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**Texas State Veterinarian to Retire December 31;
Nationwide Executive Search to be Conducted**

Dr. Bob Hillman, Texas' state veterinarian and executive director of the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC), has announced that he will retire December 31, ending his nearly seven-year tenure with the state's livestock and poultry health regulatory agency. The TAHC's 13 governor-appointed commissioners will establish a committee to conduct a nationwide search to fill Dr. Hillman's position.

"I have wrestled with the decision to retire, but it is time to put family first," Dr. Hillman told TAHC commissioners in his announcement. "Texas has made progress in many of our livestock health programs, and we have challenges to overcome in others. Just about every major disease event that has occurred in the United States in the past 6 ½ years has impacted Texas and our livestock industries. With the support of TAHC commissioners and the livestock and poultry industry, we have addressed and resolved many of these issues."

"There is never a good time for Dr. Hillman to retire. He is a great asset to the agriculture industry and never forgets the ranchers and producers of this state," said Mr. Ernie Morales, TAHC chairman and the feedlot representative on the commission. "During disease outbreaks or when addressing regulatory issues, Dr. Hillman has had to make difficult decisions based on science to regain or maintain the health and marketability of Texas' livestock and poultry. Our search committee will look within the TAHC and across the nation for the veterinarian who will best fill the enormous gap created by Dr. Hillman's retirement."

Dr. Hillman, a large animal veterinarian for 35 years, served a short stint with the USDA in Texas, and worked in private practice in both Texas and Idaho. For more than two decades, he served with the Idaho Department of Agriculture, 13 of those as the state veterinarian, during which he wrangled with controversial disease issues, including addressing the brucellosis infection in bison and elk in the Greater Yellowstone Area. He also worked closely with the state veterinarians and the cattle industry in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California and with Mexican livestock health officials to control cattle tuberculosis in Mexico, in order to prevent the spread of the disease by Mexican feeder and roping cattle imported to the U.S.

"I was fortunate to chair the TAHC commission and appoint the search committee that convinced Dr. Hillman to join us in Texas in April 2003," said Mr. Richard Traylor, who was appointed to the TAHC commission as the livestock marketing representative in 1997 and who served as TAHC chairman from 2002 through January 2006. "Dr. Hillman and I have had many conversations, day and night, but I never worried about those calls, because I knew we could work out problems. It was a pleasure to work with him."

"There were many animal health issues that needed to be addressed when Dr. Hillman arrived, but we made a big dent in those problems. The state of Texas owes him gratitude for his service, and for the sacrifices he and his wife, Martha, made, being so far from their children and grandchildren in Idaho," Traylor said.

Within days of returning to his home state as the TAHC executive director, Dr. Hillman, a Cameron native, was leading a pitched battle against exotic Newcastle disease (END) in the El Paso area. Since then, the TAHC also has successfully addressed other animal health issues, including regaining cattle tuberculosis-free status in 2006, winning the long-standing battle against cattle brucellosis in February 2008, and eradicating outbreaks of foreign animal diseases, including Monkey pox, highly pathogenic avian influenza and contagious equine metritis. In 2005, the TAHC handled the nation's first case of BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) in a native-born cow, and the agency and industry has dealt with animal issues arising from natural disasters, including floods, fires and hurricanes.

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“Dr. Hillman is an outstanding leader whose reputation is above reproach. He has demonstrated his abilities during Texas’ cattle tuberculosis, cattle brucellosis and fever tick outbreaks,” said Jon Johnson, livestock specialist for the Texas Farm Bureau, the largest agriculture association in Texas, representing more than 150,000 livestock and poultry producers.

“Dr. Hillman led Texas through disease outbreak crises with a firm resolve and sound decision-making,” Johnson commented. “When new rules or programs are needed, such as the cattle trichomoniasis program, Dr. Hillman organized industry working groups, ensuring that problems can be addressed ‘head on’ with everyone’s input.”

“Dr. Hillman has done an excellent job of providing overall direction for animal health programs for Texas,” said Ken Horton, executive vice president of the Texas Pork Producers Association. “He has been invaluable in helping the swine industry resolve problems with federal disease eradication programs, including those for pseudorabies and swine brucellosis.”

Lauded as one of the country’s most influential state veterinarians, Dr. Hillman was the 2001 president of the U.S. Animal Health Association, and has chaired the organization’s cattle tuberculosis, government relations and animal identification committees and served on the wildlife disease and brucellosis committees. He has served as president of the Western States Livestock Health Association, the National Assembly of State Animal Health Officials, and the Southern Animal Health Association. In 2007, he received the National Assembly Award, the highest honor from state regulatory animal health officials.

“Dr. Hillman has tremendous integrity, and we have enjoyed a very good working relationship between the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Veterinary Services, the TAHC and Texas industry,” said Dr. John Clifford, Deputy Administrator for USDA’s Veterinary Services. “We have reached out often to Dr. Hillman and have always appreciated his cooperation. He is a great friend and spokesperson for animal health, and we hope that he will remain involved in animal agriculture in the future.”

“Dr. Hillman is a mentor and friend, and when I call him, he gives me accurate and valuable advice,” said Dr. Becky Brewer, Oklahoma state veterinarian with the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture. “He taught me the invaluable lesson of neighbors being friends; state veterinarians working together to address issues, because there are no geographical boundaries to disease. He is definitely one of a kind.”

“Dr. Hillman has worked tirelessly for the animal industries of Texas. He understands the challenges facing our state today, and his leadership will be greatly missed by the animal and agricultural communities. I will miss his insight, knowledge and counsel,” said Dr. Tammy Beckham, director of the Texas Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratories (TVMDL).

“The TAHC staff, the Texas livestock industry and the associations welcomed me when I returned to Texas in 2003. The individuals and associations have helped me to understand our system, and accepted and followed my leadership,” said Dr. Hillman. “I am eternally grateful. I retire knowing that the TAHC will remain in good hands, and will continue to carry out its regulatory duties and responsibilities in an effective, dedicated, highly capable manner.”

“Dr. Hillman’s greatest strongpoint is his communication with industry,” added Bill Hyman, executive director of the Independent Cattlemen’s Association, an association of cow-calf producers across the state. “His frank, commonsense approach will be greatly missed, and replacing him will be difficult.”

Dr. Hillman and his wife, Martha, will return to Idaho after retirement, where he can fish, hunt, pursue hobbies and they can spend time with their children and grandchildren. Dr. Hillman plans to retain strong ties to Texas and will work on animal health projects, but at a pace not requiring constant travel, agency management and endless work hours.