

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL WELFARE

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The Committee met on Tuesday, November 8, 2005, at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center, in Hershey, Pennsylvania. Chair Steven Halstead called the meeting to order at 12:30 pm with 33 committee members and at least 20 guests in attendance. Dr. Halstead reviewed the Committee mission statement and activities of the Committee since the last meeting. Discussion included the United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) News Alert Summaries and Welfare Summaries, which are provided by the association's staff and delivered to committee members through the Chairs. Committee members expressed keen interest in these items and strong support for continuing the program. Members also expressed interest in having these items archived and available for search/review on the USAHA website. Members were asked to provide suggestions for future meeting agenda topics either directly to the Chair or Vice-Chair, or by written comment on the attendance sheets being circulated through the room. Dr. Halstead then reviewed the action taken at the previous meeting and asked members to keep this and the Committee mission statement in mind as frames of reference during this session.

Marlene Halverson, Farm Animal Economics Advisor, Animal Welfare Institute (AWI), provided an update of her organization's concerns, including equine slaughter, wild horses and burros, AWI's farm-animal-production standards and alliance with Whole Foods Market, tail docking of dairy cattle, equine-rescue operation guidelines, laboratory animals, and endangered species. Ms. Halverson mentioned that proceedings on animal sentience are available online at www.animalsentience.com. Further, she reported that the World Society for the Protection of Animals has guidelines on slaughter and disposal of birds affected by avian influenza (wspa.org).

Michael David, Director, National Center for Import and Export, Sanitary International Standards Team, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health and Inspection Service Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services (VS), presented an overview of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) guidelines on animal welfare. He gave a short history of OIE, its structure and function, described the process for adopting guidelines and standards, reviewed the 2001-2005 Strategic Plan, and summarized the organization's Animal Welfare Initiatives.

The OIE's mission is to provide international leadership in animal welfare through the development of science-based standards and guidelines, the provision of expert advice, and the promotion of relevant education and research. It aims to accomplish this mission through the promotion of science-based understanding of animal welfare, use of appropriate expertise, consultation with all relevant stakeholders, recognition of regional and cultural dimensions, cooperation with academic and research institutions, and use of communication tools appropriate to all relevant audiences.

In May 2005 at the OIE General Session, the OIE adopted guidelines for the slaughter of animals for human consumption, for the humane killing of animals for disease control purposes, for the land transport of animals, and for the transport of animals by sea. These guidelines may be viewed at www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/ncie/oie/#Terrestrial. USDA is accepting public comment on September 2005 amendments to these guidelines; comments are due in early 2006.

Future initiatives include aquatic animal welfare (transport of fin fish), companion animal welfare relative to urban animal control, wild and zoo animal welfare (harvesting/culling), laboratory animal welfare (housing, use in testing and alternative to animal use), and terrestrial animal welfare (housing/production).

James Reynolds, University of California, Davis, Veterinary Medicine Teaching and Research Center, presented a talk on pain and fractures in the bovine. The important characteristics of bovine long bone fractures include 1) tendency to be comminuted as a result of the severe trauma and stress imposed by bodyweight, 2) a marked distraction or over-riding of the fracture ends as a result of muscle spasm, making reduction and approximation difficult, and 3) marked soft tissue damage.

Dr. Reynolds summarized that cattle are sentient animals, meaning that they have the capacity to suffer pain or distress and/or enjoy pleasure. Cattle probably have similar mechanisms to humans for sensing pain. Fractures are often difficult to diagnose in these large farm animals.

Venaye Reece, Area Emergency Coordinator, USDA-APHIS-VS, described the multi-agency and non-government organization animal emergency responses following the Gulf Coast hurricanes of 2005.

Dr. Reece delineated the various lessons learned from the hurricane response efforts. She opined that as a general rule 80 percent of response problems are due to lack of communication or to miscommunication among responders. She emphasized that it is critical to have a safety officer designation for the protection of responders, including providing for work-rest cycles, hydration, personal protective equipment, immunizations, and stress management.

Dr. Reece underscored the need to work together on shared goals in emergency response, the value of Memoranda of Understanding, the delegation of authority to reduce confusion and promote the best use of resources, and seeking consensus and developing policies before the crisis occurs.

Another key consideration in emergency response is the development of maps depicting spatial relationships. Accurate mapping allows pre-planning, pre-staging, rapid needs assessment, and efficient response and recovery.

Additionally, responders should not overlook management of donations, including where they are needed and by whom. They should palletize supplies and plan for soliciting, receiving, distributing, transporting, and dispersing any leftover supplies.

Albert Kane, Program Manager, USDA-APHIS/Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Wild Horse and Burro Partnership, addressed safeguarding animal health and welfare within the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program. The program between USDA and the U.S. Department of the Interior's BLM operates under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) created in 1999. The partnership offers the BLM a national network of veterinary expertise, offers APHIS an opportunity to be more active in the horse industry, and offers animals' enhanced care and handling.

Dr. Kane pointed out that not all wild horses and burros are under BLM jurisdiction; the U.S. Forest Service has jurisdiction over some, too. All such animals, however, are protected by Federal law. The BLM does not euthanize for population control, does not sell for commercial processing, and does not sell at livestock or horse auctions.

The goal of the wild horse and burro program is to ensure the health and genetic viability of the wild horse and burro herds, and to ensure the health of the public rangelands.

The BLM's mandates are to manage range-lands for multiple uses, including recreation, wildlife, timber, grazing, oil/gas, cultural values, and wild free-roaming horses and burros. Currently, there are about 32,000 wild horses and burros inhabiting 90 million acres, which is about 4,000 head more than desired for range health.

Gathers of these surplus animals are the primary management tool for population control. The role of APHIS at these gathers is to observe and document animal care and handling, facilitate compliance with animal health regulations, consult on emergency care and euthanasia, provide emergency first aid, and conduct research sampling. The primary outlet for excess animals is adoption, including by novices. APHIS educates adopters on responsible horse ownership and obligations under the adoption agreement. The agency conducts compliance checks within the first year; every complaint is investigated.

Adopters can receive title after one year. The title application can be signed by a veterinarian, humane official, or Cooperative Extension person. Once titled, animals are private property and no longer protected by the Wild Horse & Burro Act. Titles are checked at commercial processing plants under cooperative agreements. It is illegal to sell or transfer ownership of an untitled wild horse or burro.

In 2005, Congress changed the Wild Horse & Burro Act to require the BLM to sell horses that are greater than 10 years old or that have been offered for adoption at least three times unsuccessfully. There is a sales contract that specifies the legal obligations of the buyer.

Gail Golab, Assistant Director, Communications Division, American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), delivered an update on AVMA activities. The hot topics for 2005 include foie gras production, pregnant sow housing, and the new AVMA structure for addressing animal welfare concerns.

A multidisciplinary pregnant sow housing task force was established in 2004 with the charge of conducting a thorough and objective review of the scientific evidence relating to the impact on the health and welfare of keeping breeding sows in gestation stalls. The task force concluded that no one system is clearly better than another under all conditions and according to all criteria, and that housing systems cannot be considered in isolation from management, feeding systems, environmental features, sow type, and the ethical frameworks of consumers. The full report published in the November 15, 2005, issue of the *Journal of the AVMA* is available at:

www.avma.org/issues/policy/animal_welfare/pregnant_sow_housing.asp.

Concerning foie gras production, a resolution to oppose production was introduced into the AVMA House of Delegates in July 2004 by petition. AVMA internal review and actions led to a recommendation to the Executive Board to oppose mechanical force-feeding of ducks and geese to produce foie gras, which the Executive Board forwarded as a resolution to the House of Delegates in July 2005. The House voted down the resolution, expressing concern about setting precedent, preferring instead to promote a broad principles approach distinguishing between welfare effects of practice and appropriateness of use. The outcome is that currently the AVMA has no policy on production of foie gras.

The current AVMA animal welfare structure consists of an Animal Welfare Committee, an Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, and an Animal Welfare Governance Task Force advising on the ideal structure to accomplish AVMA animal welfare goals. AVMA has five staff positions assigned to the new Animal Welfare Division, two of which must be occupied by veterinarians.

David Trus, Chairman, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) -Canadian Food Inspection Agency Animal Welfare Coordinating Committee, described the new National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC). The mission of the NFACC is to implement a comprehensive and strategic approach to farm animal care by making the best use of resources and capabilities through improved coordination, adding value to stakeholders by collaborating, communicating and sharing tools, approaches, knowledge and information/experience, and facilitating proactive approaches to livestock care. This came about through a Federal government request for a more systematic approach to addressing animal welfare and better understanding of stakeholder needs. A draft business plan was completed in 2005 approving a three

year funding agreement. The inaugural meeting of the NFACC was held in August 11-12, 2005, during which the Executive Committee was charged with developing recommendations to address outstanding items identified by stakeholders, detailed Terms of Reference (i.e. structure, relationships), broader membership categories, and long- term funding model. The next meeting of the Council, where the recommendations will be received, is scheduled for December 8, 2005.

Tim Cordes, Equine Programs Coordinator, USDA-APHIS-VS, explained the latest developments on the transport of equines to slaughter, including the Sweeney Amendment to the existing statute on equine slaughter transport.

Nora Wineland, USDA-APHIS-VS-Center for Epidemiology and Animal Health (CEAH), reported the latest activity relative to the 2002 Farm Bill language on non-ambulatory livestock data collection. The USDA examined the January 1, 2004, and January 1, 2005, non-ambulatory animal numbers for cattle and posted the results to the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) website. USDA conducted a survey of dairy operations during the spring 2005 to examine animal- handling practices and the causes of non-ambulatory cattle. The results of this survey will be released in early 2006.

A request came to the Committee for a recommendation that USAHA endorse an effort to create a program for "Pet Friendly Shelters" within the American Red Cross shelter system. The committee voted to refer this matter to the Committee on Animal Emergency Management

The Committee discussed at length a proposed resolution calling for USAHA to take a position opposing routine tail docking of cattle on the basis that current scientific literature indicates that routine tail docking provides no benefit to the animal, and that tail docking can lead to distress during fly seasons. The proposed resolution provided that, when medically necessary, amputation of tails must be performed by a licensed veterinarian. The Committee took no action on the motion to adopt this resolution on the basis that a quorum not present. An alternative was proposed by the Chair of seeking a consensus by e-mail vote, an option that was subsequently determined to be in conflict with the Association's Administrative Policy under the Bylaws.