RESOLUTION NUMBER: 5 and 20 Combined   APPROVED

SOURCE: USAHA/AAVLD COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL HEALTH SURVEILLANCE AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS
USAHA/AAVLD COMMITTEE ON NAHLN

SUBJECT MATTER: NATIONAL ANIMAL HEALTH LABORATORY NETWORK INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN), a partnership of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), United States Animal Health Association and the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians has been working since 2002 on a project to develop information technology applications and processes to facilitate the electronic interchange of data concerning testing between NAHLN-member laboratories and the USDA. This includes the development of order and result messages, messaging broker applications and a repository database to store the transferred data. This NAHLN Information Technology (NAHLN IT) project has achieved several milestones in development, including implementation of a standardized result messaging format and the implementation of messaging for two NAHLN disease surveillance programs, Classical Swine Fever and Avian Influenza in wild birds.

However, the NAHLN IT development effort is still short of several critical milestones needed to complete the project. There are at least three reasons that this project has not yet been successfully completed. First, the resources within USDA devoted to this project have dwindled and are now insufficient to support the rapid completion of this effort. Second, the development process has created a bottleneck by limiting all actual code development to USDA staff. Third, the priority of the NAHLN IT project within the USDA has not been high enough to ensure that sufficient resources were devoted to completion of the project.

The completion of the development of the NAHLN IT project is considered a high priority by the member laboratories and state animal health officials. The ability to electronically transfer information in a standardized format and using a standardized protocol is critical not only for NAHLN testing but also for interlaboratory and laboratory to state animal health official communications.

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) requests that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services (VS) open up development and implementation of the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) Information Technology (IT) system to direct participation by trusted state partners to leverage the additional capabilities and capacity of those NAHLN partners to facilitate this process. Further, the USAHA requests that USDA consider the development and implementation of the NAHLN IT system a high-priority IT project and that the resources sufficient to support the rapid development and implementation of the NAHLN IT system are allocated to those efforts.

INTERIM RESPONSE:
The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services (VS) recognizes the concerns of the United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) and appreciates the opportunity to respond.

The USAHA/American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians' National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) Information Technology (IT) subcommittee identified several NAHLN laboratory IT specialists who could participate in developing components of the NAHLN IT system, pending access feasibility. The VS Chief Information Officer (CIO) verbally agreed to this during the subcommittee meetings. However, further development of the NAHLN IT system is currently on hold pending completion of the Department-required Certification and Accreditation process. NAHLN IT resources are primarily concentrated on addressing security concerns and upgrades. The NAHLN program office will issue cooperative agreements with key NAHLN laboratory IT experts who can collaborate with VS and enhance progress on developing and implementing the NAHLN IT system.

Further, the VS CIO's highest priority in early 2011 was to secure commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) software that meets over 900 specified requirements, including those of the NAHLN IT system. Because this COTS product will eventually replace the NAHLN IT system, laboratory messaging functionality is a high-priority required element. The COTS software has been secured.

FINAL RESPONSE
The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services (VS) recognizes the concerns of the United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) and appreciates the opportunity to respond.

The USAHA/American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians' National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) Information Technology (IT) subcommittee identified several NAHLN laboratory IT specialists who could participate in developing components of the NAHLN IT system, pending access feasibility. The VS Chief Information Officer (CIO) verbally agreed to this during the subcommittee meetings. NAHLN IT resources have been primarily concentrated on addressing security concerns and upgrades due to the USDA-required certification and accreditation process.

The NAHLN program office will issue cooperative agreements with key NAHLN laboratory IT experts who can collaborate with VS and enhance progress on developing and implementing the NAHLN IT system. The training necessary to implement diagnostic test result messaging was developed by NAHLN laboratory experts and delivered to participants from seven laboratories not currently messaging in August 2011. A new NAHLN IT project team has been formed and is working with NAHLN program staff and NAHLN IT experts to assess status and establish priorities.

The VS CIO's highest priority in early 2011 was to secure commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) software that meets more than 900 specified requirements, including those of the NAHLN IT system. Because this COTS product will eventually replace the NAHLN IT system, laboratory messaging functionality is a high-priority required element. The COTS software has been secured.