

Huerfano is a sparsely populated rural county in southern Colorado that straddles Interstate 25 halfway between Pueblo and Trinidad. The mild high desert climate and expansive grasslands lend themselves beef cow/calf operations and hay production on irrigated fields. USDA estimates Huerfano County holds 16,000 cows and calves in herds ranging from 10 to 1000 head. Horses are kept to work livestock and for pleasure. In addition, small operations raise sheep, goats, and camelids. The county has a sizeable population of household pets.

Huerfano County is blessed with magnificent mountain views, a comfortable 4-season climate, good schools, and an excellent medical facility. But other than a small-animal exclusive mobile clinic we have no full-time veterinary services in the county. Disease surveillance is nearly non-existent. Emergency care for serious injuries, regulatory work (TB tests, Brucellosis tests, Trichomonas testing, tests for import/export), and sample collection and submission for reportable diseases requires hauling the animals 50-60 miles to Pueblo or Trinidad or waiting until a veterinarian from an adjoining county can travel to the Huerfano County. The lack of local veterinary care impacts this county beyond endangering livestock production and health. Potential buyers are canceling real estate contracts when they find out veterinary care for their animals is not available. Businesses involving animals are closing for the same reason.

A full-service veterinary clinic near Walsenburg with 1-2 veterinarians and 6 support staff provided service for all species for 40 years demonstrating that this county can support a veterinarian.

The Huerfano County Farm Bureau is exploring solutions to this problem. We are meeting with the administration at the CSU Veterinary College and have garnered support from local extension personnel, our economic development committee, the local Board of Realtors, and County Commissioners. The recently vacated veterinary clinic mentioned above with facilities for both large and small animals could be modernized and equipped. We are exploring the purchase of this vacant clinic by either private investors or public entities. We believe an available clinic facility, funding for equipment and inventory, and possible financial support from grants would provide considerable incentive for a veterinarian to establish a practice in Huerfano County.

Federal grants could be available to fund some of this. However, eligibility for these grants requires a recommendation by the Colorado State Veterinarian to USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to designate Huerfano County an underserved area.

We request any assistance and support you can provide in obtaining this designation.

Sincerely,

John C. Stroh, President

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Huerfano County Farm Bureau