



UNITED STATES ANIMAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

115th Annual Meeting

September 29- October 5, 2011

Buffalo, New York

RESOLUTION NUMBER: 6 APPROVED

SOURCE: USAHA/AAVLD COMMITTEE ON DIAGNOSTIC LABORATORY AND VETERINARY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

SUBJECT MATTER: MAINTAINING A WELL-TRAINED FEDERAL VETERINARY FIELD WORKFORCE AND DEVELOPING A SYSTEM FOR CONTINUALLY IMPROVING ANIMAL HEALTH PROGRAMS AT THE FIELD LEVEL

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Because of budget cutbacks, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is reorganizing the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). APHIS reports that it can no longer operate as it has in the past, as current and projected funding streams will not support the agency's existing operations and organizational structure. APHIS proposes to centralize its infrastructure by streamlining and consolidating its management to ensure the most efficient and effective use of resources provided. APHIS is considering actions that will eliminate programs not specifically funded in the budget; pursuing lower operating cost initiatives; reducing funding of selective cooperative agreements; and restricting hiring, training, travel, and services.

This causes concern that USDA-APHIS-Veterinary Services (VS) field programs will be underfunded or eliminated and the maintenance of well-trained USDA-APHIS employees in field locations will not be able to continue as they have in the past, which will negatively impact USDA-APHIS' role in the protection of animal health. One of the primary reasons that USDA-APHIS-VS has been so successful in the past is that it has a veterinary field force that can effectively and efficiently work with states, industry and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to prevent, control and eliminate animal diseases and pests. While many of the USDA-APHIS-VS field programs have been successfully completed, maintaining animal health is a continual process that requires a well-trained veterinary field workforce. Existing programs need to be monitored, and new diseases and pests will need to be addressed and eliminated. With USDA-APHIS budgets continually being reduced, there may be serious consideration given to reducing and/or eliminating federal animal disease prevention/control activities in the field. USDA-APHIS may become an advisory agency with no field workforce or hands-on experience to prevent, recognize, or respond to an animal or public health emergency.

The United States Animal Health Association should inform Congress of the importance of maintaining a well-trained federal veterinary field workforce to continue protecting



animal health by controlling diseases and pests through comprehensive surveillance and response programs.

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association urges Congress and the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to maintain and improve the current federal veterinary field workforce to protect the nation's animal and public health. Any significant reorganization in the veterinary workforce should be carried out in collaboration with state animal health authorities, animal industries and non-governmental organizations to ensure an adequate animal and public health infrastructure.

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 and appreciates the opportunity to respond.

Congressionally appropriated funding for VS has been reduced each year for the past 3 years, with fiscal year (FY) 2012 representing a 9 percent decrease from FY 2011. However, VS is committed to ensuring that the United States has an effective, committed, and highly skilled veterinary field force within the limitations of this budget reality.

As part of the VS2015 initiative, we studied how VS needs to adapt to meet the demands of animal agriculture. To the extent possible, we have focused budget reductions on program areas that are less central to our core functions of disease exclusion, detection, and response. For example, we have essentially eliminated funding for chronic wasting disease and Johne's disease. We are looking at ways to improve our delivery of services, such as moving from generalized to targeted surveillance. Lastly, we continue to offer relevant, critical training to our workforce.

Despite making programmatic changes, some office closures have already been implemented, and under increasingly tightening budgets, additional changes to operations may be necessary. However, we will strive to ensure that we maintain our core field functions to meet the needs of our stakeholders. As we consider possible changes to the veterinary workforce, we will continue to keep our State and industry partners informed.

To meet the agricultural challenges of the 21st Century, VS provides relevant, critical training to its workforce. The VS Professional Development Staff (PDS) facilitated 29 training courses in FY 2011, and most courses have a hands-on component. In addition, two distance-learning courses were created by PDS staff last year, and eight courses that



had been created by contractors in previous years are now available online to VS employees.

In January 2011, VS established the One Health Coordination Office to contribute toward improving the global health of people, animals, ecosystems, and society. Within VS, One Health is central to our VS2015 initiative. To implement the VS2015 One Health strategy, we will build upon past successes in safeguarding American agriculture, continue monitoring diseases affecting livestock, and ensure that new diseases and pests can be addressed and eliminated. VS will continue to provide U.S. leadership for the animal component of One Health and increase our collaborations among Federal, State, local, and Tribal governments; private industry; and the human health, animal health, and agriculture communities.