebook.com/SouthernIdahoLivestock/>

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