

 **STATEMENT**

United States Department of Agriculture • Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service • Legislative and Public Affairs
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**STATEMENT FROM ACTING APHIS ADMINISTRATOR KEVIN SHEA
REGARDING ALLEGATIONS AT AMES, IOWA, LABORATORIES**

February 4, 2009

As Secretary Vilsack indicated in a statement today, based upon information we provided, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) began conducting an investigation into the alleged actions of employees at the Department's laboratories in Ames, Iowa, involving the use of veterinary credentials to purchase medications for human use so that other employees might be provided with low-cost prescription drugs.

We appreciate OIG's assistance and their prompt and thorough response to our request for an investigation. We fully recognize the seriousness of this situation and have taken immediate action to address the charges alleged in the investigation. APHIS has met with and placed 17 APHIS employees identified in the investigation as participating in or having knowledge of the alleged improper conduct on administrative leave until a complete review of the evidence provided by OIG is conducted. Since APHIS will be conducting a further review and investigation of the information provided by OIG, we are limited in the amount of information we can provide at this time, and we will not be releasing the names of employees due to privacy concerns.

We want to stress that, while we are extremely concerned with the conduct demonstrated at Ames, there is no evidence any test results or other official laboratory activities were compromised in any way or caused any animal health risk. APHIS is dedicated to protecting American agriculture, and this investigation and its results will by no means prevent us from our critical mission of ensuring animal and plant health.

As Secretary Vilsack emphasized, laboratory accountability is critical, as is the American public, trading partner and stakeholder trust. In an effort to be fully transparent, we have commissioned two third-party reviews – one of Ames' laboratory processes and the other of the management processes. We expect both reviews to objectively identify any needed enhancements to our laboratory or management processes and systems and provide information on how APHIS can prevent such situations from recurring. The laboratory review has been completed, and although we are still in the process of thoroughly evaluating the results, we are gratified to see that it affirmed the laboratory is generally functioning very well and successfully fulfilling its responsibilities. The management review is ready to commence. To the extent permitted by concerns of privacy and security, both the reviews will be made available to the public once they are complete.

Accountability and responsibility will drive APHIS' efforts as we move forward from today to reinforce with our workforce both at Ames and throughout the Agency our duty as civil servants to uphold the public trust and demonstrate and follow the highest ethical standards. Agency leadership are onsite in Ames meeting with employees to discuss the investigation, Agency policies, and to answer any of their questions and concerns.