

Advancing Animal Disease Traceability (ADT) Road Map for US Virgin Islands

A Three-Year Plan

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Date: 9/22/2022

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Virgin Islands is a small US Territory located in the eastern Caribbean. It is made up of three islands St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas. St. Croix is a rural area of rolling hills with a long history of agriculture. St. Thomas and St. John have steep terrain and an economy based on tourism.

The population of the Virgin Islands is widely diverse with people from throughout the Caribbean, the United States mainland as well Europe and the Middle East. The Territory is a border of the United States.

The Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture (VIDA) is mandated to protect the public health and food supply by providing veterinary services to livestock, regulating imported and exported animals and educating farmers. The small division of Veterinary Services (VIDA VS) has oversight on livestock, horses, and poultry health and welfare as well as issues involving companion animals.

These small islands include intricate networks of farmers and animal owners who are connected by family and geography. Local knowledge of farms and animal owners and stakeholders is an integral part of our day's work. The Animal Disease Traceability program has greatly assisted with the building and maintenance of a livestock and farmer database through supportive funding and expert personnel from USDA. VIDA VS is the primary supplier and implementor of animal identification and registration in the Territory.

Federal animal health programs have supplied much of the cost of RFID tags and microchips. Cost of visual tags is largely covered by VIDA budget.

All livestock and horses entering or leaving the island Territory of the USVI are regulated by VIDA. This includes RFID tagging, microchipping and import permits.

II. CURRENT TRACEABILITY SITUATION

2.1 Who are we?

VIDA VS provides veterinary services to all farmers, regulates import/exports and responds to stray animal reports. We examine over 1,000 animals every month including pigs, sheep, goats, cattle, horses, and poultry. Regular farm visits are scheduled daily and include tagging, registration of animals and farms, tick spraying services and veterinary medical services. We also implement federal animal health programs such

as avian health surveillance, traceability, and recently African Swine Fever Surveillance and Tropical Bont Tick Eradication with support from USDA.

2.2 Where are we now?

VIDA educates farmers and horse owners and poultry owners on animal health and management issues. We work with the ubiquitous game bird populations to educate, to improve biosecurity and to register all poultry premises.

Farm premises information is held in the Access database and is available 24/7 by authorized VIDA VS staff.

VIDA VS currently serves nearly 480 animal owners and premises. 85% of these farm premises have been identified and registered. The information collected includes owner contact information, species on the premises, tagged animals, geophysical coordinates, and physical location. This information is continually being collected by VIDA VS and submitted to EMRS specialist when applicable.

With the discovery of Bont Tick on a farm in April 2021, VIDA has sought support from USDA in performing surveillance on the 55 premises and 2,000 livestock and horses following a treatment plan with various modalities.

With the diagnosis of African Swine Fever in the Dominican Republic and Haiti in August 2021, USVI has been designated a Protection Zone. This designation has created a robust swine farm surveillance program of all 33 swine premises throughout the Territory with major support from USDA.

These two surveillance programs have generated much appreciated support in updating and improving USVI farm premises data in EMRS and maintaining current tagging and registration of animals and premises.

Feed shops, veterinarians, abattoirs, racetracks, and animal exhibit areas have all been identified. There are no livestock markets in the Virgin Islands.

The avian health surveillance program also ensures compliance with enhancing traceability each year. At each surveillance visit, premises information is updated. Most of the poultry premises are backyard gamebirds.

VIDA VS is responsible for tagging and registration and is the only official tagging station in the USVI. Owners do not tag their own animals generally and there are no active livestock groups or markets in the territory who

provide this service. No one has requested to become an official tagging station. Local veterinarians are not involved with livestock.

2.3 Strengths and Weaknesses

VIDA VS is dependent on and benefits from its staff who have personal and trusting relationships with the farmers and horse owners and poultry owners in the territory. Outreach to animal owners to update information and register premises is on-going.

The major problem facing VIDA is the lack of veterinary staff in the St. Thomas district. There are no veterinarians or staff specifically assigned to veterinary services. It is very difficult to maintain the tagging of animals and registration of farms and premises. Tagging of animals is not done as completely as needed.

Providing uniform services on each island is difficult. Resources, supplies and equipment must often be duplicated for each island. Lack of staff and other resources hampers ability of VIDA VS to complete tasks in St. Thomas/St. John district.

The VI Government Administrative system poses major challenges to purchasing equipment and travel.

Lack of infrastructure on farms increases the difficulty of handling and treating animals and is unsafe for staff and animals.

2.4 Opportunities and Threats

Much human and animal traffic occurs daily throughout the USVI and Caribbean region. Introduction of a disease or pest is a potential problem. Smuggling of animals through charter flights and boats is a constant threat. VIDA VS works with Customs and Border Protection to decrease this threat.

Hurricanes are the most serious natural disaster threat to USVI. In September 2017, two Category 5 hurricanes devastated all three islands, and we are still in recovery.

Stray horses are a constant problem in the Territory and are the cause of about 6 car accidents a year. The current traceability program greatly assists VIDA VS in identifying those animals and owners involved.

There is little support or assistance locally for livestock farmers or horse owners in preparing for disasters. There are no CARTS and no attention is paid to animal welfare or health risks in the three major animal populations: livestock, horses and companion animals. There are no livestock associations or farm bureaus to assist farmers. This is a major gap in disaster preparedness and recovery.

Lists of farmers and horse owners as well as horse identification information are printed out twice a year and kept in each of the VIDA VS vehicles.

VIDA VS has an adequate supply of microchips and official RFID tags purchases with traceability funding. A wand reader has also been purchased.

2.5 Inventory of existing infrastructure and suitability assessment

VIDA VS is a small four-person team located on the island of St. Croix. VIDA VS provides veterinary services daily to farmers and is responsible for tagging animals, impounding stray animals to protect motorists and for regulating all imported animals as well as acting as the lead in all farmer and livestock and horse issues. The database is the central component of VIDA VS and the implementation of traceability.

With support from USDA through the Bont Tick Eradication Program and African Swine Fever Surveillance, the daily information collected by VIDA VS is kept current in EMRS. We have about 80% of the VI farms completed.

The database is continually being updated with new animal information as well as new farm information. Storage of the data base is held in an external hard drive. The data is backed up daily. Information is available during work hours and may be accessed by two of the VIDA VS staff if needed anytime.

III. VISION AND MISSION CONTEXT FOR ADVANCING TRACEABILITY

3.1 Vision Statement

VIDA VS recognizes the importance of enhancing traceability as an element of protecting animal health and will continue toward the goal of identifying and mapping all livestock and horse farms and premises in the USVI.

3.2 Mission Statement

To continue to enhance traceability in the USVI with the support and understanding of the farmers and agriculture stakeholders.

IV. TRACEABILITY REQUIREMENTS

2.1 Strategic goal(s)

The goal is to identify all farms and premises and maintain an active data base of premises and animals.

4.2 Programmatic goals (objectives)

- Horses are microchipped with AVID microchips as required by Virgin Islands law and registered in the VIDA VS database. Transfer of ownership is done through VIDA VS to be legally recognized.
- Cattle, sheep, and goats are tagged as required by law by owner request or by VIDA VS request
- All exported animals are identified with official RFID 840 tags.
- All cattle are identified with official RFID 840 tags.
- All tag and microchip numbers are submitted to the database daily.
- New farms and animals are identified and added to the database and submitted to EMRS specialist
- Farms are assigned a local identification number.
- Continue to educate farmers and horse and poultry owners to register their farms and animals with VIDA.

4.3 ADT Trace Performance Measures (TPMs)

- Number of farms and premises identified (percentage of whole).
- Number of animals identified (percentage of whole).
- Number of farms and premises with GPS information and PINs (percentage of whole).

- This information is reported quarterly to USDA.
- Number of animals imported and ICVIs received. VIDA VS will continue to report all CVI information by species and official RFID tags distributed.
- USVI rarely exports livestock or horses to the US. Horses and livestock are required to quarantine in Puerto Rico. All import movement requires an import permit. Horses are the most commonly imported animal. Cattle are not imported and only one or two goats or sheep occasionally are moved to USVI.
- Traceability exercises and resulting performance measures cannot be completed because of the actual situation that USVI does not import or export cattle.

4.4 Data requirements

- VIDA VS updates, maintains, and stores information within the Access database. Data is shared with police and victims of vehicular accidents involving stray livestock, especially horses.
- USVI information is regularly updated in EMRS as part of the Bont Tick Eradication Program and African Swine Fever Surveillance Program.
- Advancing traceability is enhanced daily with farm visits and tagging and registration. VIDA VS tags and microchips livestock and horses in the VI. All tags are secured in the VIDA VS office. VIDA VS is the only official tagging station and no requests have been received for another entity to be a tagging station.
- Official tags are used for cattle and any export animals and are only used by VIDA VS.
- The one abattoir in St. Croix is managed by VIDA and abattoir staff record all animals entering the facility.
- There are no livestock markets or associations in the VI.
- All imported livestock have import permits and are registered and cleared by VIDA VS through the airports and marine ports. Horses are most common animal imported.

- Horses are occasionally exported to the US under 9 CFR 72 regulations for the cattle fever tick.
- Farms and premises are given a local identification number by VIDA VS.
- EMRS specialists submit USVI data and PINs are assigned.
- Information of farms includes owners, physical location, and species present, and identified animals.

4.5 Information technology plan

VIDA will continue to use the technology available to us.

4.6 Resource requirements

Support of the EMRS specialist through the federal programs is essential to advancing traceability. VIDA VS does not have an IT person or have the staff or expertise to work in EMRS.

The database is located at VIDA VS in St. Croix. Internet connection is currently supported by ADT.

4.7 Organizational needs

No needs are required. USVI has no oversight committee and does not need one. No additional resources are needed to implement ADT.

4.7.1 Executive support

Not needed.

4.7.2 Coordination and oversight procedures

- Retrieval of information is available 24/7 by authorized VIDA VS staff.
- VIDA VS shares information with stakeholders.
- VITEMA is the local territorial emergency management agency. Despite hurricanes in 2017 there is little preparation in place to accommodate the populations of companion animals, livestock and horses in disaster response and

recovery. Coordination of agencies and other responders has been a subject of various trainings in the past hosted by VIDA VS but more work needs to be done in this area.

- Assistance is needed from FEMA and USDA to support local networking between emergency responders. VIDA has been marginally effective in forming local coordination.
- VIDA will receive \$11,529 for traceability in 2023. This adequately supports VIDA VS in traceability requirements with the staff available.
- VIDA VS provides outreach and training for farmers and animal owners. Any livestock issue involves VIDA VS at some level. The daily farm visits are our most effective outreach tool. At that time, farmers have time to discuss issues with the veterinary staff.
- VIDA VS displays ADT related information at the two local agriculture fairs and through social media and news releases.
- Feed stores and veterinarians are aware of VIDA programs and VI Code laws and regulations through letters, posters, news releases and personal contact.
- There is one private practitioner who works with livestock and horses occasionally and is accredited.
- VIDA VS provides all the veterinary medical support to livestock and horses.
- VIDA VS is the only entity that tags livestock and microchips horses and regulates imports and exports.
- Most local veterinarians are using electronic ICVIs for dogs and cats.
- VIDA VS works with the one abattoir (also under VIDA) to educate staff to biosecurity, disease risks, and traceability. The abattoir shares information with VIDA VS.

4.7.3 Policy

VI Code requires identification of all livestock over 2 months old.

4.7.4 Staffing

VI Department of Agriculture implements all tagging and microchipping of all livestock and horses.

4.7.5 Budget requirements

Additional funding is not needed. See the ADT Work and Financial plan for more information

4.7.6 Outreach (required to be addressed within the Road Map)

At both agriculture fairs, VIDA shows posters about ADT.

4.7.6.1 Accredited veterinarians

Not applicable. No one outside of VIDA tags or microchips animals.

4.7.6.2 Slaughter plants

Maintains records of all animals brought to the abattoir.

4.7.6.3 Industry as a whole

This is a small island community. VIDA regularly and routinely works with all livestock farmers.

4.8 Monitoring and reporting interstate movement activity

All animals require an import permit to enter USVI. We are islands, there is limited movement interstate. All data is reported in ADT monthly report.

V. ADVANCING TRACEABILITY

5.1 Ranking of priorities for advancement

Assigning PINs: We have completed 85% of registered farms and will have a goal of increase 5% each year. We continue with our daily visits and tagging animals, registering new farms, maintaining the database and educating farmers and horse owners.

Tagging animals: VIDA VS schedules farm visits as owners request them. VIDA VS will contact livestock owners bi-annually if needed to tag animals. Tagging of animals is mandated by VI Code. Farmers on

government leased lands are required in their lease to tag animals. Animal owners are cooperative. The farm census for each farm visit is updated weekly.

Imports: VIDA VS issues permits for animal imports which enforces traceability implementation. Animals must arrive by boat or plane only.

Educating Industry: Goats and sheep farms are abundant in various sized herds throughout the territory. There are two horse racing tracks both of which are currently being repaired and not functional. There is an extensive game cock industry. There are no cooperatives or associations within the private sector. Owners are largely educated through outreach by news releases from VIDA VS farm visits, and participation in animal health surveillance programs and fair displays.

Funding for Implementation: the current funding is adequate with the VIDA VS staff available to continue traceability in the USVI.

5.2 Implementation of objectives

- Focus on St. Thomas and St. John district post-COVID- plan visits twice a year to that district by St. Croix based staff specifically for traceability and collecting premise information.
- Continue collecting information in St. Croix on daily farm visits.
- Continued submission of information to EMRS specialists for support of federal animal health programs.