In 2019, the Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine (KSUCVM) established the Food Animal Veterinary Certificate (FAVC) program to enhance graduate confidence and proficiency in key areas of large animal practice. Feedback from regional stakeholders and practicing veterinarians identified a need for expanded production animal experience, improved technical proficiency, and rural practice management for entry-level veterinary graduates. The FAVC goal is to prepare food animal– or mixed practice–oriented graduates for long-term success in rural practice by developing skills in animal health, production medicine, practice management, and client communications beyond the standard DVM curriculum. For K-State DVM graduates, the FAVC program provides augmented training in their area of interest and communicates value-added credentials and attainment of enhanced practical skills to potential employers.

The KSUCVM offers a nontracking curriculum; however, students select 12 elective credits in years 1 to 3 and additional electives are available in year 4. The FAVC program guides student elective choices and provides additional opportunities to enhance practice-ready skills. The certificate can be completed within standard tuition and credit hour requirements for the DVM degree. Participation in the FAVC program is required for the Veterinary Training Program for Rural Kansas scholarship students, who complete 4 years of service in an underserved region of Kansas after graduation. Many nonscholarship students also complete the FAVC.

Within the FAVC program, students are assigned a faculty mentor for course selection and career planning. Together they create a customized program of study focused on the student’s practice interest. In addition to didactic courses and clinical rotations required of all KSUCVM students, each FAVC student completes 4 required credits in production medicine, rural business management, and a clinical externship and 10 elective credits chosen from a menu of 14 available courses for a total of 14 FAVC credits. Candidates must demonstrate proficiency from a list of core and elective clinical skills to K-State faculty and externship mentors. FAVC students also log a list of required and elective technical procedures, provide a college-wide seminar to communicate relevant experiences and case management skills, join a national professional association, and participate in enrichment activities provided by the College. For example, FAVC students meet monthly with private practitioners who present clinical field cases remotely. Following the presentations, students have an opportunity to discuss case management, client communication, and diagnostic challenges with KSUCVM food animal faculty.

Establishment of the FAVC benefits all KSUCVM students by stimulating new course development, including bull breeding soundness examination (BSE) and advanced palpation courses. During the BSE course, senior students complete a rotation performing BSEs on client bulls. Participants emerge confident in their abilities to perform these important examinations on day 1 after graduation. In 2 years, 9 KSUCVM graduates have received the FAVC, with over 70 students currently enrolled in the program. The FAVC has provided a successful model for the creation of other KSUCVM certificate programs, including exotic/zoological medicine and shelter medicine certificates. Several more are planned. Certificate programs advantage the professional development of new graduates and communicate these enhanced skills to future employers.