

USAHA / AAVLD Committee on Aquaculture

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Dr. Scott E. LaPatra, Buhl, ID

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The Committee met on November 7, 2005 from 12:30 pm-5:30 pm at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center, Hershey, Pennsylvania. Scott LaPatra, Chair called the meeting to order and each attendee introduced themselves. Twenty three members and guests were in attendance.

Randy MacMillan provided an update from the National Aquaculture Association. Production costs are lower in foreign countries than in the United States (U.S.), which is fueling importation of aquaculture products. Animal welfare issues, some sponsored by animal rights organizations, increase US production costs. Research as to whether or not fish or invertebrates feel pain and to what extent is considered critical. The National Aquaculture Association supports a National Aquatic Animal Health Plan but is concerned about costs. The association is concerned about inaccurate reports from the press regarding wholesomeness of farmed fish, and encourages public education as a countermeasure. The association is planning for the World Aquaculture Association meeting where vaccination of fish will be a major topic. The attraction of commercial vaccine-producing corporations is a major goal. The association is concerned about nuisance aquatic animal species and is trying to get the Fish and Wildlife Service to pay more attention to this area. The association is opposed to the national identification system proposed by Veterinary Services (VS). Association members see no market or fish health advantages.

David Morris provided an update from the National Animal Identification System (NAIS). The objective is to establish an information system to support disease control. Such a system includes the ability to trace animals back to sites of origin and forward to sites of sale in an effort to determine contact animals. Components of the identification program include premise identification, animal identification and tracking. Specific technologies have not been adopted yet and VS is hoping industries will adopt what works best.

The program is voluntary rather than mandatory; no funding exists as yet to support a mandatory program. VS is considering whether the program should be privatized. Premise identification is ongoing, and VS has received \$33 million to support this effort. An aquaculture information group has been formed and has met twice. A primary consideration is will such an identification system be beneficial? Industry representatives are uniformly opposed. Hence, industry representative are concerned how costs can be justified. Aquaculture facilities may not need to use every component of the identification system, and perhaps could model after poultry.

Jill Rolland, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) provided an update from USDA. The infectious salmon anemia program received Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funding, and is now in management mode. Indemnity was provided for years one and two of the control program, but has ended subsequently. Spring viremia of carp was detected in 2003 and 2004. Affected facilities were depopulated and cleaned. Indemnity was provided. Spring viremia of carp has been detected in wild carp in Wisconsin.

John Clifford, USDA-APHIS-VS, provided an update on the National Aquatic Animal Health Plan. The plan is transparent, based on science and seeks stakeholder input. Working groups have been established that include: health professional, certification, pathogens, surveillance, laboratory methodology, species-specific disease programs, state resource agencies, research and education. Next steps are to continue to convene working groups, continue to draft chapters and strive for completion by spring 2007.

Representatives from aquaculture companies stressed that this committee should not endorse a plan that creates economic hardship. Aquaculture companies support VS in theory, but practicality argues against programs that produce no profit.

David Scarfe reported on activities of the Committee on Aquatic Veterinary Medicine from the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). Animal welfare is a large issue for AVMA. How does the AVMA counter false information? Are aquatic invertebrates and fish sentient? PETA has reactivated their effort to fight fishing.

Limited biologic and therapeutic agents available in aquaculture are of concern. Indexing of drugs is now happening and a publication on the use of medicated feeds is under development. Large amounts of pharmaceuticals are on pet store shelves, some illegally. Pamphlets on the judicious use of antimicrobials in aquatic species have been prepared.

The Canadian National Aquatic Animal Health programs are well-funded and rapidly moving, in contrast to similar programs in the US. An online, searchable database is available to locate veterinarians and diagnostic laboratories that support aquaculture.

Scott LaPatra reported on activities of the American Fisheries Society (AFS), Fish Health Section (FHS). The AFS/FHS presented and co-sponsored continuing education (CE) with the AVMA at the Eastern, Western and National Fish Health Workshop meetings in April, June, and July 2005, respectively, to help veterinarians and other aquatic animal health professionals meet their CE requirements. Sessions sponsored included "spring viremia of carp," "applying risk assessment principles to fish health situations," and "current topics in aquatic toxicology." The importance of maintaining partnerships and collaboration with the AVMA and other animal health organizations is critical to the harmonious and efficient advancement of the field. The 5th International Symposium on Aquatic Animal Health will be held on September 2-6, 2006 in San Francisco, California.

Myron Kebus provided an update on the Wisconsin fish health medicine certification program. This is a continuing education program to support and advance aquaculture for veterinarians and is sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, in conjunction with Mississippi State University. Program consists of five modules: introduction, risk management and biosecurity, water quality, fish health inspection and veterinary health assessments. Those involved include fish farmers, veterinarians, state officials and members of USDA.

Two resolutions were submitted and approved last year that were responded to. Resolution 12 entitled “adequate long-term financial support for the state-federal infectious salmon anemia program and indemnification in the northeastern United States” stated concerns over the continued funding of the infectious salmon anemia program. APHIS indicated that funding is ongoing through fiscal year 2006, but Congress has not authorized funds beyond that time. Resolution 14 entitled “risk assessment in aquatic animal health” stated that information gaps existed that would not allow credible risk assessments to be performed and that steps should be taken to fill those gaps. APHIS indicated that at the present time they were not in the position to conduct gap analyses or risk assessments for pathogens of economic significance to the farmed food fish industry.

Cynthia Johnson discussed a VS-funded program on forecasting disease emergence. Factors behind disease emergence include health systems, climate and environment, industry and economics, social and cultural considerations, political issues such as war, and agent/host and vector factors. Aquaculture was selected because it is rapidly growing, has had recent outbreaks in the US, and participants desire to increase their knowledge in aquatic animal medicine. Have developed a disease emergence profile, including a score for emergence potential. Future steps include internal and external reviews and plans for future modeling.

A resolution from the National Aquaculture Association was presented by Randy MacMillan. The resolution read: “The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) supports the domestic aquaculture industry's request to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services, for exemption from the NAIS.” The merits of the resolution were discussed – especially the economic burden such a system may impose on aquaculture producers. The resolution was ultimately tabled.

Kevin Snekvick replaces Tom Baldwin as the committee co-chair for AAVLD.

Attendance

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*Interested in becoming new members