Dr. Bennie Osburn Retires as Dean of UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine

Dr. Bennie I. Osburn retired June 29 from the position of dean of the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. As one of the longest-serving veterinary deans in the country, Dr. Osburn has led the School of Veterinary Medicine with distinction for 15 years.

An energetic proponent of the profession, Dr. Osburn has raised awareness of the broad role of veterinarians in the traditional areas of food animal medicine and food safety as well as the profession’s value in the lesser-known sectors of environmental health and One Health.

Upon his retirement this year, Dr. Osburn leaves the school with eight new facilities, new and expanded programs of regional service and international stature, more than 700 students, 300 faculty members, a robust research enterprise, a budget of $150 million and a scholarship endowment of more than $40 million.

“Bennie has been a regular attendee at our House of Delegates and Board of Governors meetings,” said immediate past CVMA president Dr. Dean Henricks. “He has been a great resource for the CVMA, bringing not only his own insights on veterinary issues, but also sharing the perspectives of the many associations and organizations to which he belongs.”

Dr. Osburn’s 41-year scholarly career has been filled with contributions to UC Davis’s mission of teaching, research and public service. As an educator, Dr. Osburn takes pride in having mentored 50 graduate students. When he became dean in 1996, his dedication broadened to serve all the school’s students and future veterinarians of California.

After leading an assessment by the University of California of the health workforce, Dr. Osburn was instrumental in raising the number of DVM students from 108 to 131 students per class to address existing and projected shortages.

Responding to greater demand for veterinary specialists, he helped increase the number of specialty residents in the school from 60 to more than 100 in what is believed to be the largest veterinary residency program in the nation.

Ninety new ladder-rank faculty and more than 150 other scientists and lecturers have been recruited during Dr. Osburn’s three terms.

Along with faculty and other friends of the school, Dr. Osburn navigated through a rocky period of limited accreditation due to facilities and successfully guided the school back to full accreditation in 2004. He set a precedent for the University of California when he oversaw the planning, fundraising and construction of eight facilities designed to unite faculty and students and to promote research collaborations.

Dr. Osburn was instrumental in starting the combined DVM/PhD degree program, a graduate student support program, and programs to encourage veterinary students to explore food animal medicine and research careers.
While president of the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges from 2003-2005, Dr. Osburn launched national initiatives to build capacity at veterinary schools, establish veterinary loan repayment programs and increase federal research funding. His work on a national public health task force, for example, was in part responsible for the increase in the number of public health programs in colleges of veterinary medicine, including the Master of Public Health degree program that he helped found at UC Davis.

Most recently, he has served as chair of the board of the North American Veterinary Medicine Education Consortium, paving the way for the future of veterinary education through nationwide coordination of curricula, resources, testing and licensing.

Dr. Osburn completed his DVM degree at Kansas State University, a PhD in comparative pathology at UC Davis and a research fellowship at Johns Hopkins University. In 1970, he returned to the School of Veterinary Medicine as a faculty member and made key discoveries about food animal viruses - including the bluetongue virus - developmental immunology, congenital infections and food safety. He has published more than 280 peer-reviewed publications about health in sheep, primates, dairy cattle and other species.

Under Dr. Osburn’s leadership, the school’s research funding rose from $46 million in 1996 to $109 million in 2010. He helped launch joint ventures such as the UC Veterinary Medical Center—San Diego, the Western Institute for Food Safety and Security, and the FDA Western Center for Food Safety. Dr. Osburn was also instrumental in nurturing centers of excellence such as the Center for Comparative Medicine, the Center for Vectorborne Diseases, the SeaDoc Society and the International Animal Welfare Training Institute. Health programs for regenerative medicine, wildlife, shelter pets, companion animals and horses also blossomed during his tenure.

“It has been my pleasure and privilege to serve as dean,” Dr. Osburn told faculty, staff and students when he announced his retirement late in 2010. “Leading this school has been one of the most rewarding challenges I have ever experienced, and together we have accomplished a great deal in a short amount of time.”

The CVMA congratulates Dr. Bennie Osburn on his successful tenure as Dean of the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine.

**Update on Search Committee for the Next Dean**

*After reviewing the recommendations of the recruitment advisory committee, Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor Ralph J. Hexter invited three candidates to meet with campus constituents during June. A public forum was held for each candidate on the UC Davis campus.*