About NAHLN

Last Modified:

Originally composed of 12 laboratories when implemented in 2002, the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) has grown to include 66 State, Federal, and University laboratories. These laboratories are distributed throughout the United States and are capable of testing large numbers of samples for specific disease agents.

The NAHLN supports U.S. animal agriculture by developing and increasing the capabilities and capacities of a national veterinary diagnostic laboratory network to support early detection, rapid response, and appropriate recovery from high-consequence animal diseases. It is a nationally coordinated network and partnership of Federal, State, and university-associated animal health laboratories. NAHLN veterinary diagnostic laboratories provide animal health diagnostic testing to detect biological threats to the Nation’s food animals, thus protecting animal health, public health, and the Nation's food supply. They provide the capability to diagnose both endemic and foreign high-consequence livestock pathogens in animals and environmental samples and are likely to be the first-line laboratories for recognition of an intentionally or accidentally introduced agent in animals.

The National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) continue to serve as the Nation’s reference laboratories for both the NAHLN and USDA.

View All NAHLN Laboratories

Organization

NAHLN Coordinating Council Members
How the NAHLN Program Is Organized and Administered
Organizational Chart for the NAHLN Program Office
NAHLN Overview
NAHLN Briefing Document
NAHLN Flyer

Guiding Documents and Other Information

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Mission and Vision Statements

Mission

The NAHLN is a nationally coordinated network and partnership of Federal, State, and university-associated animal health laboratories. NAHLN laboratories provide animal health diagnostic testing, methods research and development, and expertise for education and extension to detect any local, regional, national, and global biological threats to the Nation’s animal agriculture (poultry, livestock, and other animal species that may interact with animals of agriculture), thus protecting animal health, public health, and the Nation's food supply.

Vision

NAHLN: A network of animal disease diagnostic laboratories that works effectively as a team, provides ongoing disease surveillance, responds quickly to disease events, communicates diagnostic outcomes to decision makers in a timely manner, and has the capability and capacity to meet diagnostic needs during animal disease outbreaks

NAHLN Strategic Plan

NAHLN 2026-2028 Strategic Plan

Concept Paper: A Proposal for a Revised Structure of the NAHLN

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Newsletter: The NAHLN Update

Issue	Date
Vol 16, No 2 (6.03 MB)	Dec 2025
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Vol 14, No. 2	November 2023
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Vol 13, No. 2	July 2022
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Vol 12, No. 1	July 2021
Vol 11, No. 2	December 2020
Vol 11, No. 1	June 2020
Vol 10, No. 1	June 2019

Guidance to Authors (40.9 KB)

NAHLN Background and History

The NAHLN is a cooperative effort between two USDA agencies—APHIS and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)—and the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians. It is a multifaceted network composed of laboratories that focus on different diseases, using common testing methods and data standards to process diagnostic requests and share information.

Networking these resources provides an extensive infrastructure of facilities, equipment, and personnel that are geographically accessible no matter where disease strikes. The laboratories have the capability and capacity to conduct nationwide surveillance testing for the early detection of an animal disease outbreak. They are able to test large numbers of samples rapidly during an outbreak and to demonstrate freedom from disease after eradication.

Defining the Need for the NAHLN

The Nation's public health and food supply is at constant risk from accidental or malicious introduction of exotic animal diseases. The threats include conspicuous agents like foot-and-mouth disease and highly pathogenic avian influenza, as well as less familiar agents that affect animals and humans, such as influenza A in swine and bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

The Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act of 2002, Section 335 authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to develop an agricultural early warning surveillance system to counteract these growing risks. Congress has the authority to appropriate funding for this effort.

Published in 2004, the Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD-9) on the Defense of United States Agriculture and Food specifically directs the USDA to develop a comprehensive and fully coordinated surveillance and monitoring system for animal disease, as well as a nationwide laboratory network that integrates and interconnects existing Federal and State laboratory resources and utilizes standardized diagnostic protocols and procedures.

Establishing the Network

In response to these suggestions, the USDA Safeguarding Review identified the need for a state-of-the-art National Animal Health Laboratory Network, which would coordinate Federal laboratory capacity with the extensive infrastructure (facilities, professional expertise, and support) of State-supported laboratories.

Special funds for Homeland Security were awarded by APHIS and Cooperative State Research, Education & Extension System (CSREES*) through CSREES. Cooperative agreements were awarded in May 2002 through APHIS and CSREES to 12 State/university diagnostic laboratory facilities for a 2-year period to develop

capacity and surveillance programs for 8 high-priority foreign animal diseases. The network has grown rapidly since then, supported by APHIS and NIFA funding.

* *CSREES was reorganized in 2009 and is now part of NIFA.*

Historical Documents on the NAHLN

- 2022: NAHLN 20-Year Anniversary, 2002-2022 (6.89 MB)
- 2018: NAHLN Founding Principles Slide Deck (1.06 MB)—available in Microsoft PowerPoint format upon request
- 2012: NAHLN 10-Year Anniversary (742.8 KB), 2002–2012
- 2005: AAVLD/NAHLN White Paper (54.35 KB)—progress and plans, need for full implementation/increased funding
- 2002: AAVLD/NAHLN White Paper (271.99 KB)—background, benefits, risk, what's needed

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