

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Chair: James W. Leafstedt, Alcester, SD
Vice Chair: Donald E. Hoenig, Belfast, ME

J Lee Alley, AL; Wilbur B. Amand, PA; Robert G. Ehlenfeldt, WI; Nancy E. Halpern, NJ; William L. Hartmann, MN; Bob R. Hillman, TX; Donald H. Lein, NY; Bret D. Marsh, IN; Lee M. Myers, GA; R. Tracy Rhodes, WY; Richard D. Willer, AZ.

Committee members present – J Lee Alley, AL; Wilbur Amand, PA; Richard Breitmeyer, CA; William Hartmann, MN; Nancy Halpern, NJ; Donald Hoenig, ME; Robert Ehlenfeldt, WI; James Leafstedt, SD; Bret Marsh, IN; Lee Myers, GA; Tracy Rhodes, WY; and Richard Willer, AZ.

American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians (AAVLD) participants – Alex Ardans, CA; Grant Maxie, CAN; Barbara Powers, CO; Gary Osweiler, IA; and Donal O'Toole, WY.

Committee Chair participants – Bruce Akey, NY; Pat Blanchard, CA; Charlie Brown, WI; Kathleen Connell, WA; Kevin Custer, IA; Howard Lehmkuhl, IA and Glenn Plumb, WY.

The Committee on Government Relations, a standing United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) Committee met jointly with AAVLD's Government Relations Committee and USAHA Committee Chairs in Washington, D.C., February 14-16, 2006. During the three-day meeting discussions were held with representatives of the Washington based Animal Agricultural Coalition, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and Veterinary Services (VS), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC).

On Tuesday morning, February 14, 2006, the Committee met with the Animal Agricultural Coalition (AAC). John Adams current chair of the AAC discussed the Presidents FY2007 budget for the Department of Agriculture. He reported that the Presidents Budget does not favor agriculture. Overall the proposed budget cuts agriculture appropriations \$7 billion. Most of these cuts apply to ag commodities.

The AAC has four primary budgetary priorities regarding the 2007 budget. These priorities are disease surveillance, animal health research, animal health infrastructure and food safety. USAHA and AAC need to be working together on advocating forcefully for these identified budget priorities.

Funding for the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) was discussed with the AAC and it's continuing need for additional funding.

The need for additional laboratories in the network and additional funding for support of the NAHLN were reviewed with the AAC. It was agreed that USAHA, AALVD and AAC would work to develop a plan for moving the NAHLN forward including increased funding in the FY08 budget proposals. The group also agreed that these efforts must be discussed with Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Services (CSREES).

AAVLD will be updating the white paper reflecting the funding needs to complete the NAHLN infrastructure (people and equipment) and the annual operating monies. The National Animal Identification System (NAIS), the National Bio and Agro Defense Facility, Plum Island research on vaccines and diagnostics and avian influenza surveillance were additional topics discussed during the meeting with the AAC.

The Committee had no scheduled agency meetings for Wednesday afternoon, February 14, 2006. Individual members of the Committee made visits to Capital Hill for meetings with their home states members of Congress and/or Congressional staffers.

Wednesday morning February 15, the group traveled to Riverdale, Maryland for visits with Veterinary Services, National Animal Health Policy and Program staff. Dr. Jere Dick welcomed the group to VS's Riverdale Headquarters. Dr. Dick introduced several members of his staff and asked each of them to update the USAHA/AAVLD group on their areas of responsibilities. They were also asked to update the group on their responses to USAHA's 2005 Resolutions.

Dr. Tim Cordes, Avian, Swine and Equine Programs staff presented information regarding equine piroplasmiasis and research work to be conducted by USDA, Agricultural Research Service (ARS) on potential treatment for chronic cases. This research was requested in Resolution 11 approved at USAHA's 2005 Annual Meeting. The group expressed a concern to Dr. Cordes about a need to identify horses that test positive for piroplasmiasis. Some of these test positive horses attempt to enter the U.S multiple times.

Dr. Fidelis Hegng, Avian, Swine and Equine Programs Staff updated the group on VS programs for H5N7 avian influenza programs for commercial and live bird market surveillance programs. VS has provisions for 100% indemnity for commercial and NPIP flocks. Commercial flocks are defined as layer flocks with 75,000 birds, meat type chickens that process at least 200,000 birds weekly and meat type turkeys that process 2 million birds annually. Dr. Hegng reported that the ELISA and AGID are the official tests for AI. There are 130 authorized laboratories conducting the official AI test.

Dr. John Korslund, Avian, Swine and Equine Programs Staff responded on two recommendations that the Committee had requested that he respond to. The first recommendation asked VS to alter surveillance strategies for brucellosis and pseudorabies in commercial swine. Dr. Korslund reported that the National

Surveillance Unit was finalizing development of a modified pseudorabies surveillance plan.

The second recommendation requested VS to consult with the National Pseudorabies Control Board to identify states with increased risk for transmission of pseudorabies from feral and transitional swine to commercial swine. VS supports this recommendation and is working with the National Surveillance Unit to provide a risk analysis to identify states with increased risk.

The group was updated on Surveillance and Identification Program (SIP) by Dr. Adam Grow and staff. Premises registration is progressing with approximately 210,000 sites registered, an estimated 10% of the total premises needing registration. The rollout of the 840 AIN tag distribution system has begun with tags already available for the CWD, Scrapie and Michigan TB eradication programs. Web based training sessions have begun for state veterinarians and VS area office staff on the use of the web based tag ordering application. Further rollout of this system to AIN managers is expected in the next several weeks. USDA expects to publish a notice in the Federal Register in early March laying out the technical requirements for privately held animal tracking databases to be certified to interface with the federal metadata portal. This metadata portal will simply keep track of which databases contain movement information for any given AIN, it will not contain the actual tracking data or any other ancillary data from the private tracking database.

Of the current \$33 million funding for development of NAIS, USDA plans to spend approximately 22% on information technology infrastructure development, 62% on cooperative agreements with states and tribes for development projects, 11% on communication efforts with stakeholders and 5% on internal staffing needs to support the program. Some 30 applications were received for the recently announced 3 million competitive grants for special projects related to NAIS development. Those applications are being reviewed and awards will be made as quickly as possible. Because of the evolving nature of the technology for individual animal identification, visual identification is currently the only required form of ID.

The newly revised National Veterinary Accreditation Program should begin implementation soon. Changes from the existing program includes the creation of two levels of accreditation (category 1 and 2), expanded training and continuing education requirements and a requirement for renewal every 3 years. Category 1 accreditation will cover only companion animals (equines are excluded) and will require 4 units of training to be accredited. Category 2 accreditation will cover all species and require 9 units of training. Category 2 also does endorsements for specialized uses such as TB testing and Trichina Certification. The training units will be available via the internet, on CD Rom's or hard copy. Each unit is expected to require approximately one hour to complete. A new reference guide will also be published on a CD Rom.

The SIP Division is responsible for coordinating the implementation phase of surveillance plans developed by the National Surveillance Unit, monitoring the

performance of National Surveillance Databases, implementation and oversight of special projects and development of budgets related to surveillance efforts. New regulation promulgation is typically an 18-24 month project and the unit typically develops projects on a 5 year timescale. Due to the recent resignation of Dr. Valerie Ragan, the designation of National Surveillance Coordinator has now been vested in Dr. Brian McCluskey.

Dr. Larry Granger, Associate Deputy Administrator, USDA-APHIS-VS Emergency Programs provided an overview of the National Veterinary Stockpile (NVS) which is a new requirement under Homeland Security Presidential Directive 9 (HSPD). This directive requires development of the NVS in order to respond within 24 hours of an animal disease emergency. Components of the NVS includes all response equipment, including personal protection, vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostic reagents. Some information, such as number of doses and strains of foot and mouth disease vaccine remains confidential. There has been significant funding for NVS, including an additional \$10 million supplemental appropriation for AI. An intergovernmental Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from various federal agencies is responsible for reviewing threat agents, regional populations at risk, laboratory capacity and makes recommendations to Veterinary Services Management Team (VSMT). The end goal of the NVS is to have all necessary supplies in ready to use “push-packs” stored in strategic sites in various regions of the United States that can be deployed in 24 hours.

Dr. Alan Hogue , USDA-APHIS Animal Care (AC) provided a brief review of “Lessons Learned” from Hurricane Katrina. He noted that AC has a field force of 100 inspectors nation-wide that could be used in future disasters, but that no policy decision has yet been made. In the United States there are more than 96 million households with pets. The review of issues included the need for standards of care for animals in disasters, rescue and relocation of animals, shelter facilities, reunion of pets and owners, transportation, and contingency plans for animal facilities.

Dr. Barbara Martin, USDA-APHIS-VS, National Veterinary Services (NVSL), NAHLN Coordinator gave an update on the NAHLN. She emphasized the importance of the partnership between APHIS-VS, CSREES and AAVLD including the steering committee makeup and function. She reviewed many recent activities including a joint symposium that addressed quality assurance, a “train the trainer” program aimed at leveraging additional laboratory response personnel, a multi-state exercise to enhance surge capacity, development of IT standards and testing of new technologies in partnership with Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and Department of Homeland Security She also discussed the Integrated Consortium of Laboratory Networks.

Dr. Joe Anneli, Emergency Programs, discussed VS's participation in an Interagency Animal Pathogen Disinfectant Issues Committee which is addressing various foreign animal disease threats. He also gave a brief overview of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) document, Federal Food and Agriculture Decontamination and Disposal

Roles. He encouraged state agencies to review their material for use during an outbreak. He also stated that ESF11 has now been updated to include all of agriculture and provides standard operating procedures for coordination during a disaster.

On Thursday Morning, February 16, 2006, the Committee met with the USDA-APHIS Administrator, Dr. Ron DeHaven, and the Deputy Administrator for Veterinary Services, Dr. John Clifford. The group was updated on current topics, including the status of H5N1 avian influenza; bovine spongiform encephalopathy program; Plum Island Animal Disease Center; APHIS FY07 budget; national animal identification system; cattle fever tick program; National Animal Health Laboratory Network; and Veterinary Services personnel.

Dr. DeHaven discussed the global outbreak of H5N1 avian influenza and expressed concern that humans were serving as sentinels in many underdeveloped countries. He emphasized the need to develop an international emergency management system within the United Nations Foreign Agricultural Organization. He expressed the need to establish an international command center utilizing the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) assessment tool to evaluate national capabilities for uniform, comprehensive and objective information for global decisions. Dr. DeHaven indicated that the U.S. had pledged \$334 million to assist in this effort. USDA continues to relay four basic messages about H5N1 to the public: (1) USDA is accustomed to dealing with avian infectious diseases; (2) a sophisticated surveillance system exists in the U.S.; (3) advances are being made to an already strong response system and (4) poultry continues to be safe to eat.

Dr. DeHaven reported on the status of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) program. He indicated that the U.S. had tested 615,000 samples and that USDA would soon announce the transition from an enhanced level of surveillance to a maintenance testing level. USDA is streamlining the rule making process to establish a global standard of trade based upon risk assessments. The risk assessment approach will be published and available for comment and review.

Dr. DeHaven briefly commented on the status of the Plum Island Animal Disease Center and indicated that APHIS was a member of the Plum Island Animal Disease Center Board, in conjunction with the USDA, Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Science and Technology Directorate. He emphasized the agency's commitment to maintain the Plum Island facility in the short term and minimize vulnerability to program work during the transition to a new facility (i.e. the National Bio and Agro Defense Facility). He indicated that \$22 million had been transferred to the ARS budget for necessary modifications, including the expansion of BL3 laboratory space. The number of current USDA employees at Plum Island is less than 100 (about 40 each for ARS and APHIS).

Dr. DeHaven discussed in detail the status of the APHIS budget. He indicated that federal agencies experienced substantial cuts in FY06 and that USDA was pleased

that the cuts were not as significant as they could have been. He reported that APHIS was to receive over \$807 million for FY06 and that supplemental funding for avian influenza surveillance was anticipated, the amount of which was not yet available. A priority for FY06 will be enhancing enforcement and investigative service support for DHS , Customs and Border Protection in investigations and prosecutions of illegal importations of agricultural products. Dr. DeHaven said the Johne's Disease program would experience a \$5 million decrease due to the shifting of resources into the BSE surveillance program, and he expressed concern about the sustainability of achievements in the Johne's Disease program. He indicated the lack of adequate funding for the tuberculosis program and that Commodity Credit Corporation(CCC) funding would likely be sought to support indemnity payments. Dr. DeHaven reported that the APHIS FY07 budget request was \$953,373,790, reflecting a \$146,067,400 increase over the FY06 enacted budget of \$807,306,390. The FY07 request reflects net increases in pest and disease exclusion activities; animal and plant monitoring and surveillance; and scientific and technical services; while pest and disease management activities reflects a slight decrease. Of particular interest was a \$56.73 million increase for highly pathogenic avian influenza activities.

Dr. DeHaven discussed the National Animal Identification System (NAIS). He acknowledged some push-back as a result of the Secretary of Agriculture's announcement to pursue a private database, but was encouraged that the U.S. could have a viable system with this new direction. He explained that the planned meta data repository would be a portal to access data and that capabilities would be available to accommodate all commodity groups. USAHA President Bret Marsh commented about the offer to the Secretary of Agriculture to host a NAIS symposium. Dr. DeHaven responded that the APHIS staff would recommend to the Secretary that USAHA host such a session with limited groups to help move forward the concept of a solitary meta data system. USDA will soon advertise the technical criteria for the database and enter into multiple 12 to 18 month agreements with an unlimited number of partners. He indicated that USDA will set milestones and targets for voluntary participation in the NAIS, but that there were no official discussion of the program becoming mandatory. It was mentioned that the lack of a national mandate for participation in the NAIS may compromise states from moving forward with state requirements.

Dr. DeHaven briefly mentioned the cattle fever tick program. He indicated that the budget for the program had increased the previous two years and that APHIS would request an increase for FY07. The objective is to continue progress in moving the "tick line" further south into Mexico.

Dr. DeHaven reported on the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) and emphasized that it continued to be a priority for USDA. Representatives of AAVLD remarked that they were pleased with the progress of the NAHLN Director and the dedication of much needed personnel. However, the AAVLD expressed concern that funding had appeared to plateau despite the need to fully fund infrastructure in all 50 states. A discussion ensued as to whether the CSREES agency was the best fit for funding the NAHLN infrastructure. Further, concern was expressed about the specific

lack of funding for BSL 3 capability and a respective national plan. Additional concerns were registered about USDA reporting of 49 laboratories in the NAHLN when the majority did not have full capability. AAVLD recommend that the information, particularly the map illustrating the NAHLN laboratories, be redesigned to reflect the true status of each laboratory. Dr. DeHaven reported that the National Veterinary Services Laboratory Director vacancy would be filled soon and that Dr. Randall Levings had been promoted to a scientific leader position, the first within APIHS-VS, under the direction of Associate Deputy Administrator for Animal Emergency Management. He mentioned that NVSL welcomes a visit from AAVLD representatives in an effort to compare accreditation standards. NVSL agreed to pursue AAVLD 17025 standards, which are equal to OIE standards, and remains open to a "joint accreditation" process at some point in time.

In his final remarks, Dr. DeHaven discussed personnel issues within APHIS-VS. He stated that the search for the new Director for the Center for Epidemiology and Animal Health was underway and that Dr. Brian McCluskey had been named interim National Surveillance Coordinator. He mentioned that VS now had three Associated Deputy Administrators and that all programs would be channeled through this new organizational structure. Finally, he mentioned that Dr. John Clifford would re-instate a VS planning staff to plan program priorities and overall strategies, with an initial emphasis on avian influenza and tuberculosis surveillance.

The group entered into miscellaneous discussions, raising several pertinent issues. The group mentioned the need for new tools to eradicate tuberculosis beyond the traditional skin testing methodology and finding of slaughter plant lesions. Dr. DeHaven remarked that it was important that no UM&R or Program Standard be in conflict with the federal code of federal regulations (CFR). The CFR is considered the official rule for regulatory enforcement and may require 18 to 24 months to amend. USDA was encouraged to regularly communicate with USDA-VS field staff, particularly relating to rapidly evolving issues, e.g. emergency management. Dr. Clifford suggested that program activity reports be routinely distributed to the field. Dr. Clifford commended USAHA/AAVLD for a productive meeting and for its effective resolution process. He commented that the USAHA/AAVLD Annual Meeting had continued to expand with concurrent increased participation from VS.

Dr. Tom McGinn, Department of Homeland Security visited with the Committee and reported that Dr. Kimothy Smith is the Chief Veterinary Officer for DHS and leads the veterinary efforts for DHS. He also reported that Dr. Lyle Jackson leads the Infrastructure Partnership Division in the Preparedness Directorate. Formerly this was the Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection.

Three positions have evolved in management of the Plum Island facility. These positions include the Director, Assistant Director for Science and Assistant Director for Operations. DHS is considering how to continue to operate the Plum Island facility especially for the short term of the next 3-5 years. Dr. McGinn asked the committee for comments on how the proposed new National Bio and Agro Defense Facility should

function. Dr. McGinn reported that the office of Domestic Preparedness has \$2.7 billion for distribution to states for state assistance. There may also be other funding possibly available for specific projects. Science and Technology centers, located in California and Texas. Research on foot and mouth disease modeling being worked on at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, using a multiplex PCR approach. Its being tested in NAHLN laboratories for field applicability. This is the same technology being deployed in LRN laboratories.

Dr. McGinn related to the committee some new opportunities for partnership with federal agencies: (1) CDC and Zoonoses. Is there an expanded role for veterinary laboratories with LRN? (2) FBI and Vulnerability issues: FBI is doing vulnerability assessments of 50 facilities. Is there a role for veterinary medicine? Some examples may include bottled water, yogurt, baby food and cattle feed lots. (3) USDA-animal health and infectious diseases. (4) FDA-food safety and chemical threats. (5) DHS has pushed to get multiplex PCR's online in veterinary laboratories and some laboratories have partnered well with other agencies. Dr. McGinn suggested to the committee that there may be opportunities for modeling to predict the diagnostics needed at state and federal facilities. The Office of Science and Technology Policy is interested in modeling as well as decontamination and disposal issues.

Dr. McGinn's overarching message was for groups to stress interacting with funding sources and getting funds for cooperation and collaboration rather than by stand alone approaches. For the national Infrastructure Protection Plan, groups need to be at the table when plans begin to emerge. In addition, stakeholders and cooperating groups need to share among themselves how they are successful.

Dr. Henry Childers, President American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) welcomed to committee to the associations Governmental Relations office, in Washington. Dr. Childers informed the committee that AVMA supports NAHLN and that AVMA is actively seeking funding for its support. Dr. Childers also announced that the AVMA Executive Board during it's 2005 fall meeting endorsed the attendance of AVMA's President at the USAHA/AAVLD Annual Meeting.

Brian Smith, Legislative Assistant, Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges visited with the committee late Friday afternoon February 16, 2006. He discussed the Veterinary Workforce Expansion Act. Sponsored by Senator Wayne Allard . The Senate bill is S914 and in the house its HR 2206. Current language of the bill calls for \$800 million over a five year period.

Main focus of this legislation is getting infrastructure to veterinary colleges. Competitive grant process must demonstrate how colleges will actually increase number of veterinarians in public practice.

AAVLD agreed to conduct a survey to demonstrate shortages of veterinary diagnosticians. This information would also identify the number of vacant positions for diagnosticians in diagnostic laboratories. March 14, 2006 will be Veterinary Education

Day on Capital Hill. Deans of the Veterinary Schools and Veterinary Science Departments will be visiting Capital Hill to support the Veterinary Workforce Expansion Act. Senator Allard will be speaking to the group.

The primary selling points for the Act is that today veterinary schools and colleges are at capacity and that this nation has a critical need for more public practice veterinarians.