

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Chairman: Dr. Steven L. Halstead, Lansing, MI

Dr. Richard E. Breitmeyer, CA; Dr. Stephen K. Crawford, NH; Dr. Dave E. Fly, NM; Dr. Tony M. Forshey, OH; Dr. William L. Hartmann, MN; Dr. Guy Hohenhaus, MD; Dr. Donald E. Hoenig, ME; Mr. James W. Leafstedt, SD; David T. Marshall, NC; Dr. David L. Meeker, VA; Mr. Bill Sauble, NM; Dr. John R. Scamahorn, IN; Mr. Brian T. Smith, DC; Dr. Robert C. Stout, KY.

AAVLD Participants included: Bruce Akey, NY; Gary Anderson, KS; Craig Carter, KY; Sharon Hietala, CA; Steve Hooser, IN; Barbara Powers, CO; David Steffen, NE.

Committee representatives included: Joseph Corn, GA; Christine Hoang, IL; Francois Elvinger, VA; Greg Rosales, AL

The Committee on Government Relations met on March 10-11 in Washington D.C. Meetings began in the Whitten Building, with Acting Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Administrator Kevin Shea and Veterinary Services Deputy Administrator, Dr. John Clifford.

Shea addressed the trajectory on USDA appointments for the Committee. Secretary Vilsack has appointed his chief of staff and deputy chief of staff. Nomination for Deputy Secretary has been made. He anticipates that the Under Secretary positions should be determined in the next two to three months. The APHIS Administrator has historically been a career position, and at this point Cindy Smith will likely continue in that position.

Shea outlined the Secretary's priorities for the administration, which include:

1. Safe, nutritious food supply
2. Sustainable agriculture policy
3. Climate change adaptation leader
4. Technology for USDA
5. Support 21st Century rural community
6. Quick implementation of the Farm Bill

He indicated that currently there is does not exist great detail on direction of national policy, awaiting appointment of the respective under secretaries.

Shea discussed the National Animal Identification System (NAIS), indicating that the Secretary is revisiting the program, though no decisions have been made as to its direction. He noted that Rep. Collin Peterson is pressing for a mandatory program, and a House Agriculture Subcommittee will hold a meeting on March 11, where Dr. Clifford will testify on the program's effectiveness. Regarding mandatory premises identification, the proposed rule has not driven in overall policy, though the rule expected to prevail. He also noted that on the relation between food safety and NAIS, there is no formal intent, but evidence can indicate that NAIS has potential to support food safety.

Effectively there is an anticipated flat budget for APHIS and most likely probably other agencies for the coming fiscal year. Shea responded to a question of the status of availability of Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funds by saying there is no decision. Though there has been some tightening in recent years, the true test will be the next emergency. In past benefit to industry was the primary consideration. It is likely that job protection may be a significant consideration in use of CCC funds.

The Committee asked Shea as to the involvement of the Secretary regarding animal care. Though there is not much direction to date, the Secretary is sensitive to welfare. Dr. Clifford added that VS is considering adding a welfare specialist, and VS would likely take lead for USDA on farm animal care. Many questions still revolve around this issue.

The issue of a single food safety agency was discussed. The Secretary is interested in the issue, but its final status is unclear.

Shea was asked about the opportunity to move NAHLN forward, regarding a letter sent on behalf of AAVLD. He encouraged continued communication with the Secretary's office, and the goal of increasing jobs in the U.S. as a point to consider. AAVLD representatives also expressed interest in the 2015 initiative. Committees are being formed, with the intention to have broad inclusions.

The Committee continued discussions with Dr. John Clifford, beginning with discussion on the 2009 budget. The current omnibus bill provides \$21 million for animal identification; a slight decrease for Avian Influenza; slight increase for Brucellosis, Chronic Wasting Disease and emergency management; and a significant increase for Cattle Fever Ticks. As the bill stands there would be a \$23 million shortfall for Veterinary Services. This will probably mean a decrease in state cooperative agreements. Also the 2009 NAHMS goat study has been cancelled. Finally, Veterinary Services staff will probably be reduced to adjust to the reduced budget.

He discussed the current status of the Bovine Tuberculosis program. Since the listening sessions, VS staff has been having internal discussions concerning long range planning for the program. He expressed that they want to get it right and that will probably takes some time and require the usual rule making process that could take 2 to 3 years. A USAHA symposium on Bovine Tuberculosis was discussed as a method of expediting changes to the program. The need for a better test for tuberculosis remains a high priority. Because of this VS will fund the creation of a serum bank over the next year for use in the development of tests for tuberculosis.

Clifford suggested that a much faster track is being considered for the bovine brucellosis Eradication program. Consideration is being made to regionalize the Greater Yellowstone Area and declare the rest of the United States Brucellosis free. A priority for the program remains the development of an effective vaccine for use in elk.

VS has heard feedback on its 2015 initiative, and there is not a change in the vision, but feedback has impacted the thought process. VS at this time does not see long term eradication programs for VS or states as has existed historically. Rather, shorter term programs 3-5 years may be the direction, with industry taking a larger role in the time before that. It also provides a new opportunity to evaluate Cooperative Agreements. States will continue to need support– a single line item directive to states could provide more stability from year to year for animal health, with a shift to more of a species-specific line items. APHIS has to lead this issue, and support would still be needed from senior officials and Congress. Clifford indicated that Johne's disease would be a good example of this model, and an example of scrapie eradication would be completed before the transition.

Clifford indicated he would testify before a House Agriculture Subcommittee on the effectiveness of NAIS. Discussion followed on data transfer from states to national, and concerns on accuracy and duplication of data entry. The emphasis so far has been to build system, not maintenance; there is a need to continue work on that part of it.

The meeting continued with Mr. John Picanso, VS chief information officer, Drs. Aaron Scott, and Sarah Tomlinson National Surveillance Unit in addition to Dr. Clifford.

Picanso indicated that in March 2008, the VS information technology (IT) Board met and found that VS needed a framework for IT.

IT has prepared a Status of Framework document that includes five execution initiatives:

1. Data acquisition and exchange
2. Security: Will increase.
3. Software services and delivery
4. Governance
5. Modernizing legacy

Many of the initiatives tie into the VS 2015 vision. The Committee stressed the importance of input from the States and laboratories in the developmental process. Currently VS is drafting a national implementation plan for review.

Scott, by teleconference, discussed surveillance fundamentals: smarter, cost efficiency, for specific information. He highlighted the following key points:

- More tools are now available
- Efficient funding allocation-most measure effectiveness
- Premises animal ID-will help in planning and efficiency
- More collaboration with public health
- Changes in long-standing surveillance (brucellosis and tuberculosis)
- More comprehensive, integrative, dynamic surveillance across species
- Targeted towards streams of information

The Committee also discussed disease reporting confidentiality as an important factor being dealt with in regards to surveillance. Integration of state data into VS system will play a key role.

Clifford discussed the contagious equine metritis (CEM) situation, noting that VS does not currently have any direct equine disease program funding. VS will work with stakeholders on levels of resources needed at the local level, and work to determine a threshold for related support.

VS will also be seeking input from stakeholders on bluetongue virus (BTV) and other vector borne diseases as it becomes a more prominent issue in the U.S. Surveillance resources currently are not available for BTV.

Dr. Cyril Gay, Agriculture Research Service (ARS) provided an update of programs to the Committee, sending apologies from Drs. Caird Rexroad and Steve Kappes for being unable to attend. Dr. Gay addressed the budget outlook for 2009. He cited not much of an increase with FY09 Omnibus bill. He expressed his appreciation of USAHA Resolutions in support of ARS programs. Animal Health funding will be approximately \$60 million, however no funding was included in the stimulus bill.

Dr. Gay admits ARS not on cutting edge of technology in areas of diagnostics/research and collaboration, when looking at models of other countries. ARS is working to capitalize on genomics activity, and working to create vaccines for production purposes that are specifically designed for disease eradication. ARS is also conducting GAP analysis on what is needed in terms of agriculture research and what their priorities will be. There is a need to strengthen partnerships with academia, industry, and other government entities. The Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine is an example of an excellent partnership between ARS and universities.

Regarding the National Bio- and Agro-defense Facility (NBAF), DHS is working on design. ARS is planning to focus on seven disease categories and their vectors. NBAF should provide more capacity to train scientists for when new diseases emerge. ARS will look to partner with industry (pharmaceuticals and biologics) to develop countermeasures once new discoveries come online. ARS wants feedback on what priorities the agency should focus on.

The Committee met with representatives of the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Services (CSREES), including Dr. Muquarrab Qureshi, Dr. Mark Robinson and Dr. Gary Sherman.

They discussed the transition to the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) by October 1, 2009. There will be structural changes, but mostly administrative changes and the Farm Bill funding will remain intact. NIFA is authorized for up to \$700 million for programs. The Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) administrator and Chief Scientist will be appointed directly by the President. USAHA can provide input on these appointments to the White House. Agriculture research funding went to zero in the stimulus bill, though funding was considered.

Dr. Sherman indicated that NVMSA will become National Veterinary Medical Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP). CSREES had 270 days from when the Farm Bill was signed to promulgate regulations for implementation, which should be expected within a week. There will be an interim final rule with a 60 day comment period and 30 days after that for final implementation. VMLRP received \$2.95 million in the omnibus spending bill and have \$1.8 million currently for a total of nearly \$5 million for the program. It will include vet lab diagnosticians, pathologists, etc, but will focus on food animal veterinarians. Additionally, FARAD received \$806,000 in the omnibus bill.

Dr. Beth Lautner, National Veterinary Services Laboratories and Barbara Martin, National Animal Health Laboratory Network, joined the discussion with CSREES to review the direction of the NAHLN. Significant cooperation between NVSL and CSREES has taken place since the 2008 Annual Meeting in Greensboro, as the two agencies have been working jointly on the vision and mission.

The Committee continued discussion with Lautner and Martin. Regarding the NAHLN Survey from 2007-2008, results indicated it was necessary to clarify roles of APHIS and CSREES, and there is a need for a more active role of deputy administrator.

The NAHLN Coordinating Council will include 13 state partners, made up of nine laboratory directors and four state animal health officials, as well as 9 USDA participants. The goal of the council is to have good balance and geographic, species, etc., representation. A framework has been drafted for the Coordinating Council, which includes APHIS, CSREES, and laboratories. Key components include:

- Responsibilities, Roles and Veterinary Services Strategy

- review and write goals
- determine what makes a NAHLN lab
- call for nominees – balance geography and activity
- establish co-chairs
- determine industry partners/committees, such as Animal Ag Coalition

Barb Powers indicated that the mission and vision edits have been completed.

Proficiency Tests and other day-to-day activities will be led by NVSL, while CSREES will provide support such as strategic and coordination planning. True teamwork is the goal of the framework.

A technical working group is active and working on method validation, continual assessment, etc. The perception is that the modeling which is used to determine what labs to select for testing regional diseases is very good, for example, what was done for pseudorabies, brucellosis, and classical swine fever.

Don Hoenig commented that it may make good sense to think of surveillance more broadly than a test-specific focus – possibly broad based evaluations such as necropsy.

A viable opportunity likely exists for NAHLN labs to partner with FERN, where they can leverage resources where DHS may be able to fund equipment needs.

Dr. Martin highlighted key successes of NAHLN:

- 580.4 – good example was the MCF situation in Washington
- NAHLN Checklist – outlining lab responsibilities: QA implementation, 4 labs did not respond, all labs will eventually be accredited
- Scenario testing – AI was a good example with >700 people attending across the network – found marked differences among States – this exercise looked at what goes on in the lab North Carolina and Indiana provided good examples
- 4. Surveillance Pilots: SIV, PRV, and FMD

The GRC met next with with Mr. Bryce Quick, Deputy Administrator with FSIS. Mr. Quick represented Administrator Alfred Almanza, who was unable to attend due to a late scheduling conflict. Mr. Quick addressed five items on the GRC agenda:

- FSIS awaits publishing (probably within the next week or so) a Final Rule addressing non-ambulatory cattle at inspected plants, which will expand current regulations and prohibit the inspection and passing for human consumption cattle that become non-ambulatory after the antemortem inspection process. FSIS feels that this rule will enhance consumer confidence, has the support of the agency, and does not expect any delay or objection from the current administration.
- Interstate shipping of state inspected meat products. Provisions to allow interstate shipping of meat products are included in the current Farm Bill, which charge the agency with publishing a Final Rule within 18 months. The provisions would allow movement of state product if the plants met provisions that were “identical to” federal requirements, rather than the current “equal to” language. I would also require inspection supervision by federal FSIS personnel. The rule is quite restrictive and does not meet all of the needs of the state inspection lobbying efforts, but has the approval of NASDA and is a compromise on the issue.
- Single food inspection agency- Secretary Vilsack supports the concept, but early discussions do not appear to include FSIS. The previous administration attempted to administer “risk based inspection” but the plants and the consuming public were not ready for that concept. FSIS has positioned themselves for future regulatory structure changes through their development of a performance based inspection protocol, and their activities involve actual inspection authority, rather than the oversight authority of FDA which actually involves auditing of the process rather than direct on sight routine inspection.
- FSIS is a supporter of any veterinary workforce development legislation as they have struggled for years to attract veterinarians for employment with their agency.
- FSIS has met the majority of their pathogen reduction goals, despite a few blips in *e. coli* numbers that they are still assessing.

The Committee adjourned its meetings for the day. The meetings resumed on Wednesday, March 11 at the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Government Relations Division Office.

Meetings began with AVMA, represented by Drs. Ron DeHaven, Mark Lustchaunig, Angela Demaree and Christine Hoang, and the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) represented by Dr. Michael Chaddock and Mr. Brian Smith. Dr. DeHaven began discussion by informing the group of the omnibus spending package for fiscal year 2009, that included 806,000 for the Food Animal Residue Avoidance Databank, and \$2.95 million for the National Veterinary Medical Services Act.

DeHaven stated that AVMA will support a mandatory animal ID system, and he would be testifying to Congress later in the day. He highlighted five of AVMA's priorities for the 111th Congress, which include: animal care; veterinary workforce development; veterinary education including the North American Veterinary Medical Education Consortium; economic viability; and other veterinarian advocacy. He highlighted the importance of the antibiotic resistance issue, noting that veterinary oversight of all feed with antibiotics would add to the demands of current veterinarians, though AVMA will explore areas to provide oversight in a manageable way.

Dr. Lustchaunig discussed the AVMA legislative agenda, which is still in development, but includes areas of healthcare reform as it affects practicing veterinarians, animal welfare legislation, food safety, environmental regulations, and veterinary accreditation. He addressed the process for requesting funding, noting that inclusion in the President's Budget is preferable, but they do also work closely with the appropriations process in Congress.

AVMA and AAVMC will be working closely on workforce issues, including the federal salary level increase. He indicated that this could translate to the state level if progress is made.

AVMA also has an interest in finding an appropriate bill to authorize funding for the NAHLN.

Dr. Mike Chaddock welcomed the opportunity to visit with the group. Brian Smith reviewed the AAVMC legislative agenda, noting their focus is exclusively on veterinary schools' interests. Smith noted that education, research and outreach is their primary focus, including: Veterinary Public Health Workforce Expansion Act and funding authorization. A key part of this issue is to look at unique ways to increase enrollment, not exclusively focused on new facilities. AAVMC is also aware of the issues related with advanced training, specifically for laboratories. They feel that members of Congress are making progress in their understanding of the veterinary workforce needs.

Dr. Chaddock explained the AAVMC's leadership on the North American Veterinary Medical Education Consortium. They have produced a foresight report, and will be evaluating input over the next few months. The vision of the consortium is to: to address the societal needs of veterinarians of the next 25 years; evaluate skill sets needed; and develop models to deliver these. Two key issues are accreditation and licensure for the future. Chaddock emphasized the need for broad-based input, and extended invitations to any organizations interested in participating and supporting the consortium.

Dr. Mike Chaddock welcomed the opportunity to visit with the group. He stated that AAVMC can only have limited lobbying efforts because of its tax status, thus many efforts focus on research, education.

Brian Smith reviewed the AAVMC legislative agenda. Vet Workforce Expansion Act passed last year as part of a larger bill giving responsibility to the Department of Health and Human Services, and it only included minor renovations instead of outright new construction allowed. There is no real progress on implementation of the law yet, though the House Energy and Commerce Committee is interested in pursuing this. AAVMC wants a comprehensive approach to address not just construction but also expanding enrollment in schools, assistance to recruiting faculty, and fellowships. A recent GAO report on federal veterinary workforce has stimulated interest throughout Congress. There is a need grassroots advocacy, and AAVMC is encouraging members to talk to the local Congress person(s), including topics such as training for diagnosticians. AAVLD can provide workforce survey results for labs for use in discussions. Congressman Curt Schrader (D-Oregon) is currently the only veterinarian in Congress and will likely be a leader on veterinary issues.

Dr. Chaddock explained the AAVMC's leadership on the North American Veterinary Medical Education Consortium, which is a follow up to the Foresight Report (AAVMC publication). They envision a 12-18 month process of identifying societal needs for the veterinary profession, determine entry-level skills/knowledge for new vets, and evaluate what are the different models for delivering the needed education (land grant institutions, distributed model, etc.). The Consortium will also address how accreditation and licensure fits into veterinary education in the future. AAVMC will be the leader, convener and facilitator for this effort but will not dictate outcome. There is also international interest. A written, non-prescriptive plan will be the final product, meant to serve as a planning guide for vet schools

in the future. AAVMC is currently in a fund raising mode right now but hope to kick off this process in the next two weeks. This process is meant to be all inclusive.

The Committee held its next session with a joint meeting of the Animal Agriculture Coalition (AAC). Ms. Kerry Thompson, Chair of AAC and representing the American Horse Council, was accompanied by representatives of the American Sheep Industry Association, National Pork Producers Council, National Milk Producers Federation, Biotechnology Industry Organization, National Association of Federal Veterinarians, and National Aquaculture Association. National Renderers Association and AVMA were represented on the Government Relations Committee.

Kerry Thompson presented AAC priorities for FY2010, broken down by agencies within USDA and FDA.

- AAC is particularly concerned about the significant reductions in animal research funding resulting in the loss of critical research infrastructure and long-term research programs at USDA's Agriculture Research Services (ARS) which puts the economic competitiveness and viability of the animal agriculture sector at risk. AAC recommends and strongly supports funding increases for ARS to fulfill its mission, with planned emphasis on animal genomics, food safety and animal protection, as well as increased emphasis on improving animal productivity and efficiency, including utilization of alternative by-products and waste management and treatment.

John Adams pointed out that there was new emphasis on competitive funding and AAC encourages greater integration of ARS efforts with the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES).

- AAC strongly supports the concept and creation of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) with the transfer of all authorities of the CSREES into the new agency by October 1, 2009. AAC requests that full funding to the authorized level of \$700 million for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) be achieved within 5 years. Areas of research that AAC supports include - reproduction, genomics, animal health, nutrition, quantitative genetics, physiology; - animal productivity and efficiency; - animal wellbeing and assessment of wellbeing; - nutrient excretion and waste management and treatment [AAC opposes removal / reductions of funding for Integrated Water Quality programs (\$14.5 million) and Sustainable Agriculture Extension (\$1 million)]. AAC furthermore requests the development of tools for application of research outcomes and urges support for the development of disease outbreak and spread models by DHS. AAC also requests support of Graduate Fellowship Grants (\$4.5 million) and Institution Challenge Grants (\$6.5 million), and a \$5 million appropriation for the National Veterinary Medical Services Act (NVMSA).

AAC representatives and the Committee expressed a sense of urgency in restoring and allocating funds for agricultural research and science based agriculture. The return on investment of animal agricultural research is very high and developing a plan for pushing and increasing animal agricultural research is imperative. Rich Breitmeyer suggested that AAC produce one-pagers to keep USAHA and State Veterinarians informed on action items that the AAC is working on and provide regular updates to help generate broader support.

- Regarding the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) budget, AAC's top priority is the request for an \$ 18.4 million increase over the \$ 13.6 million FY 08 funding for APHIS / Veterinary Services (VS) initiatives for the National Animal Health Emergency Management System (NAHEMS). AAC supports a strong VS and Wildlife Services (WS) infrastructure to support disease control and eradication programs, disease surveillance and monitoring, including detection of emerging diseases, emergency control and response, and animal protection operations at the wildlife / domestic animal interface. Some of those programs are severely underfunded and leave animal populations at risk. AAC further requests funding (\$ 10 million) to support field validation of new detection technologies and enhance the Veterinary Stockpile, funding (\$ 10 million) to support the creation of a National Animal Health Emergency Management and Infrastructure Development Center and supports the creation of a system that allows identification of premises and animals for adequate trace back capability in the time of disease or other emergency.

The AAC requests a \$ 19 million increase to \$ 155 million funding for the Animal Health Monitoring and Surveillance (AHMS) program, assuring regional surge capacity for laboratory diagnostics in major animal health emergency events, enhanced surveillance and further National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) infrastructure development in coordination with CSREES. The 12 core laboratories receive less than 6%, and the remaining 46 NAHLN laboratories 1% or less to operate their operations

(average per State is \$ 5.2 million), and federal funding of the NAHLN is grossly insufficient and inappropriate for adequate preparedness in case of an animal health emergency. AAC further requests enhancement of the National Surveillance Unit to ensure its capability in collecting, analyzing and disseminating domestic and foreign animal disease surveillance output in both the public and private sectors. AAC finally requests adequate funding for the Center of Veterinary Biologics which currently is at about 50-60 % of its authorized staffing levels.

John Adams asked State Veterinarians specifically about the value of pushing for funding of eradication programs versus control and prevention programs. Don Hoenig replied that some new initiatives and potential moves based on VS 2015 would redirect activities towards prevention instead of eradication with a move away from federal staff towards control and activities by stakeholders in industry and States. The need for smarter spending of federal dollars is advocated, although USDA lacks flexibility because of funding mechanisms. TB control and eradication could be viewed as a model in the context of VS 2015 – in California \$16 million were spent to date on remaining infected herds which is not sustainable, while National Milk approached ARS for TB research support ~ 5 years ago with no increased funding for research into sustainable control measures. State Veterinarians, as a group, are 'cautiously optimistic' to see necessary changes occur and look forward to details in VS 2015 and elsewhere as to progress and changes away from the status quo.

AAC also indicated reinstating support for the Livestock Market Information Center. They will continue to support long-term FARAD funding in the amount of \$2.5 million per year.

Continuity of business planning (COBP) is also a priority for the AAC, through the USDA Office of Homeland Security. Key issues addressed with this include: emergency management; a need for system-wide inclusion; bringing together public and private sectors on regional basis; and working with DHS on diseases crossing state lines and thus a regional emphasis. A number of tools are currently in place, including the Emergency Management Councils. The threat of FMD demonstrates the need for planning now. The group discussed various aspects of DHS funding, including challenges for the agriculture sector and the need for the ability to use funding for positions. States could benefit from involvement of USDA, and the possibility of an MOU was discussed. It was also suggested that the National Animal Emergency Task Force be re-implemented to get more recognition for agriculture funding and help to expedite planning processes for COBP. It was noted that the regional exercises for emergencies have been productive.

AAC also shared its support for FDA-CVM, specifically the Animal Drug User Fee Act to be funded at a level of \$15.262 million.

The Coalition noted that the details of the President's budget for FY 2010 have not yet been released, and from that a more detailed list of funding requests can be shared. For FY 2011, budget increases are not anticipated.

The Committee discussed the trend of animal care and welfare legislation. The group discussed the various state legislative initiatives, many driven by anti-animal agriculture organizations. The role of OIE in animal welfare is becoming increasing, and though the U.S. agriculture industry is providing input, it is only one of the 167 member countries, and impact may be minimal. USDA's role in welfare regulations is an important point, though much of the state legislation needs to be addressed by the industry. The group discussed various programs in place throughout the industry, but emphasized the need for continued coordination among the commodity and agriculture organizations to develop a strong, unified voice.

Ms. Jessica Fantinato, USDA Office of Homeland Security, provided an update on the Government Coordinating Council. The Obama Administration considers the Homeland Security measures for the Food and Agriculture Sector a priority. All of the previous "Presidential Directives" have been renamed by the title; i.e., the National Infrastructure Protection Plan (NIPP) and are still a priority to further develop the critical infrastructure protection plan. The current administration is emphasizing the need for the federal government to partner with states, localities and the private sector to leverage its expertise and its assets, and listen to their concerns. The newly revised NIPP has been released and identifies the Nation's critical infrastructure and key resources. Each section has to develop a Sector Specific Plan and an annual report describing progress in implementation of the plan. The Agriculture and Food Sector Specific Plan was originally written in 2006 and in 2008, an update document was released. Currently, a revision is underway to make the plan more relevant to sector partners. Changes will include combining

two separate plans of USDA and FDA into one plan, increased information on the sector and its complexities and providing resources for infrastructure protection.

The Food and Agriculture Sector has a Government Coordinating Council (GCC) and a Sector Coordinator Council (SCC). The GCC has over 19 agencies or organizations represented, including NASAHO and AAVLD. The SCC represents producers. The GCC has monthly conference calls, quarterly face-to-face meetings, and annual tabletop exercises. The most recent tabletop exercise revealed strengths in interagency coordination, incident command structure, and public information. Areas identified for improvement included planning, disposal and economic considerations. The next tabletop exercise will be in FEMA region 7.

Further work is progressing to identify Critical Infrastructure and Key Resources (CIKP). The Food and Agriculture Criticality Assessment Tool (FASCAT) has been developed to assist in identifying these resources and is available at <http://www.ncfpd.uma.edu>. This is aimed to assist states in identifying the key food and agriculture resources and provide more uniformity across the sectors. The FASCAT can be used to develop the sector and state lists (but FASCAT use is not required). The FASCAT has been released to the State Homeland Security Advisors, as well as State Veterinarians and GCC members. Webinars have been provided and some states are designated as Pilot states and have had workshops. The data call is due April 1. The process will be refined even more next year, and hopefully, more resources will be available for assistance.

2008 Sector goals included: FASCAT implementation, one tabletop exercise, improving sector communications and revision of the Sector Specific Plan. Action items also included increasing participation of sector members at the state and local level, and review of guidance language for allocation of DHS grant funds.

2009 Sector goals also include a continuance of 2008 goals, increasing more active sector membership participation, and creating more effective and efficient information sharing process. In addition, a 3-year tabletop exercise schedule will be developed for the yearly exercises.

Dr. William Flynn, Senior Policy Analyst for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM) next addressed the Committee. The Government Relations Committee met with Dr. William Flynn, Senior Advisor for Science Policy, Center for Veterinary Medicine, FDA. Several members of the Committee expressed interest in exploring opportunities for NAHLN Laboratories to work more closely with FDA, especially in the areas of toxicology and food microbiology. Continuing efforts will be made in the areas of the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN) and FDA's new program, Pet Net, which needs laboratory support for problems with pet food and animal feed.

The FDA enhanced feed rule was also discussed. Dr. Flynn anticipated that the Administration may delay the April 27, 2009 implementation date. Many members expressed concerns regarding carcass disposal; many rendering companies will discontinue services or increase charges significantly. Veterinary diagnostic laboratories will also face much increased costs for disposal, requiring additional charges to clients, which could lead to decreased submissions. Dr. Flynn recognized that the rule was written before the BSE surveillance was completed that demonstrated the extremely low risk of BSE in the U.S.

Antibiotic resistance issues were also discussed. It is important to protect the ability for veterinarians to use antimicrobial drugs to treat, control and prevent disease. Dr. Flynn noted that CVM must be more proactive and work closely with stakeholders, as Congress is very interested in reviewing this issue.

The Committee concluded its meeting with a session with USDA-APHIS-VS, Emergency Management and Diagnostic Programs, represented by Drs. Jose Diez and Mark Teachman, and Department of Homeland Security, Office of Health Affairs represented by Drs. Tom McGinn and Doug Meckes.

Dr. Diez reported that, following the collaboration leading up to the Joint Scientific Session in Greensboro, DHS and USDA have continued to meet jointly every two weeks. They distributed hundreds of the FAD Preparation CD following the Greensboro meeting. Dr. Diez also stated that he now supervises NVSL, CVB, the move to the new Ames facility and the NBAF transition.

A national level exercise is planned for 2010 but funding will be a challenge. Dr. Teachman said that VS is pursuing efforts to plug into the FEMA five year exercise planning process.

Dr. McGinn was asked a question about USAHA Resolutions 2 and 35 and reports that while formal responses are being reviewed at the Department level, DHS has put together a grants mentoring tool for

states to pair up with others states who have been successful in receiving DHS funds in the past. The need still exists to fund one person per state for emergency management and homeland security. Dr. McGinn also suggested procuring a speaker for the fall meeting in San Diego who could address the progress made by Customs and Border Protection on interdicting agricultural contraband. Dr. McGinn also mentioned that the fire fighting community has refined their approach to obtaining funding over the years by linking the lack of capacity and resources directly to consequences. DHS is looking at ways to model this approach. FAS/CAT is the avenue for agriculture in this process which will enable us to compete more effectively for the 80:20 funds.