

the State animal health official of each State involve the leading health animal experts in the State in the nomination process.

§ 3431.6 Review of nominations.

(a) *Peer panel.* State shortage situations nominations will be evaluated by a peer panel of experts in animal health convened by the Secretary. The panel will evaluate nominations according to the criteria identified in the solicitation. The panel will consider the objectives and activities of the veterinarian position in the veterinary service shortage situation and the risks associated with not securing or retaining the position and make a recommendation regarding each nomination.

(b) *Agency review.* The Secretary will evaluate the recommendations of the peer panel and designate shortage situations for the VMLRP.

§ 3431.7 Notification and use of designated veterinarian shortage situations.

The Secretary will publish the designated veterinarian shortage situations on the Agency's Web site and will use the designated veterinarian shortage situations to solicit VMLRP loan repayment applications from individual veterinarians in accordance with subpart B of this part.

Subpart B—Administration of the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program

§ 3431.8 Purpose and scope.

(a) *Purpose.* The regulations of this subpart apply to the award of veterinary medicine loan repayments under the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) authorized by the National Veterinary Medicine Service Act, 7 U.S.C. 3151a.

(b) *Scope.* Under the VMLRP, the Secretary enters into service agreements with veterinarians to pay principal and interest on education loans of veterinarians who agree to work in veterinary shortage situations for a prescribed period of time. In addition, program participants may enter into an agreement to provide services to the Federal government in emergency situ-

ations in exchange for salary, travel, per diem expenses, and additional amounts of loan repayment assistance. The purpose of the program is to assure an adequate supply of trained food animal veterinarians in shortage situations and provide USDA with a pool of veterinary specialists to assist in the control and eradication of animal disease outbreaks.

§ 3431.9 Eligibility to apply.

(a) *General.* To be eligible to apply to the VMLRP an applicant must:

(1) Have a degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), or the equivalent, from a college of veterinary medicine accredited by the AVMA Council on Education;

(2) Have qualifying educational loan debt as defined in § 3431.3;

(3) Secure an offer of employment or establish and/or maintain a practice in a veterinary shortage situation, as determined by the Secretary in accordance with the procedures in subpart A of this part, within the time period specified in the VMLRP service agreement offer; and

(4) Provide certifications and verifications in accordance with § 3431.16.

(b) *Non-eligibility.* The following individuals are ineligible to apply to the VMLRP:

(1) An individual who owes an obligation for veterinary service to the Federal government, a State, or other entity under an agreement with such Federal, State, or other entity are ineligible for the VMLRP unless such obligation will be completely satisfied prior to the beginning of service under the VMLRP;

(2) An individual who has a Federal judgment lien against his/her property arising from Federal debt; and

(3) An individual who has total qualified debt that does not meet the debt threshold.

§ 3431.10 Eligibility to participate.

To be eligible to participate in the VMLRP, a participant must meet the following criteria:

(a) Meet the eligibility criteria of § 3431.9 for applying to the VMLRP;

(b) Be selected for participation by the Secretary pursuant to § 3431.12.