OTTAWA, November 28, 2006 – The Honourable Chuck Strahl, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, and Dr. Paul Boutet, President of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA), announced today that a pool of private sector veterinarians will be established to assist governments in responding to animal health emergencies such as disease outbreaks or natural disasters.

The Canadian Veterinary Reserve (CVR), a joint initiative of the CVMA and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), will supplement existing response capabilities of federal and provincial governments. It will also provide Canada with additional flexibility to increase its support for international animal disease control efforts.

“Canada’s new government is strengthening its ability to respond to infectious animal diseases such as avian influenza which have the potential to extract an enormous toll in animal health and social and economic costs,” said Minister Strahl. “We are pleased to be working with the CVMA to ensure that Canada has the surge capacity to respond to prolonged or multiple disease outbreaks, and to increase our contribution to international efforts to address disease occurrences at source as part of an enhanced prevention effort.”

The CVMA has created an Interim Advisory Board of animal and public health stakeholders to provide advice and guidance on the administration and training of the CVR over the next six months.

A recruitment campaign will be rolled out by the CVMA at the national and provincial level in the coming weeks. For the initial group, orientation and training will begin early in 2007. A reserve of 100 to 150 personnel is the initial target with a view to grow the reserve to 300 to 500 personnel over five years.

The ability of the CVR to respond to other declared emergencies, nationally or internationally, such as the flooding and damages associated with Hurricane Katrina in the United States, will also be incorporated into the program.

“I believe that veterinary practitioners will seek to join the CVR as an opportunity to contribute their skills and knowledge in these types of disasters. This service will provide significant benefits to Canadian society in general and it will minimize the suffering of many of the affected animals in particular,” said Dr. Boutet.

The US, UK, Australia, the European Union and other countries have also established similar veterinary reserves, models which Canada is considering and adapting in the development of the Canadian Veterinary Reserve.

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