

## Canadian veterinarians help Guatemalan community overrun by dogs

**MONTREAL, QUEBEC (February 24, 2009)** – A team of Canadian veterinarians and animal health technicians have returned from Todos Santos, Guatemala where they participated in a groundbreaking study examining the use of the new chemical sterilant, Esterisol®, to control canine population. Members of the non-profit organization, Veterinarians without Borders/Vétérinaires sans Frontières-Canada (VWB/VSF) spent three weeks in the remote village working with local partners to chemically sterilize approximately 47% of owned male dogs.

“When Todos Santos approached us in 2007 they were desperate to find some way of controlling their dog population,” said Dr. Enid Stiles, Canine Program Coordinator, VWB/VSF. “The dog population had gotten completely out of control. People were being attacked and it was affecting everyone’s quality of life – people and dogs! We were determined to work with this community to build a sustainable and culturally-appropriate program that would keep the dog population in check”.

For years, Todos Santos had tried unsuccessfully to manage their escalating dog overpopulation problem, often resorting to mass extermination campaigns using strychnine. Unfortunately, not only were these campaigns simply band-aid solutions, they also resulted in the death of numerous owned pets. The people of this community, who despite everything have deep respect for these animals, looked to VWB/VSF for a more permanent and humane solution.

“This is a really exciting case study because it gives us the opportunity to determine not only the medical efficacy of this new product but also assess its cultural acceptance – which is the key to finding a sustainable solution,” said Dr. Stiles. “We know that surgically removing the testicles from male dogs is often met with resistance from dog owners, so chemical castration could be a viable alternative. But, there is still a lot of work to do - this was just the first phase in a long-term and comprehensive project that we believe can succeed in a way that the traditional fly in/fly out spay/neuter campaigns have not.”

Todos Santos is like so many other villages around the world where free-roaming dogs are part of community life; yet, without accessible and affordable veterinary care, these dogs reproduce uncontrollably and spread deadly diseases like rabies. Killing approximately 55,000 people a year – one person every ten minutes – rabies continues threaten the world’s most vulnerable communities.

The VWB/VSF team, which included 3 veterinarians and 5 animal health technicians, were thrilled with what they managed to accomplish during this first phase. Community support for the project was overwhelming and the plan is to return to Todos Santos this spring to evaluate the project and work with local stakeholders on a larger campaign to promote responsible pet ownership.

### ABOUT VWB/VSF-CANADA

#### Mission Statement:

*To work with those in need to foster the health of animals, people, and the environments that sustain us.*

VWB/VSF-Canada was founded in Guelph just three years ago. In the organization’s short existence, they have put Canadian expertise and resources to work in more than 25 projects in parts of the world as near as the Canadian Arctic and as far as Indonesia and Malawi. The organization is committed to engaging people where they live and working with them to build on their existing strengths to adapt and prosper in the rapidly changing world. From



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developing a canine population control program in Guatemala, to improving goat production for women and children in HIV/AIDS – affected households in Uganda, to assisting in the development of veterinary curricula in Senegal, VWB/VSF-Canada is continually working to help communities develop locally-defined strategies to promote and maintain public and animal health.