

Animal Health Safeguarding Review Implementation Progress Report May/June 2002

I. Progress achieved in implementing the review:

Authorities/Funding

- Animal Health Protection Act enacted – The Animal Health Protection Act was signed into law as part of the Farm Bill. This act consolidates and updates the statutory authorities underpinning APHIS’ animal health safeguarding activities. Recommendation 58 in the Safeguarding Review encouraged passage of the Animal Health Protection Act in order to deal with shortcomings in APHIS authorities.
- Team named to implement the Animal Health Protection Act and other Farm Bill initiatives - A cross-APHIS team will work to implement the Animal Health Protection Act and other Farm Bill initiatives. For APHIS implementing the Animal Health Protection Act will require revising regulations to reference the Animal Health Protection Act and to comply with new authorities provided in the Act. An Animal Health Protection Act fact sheet and question and answer document will be posted on the APHIS farm bill web site.
- Homeland Security funds allocated to states – USDA received \$328 million in Homeland Security Funds earlier this year. On May 30th the Secretary of Agriculture announced the release of \$43 million for state grants and cooperative agreements to improve food and agricultural protections. Monies will be used to initiate a network of diagnostics laboratories, strengthen state capabilities to respond to animal disease emergencies, strengthen state-level surveillance for animal disease, and place tissue digestors in several states. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations identified funding as a critical need (#s 70, 124).

Surveillance

- Leadership position for National Surveillance System advertised – APHIS has begun the recruitment process for a new Assistant Deputy Administrator. For the next several years, the Assistant Deputy Administrator will concentrate on the national surveillance system and function as a surveillance coordinator. Recommendation 1 in the Safeguarding Review called for the establishment of a national surveillance leadership position.

Response

- Incident Command System (ICS) utilized in Virginia Avian Influenza outbreak – Federal and state personnel are operating under an incident command structure to address the avian influenza situation. The use of ICS for managing disease outbreaks is new; ICS has

been used for many years to address natural disasters and forest fires. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations addressed improving the management of emergency operations (#111, 123)

- APHIS holds second Emergency Management Concepts and Issues for Animal Health Managers course – On June 4 – 11th APHIS held the second of three planned courses for AVICS, State Veterinarians, and other animal health emergency managers in Orlando, Florida. These courses review the epidemiology of a number of foreign animal diseases, introduce participants to the Incident Command System, discuss how existing animal health emergency management operations interact within both an incident command system and the Federal Response Plan, and offer instruction in responding to intentional introductions of biological agents. Joint attendance of federal and state animal health officials at these sessions also works to improve communications and cooperative partnerships. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations addressed improving the management of emergency operations (#s 111, 123).
- Changes proposed to foreign animal disease compensation – APHIS issued a proposed rule on May 1st which would amend its regulations to allow the payment of 100 percent of purchase, destruction, disposition, and cleaning and disinfection costs associated with a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak. The proposed rule also outlines changes in the process for valuing animals and materials destroyed during an outbreak. Comments on the proposed rule are due by August 1st. Recommendation 148 in the Safeguarding Review called on APHIS to clearly define, establish, and communicate a comprehensive indemnity plan.
- APHIS joins with the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) to examine the feasibility of insurance for animal disease losses - APHIS entered into an Interagency Agreement with RMA under which RMA is providing APHIS funds to develop a research report outlining information which will assist RMA in evaluating disease risk management tools for livestock and poultry producers. APHIS will examine the needs of U.S. livestock industries for insurance to subsidize losses from livestock diseases and analyze the feasibility of designing viable insurance products. Exploring other potential compensation options addresses the Safeguarding Reviews recommendations calling for comprehensive indemnity plans (#148).
- CWD response activities allow APHIS to strengthen and expand partnerships with wildlife organizations – New findings of CWD in Wisconsin and New Mexico have resulted in a number of proposed response activities. These activities are being coordinated with Department of Interior officials at the federal level and with state wildlife agencies and organizations as well. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations dealt with the need to develop response approaches for wildlife (#s 131, 132, 133, 134).

Exclusion

- Declaration forms edited to improve data on agriculture products – The Customs Declaration form has been edited and now has two questions relating to agriculture. Travelers must now indicate in the affirmative or negative for four specific areas (fruits, plants, food, insects; meats, animals, animal/wildlife products; disease agents, cell cultures, snails, or soil; or if they have been on a farm/ranch/pasture). There is also an additional question about whether the traveler has been in close proximity to livestock (such as touching or handling). The mail interception notice has also been revised to include additional information to improve tracebacks. Safeguarding Review recommendations 34 and 78 suggested improvements in the information collected from passengers and regarding parcels.
- Improvements in Animal Import Center biosecurity procedures – The New York Animal Import Center has taken steps to improve biosecurity procedures associated with private practitioners accessing the facility. The use of private practitioners will be limited to emergencies and private veterinarians entering the facility will observe all necessary biosecurity protocols including use of shower facilities and disinfection of equipment. Safeguarding Review recommendation 46 raised concerns about biosecurity associated with private veterinarians accessing APHIS quarantine facilities.
- Increasing risk assessment staffing – APHIS VS will be utilizing funds from the new Trade Issues Resolution and Management line item to add additional positions to its risk assessment staff. Several new positions should be in place by the end of this fiscal year. These new positions will allow VS to handle the increasing volume of risk assessments and to better monitor the status of past risk assessments. Improving the use of risk assessments is the topic of several Safeguarding Review recommendations (#s 47, 53)

Laboratory System

- National Animal Health Laboratory Network developments - In addition to the distribution of Homeland Security funds to state laboratories to initiate a National Animal Health Laboratory Network (see earlier item), the Bioterrorism Preparedness Act includes authorization of additional funds for development of an agricultural bioterrorism early warning surveillance system through enhancing the capacity of and coordination between state veterinary diagnostic laboratories. The funding authorized under the Bioterrorism Preparedness Act is yet to be appropriated. A network of laboratories has been established for CWD/TSE diagnostic testing. To date, in addition to NVSL, six laboratories are under contract to perform CWD/TSE testing. Solicitation of up to 10 additional laboratories is underway; applications have been received and are currently under review. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations point toward the establishment of a national animal health laboratory system (#s 17, 74, 121)
- Laboratory Modernization Plan continues to make progress – An architectural and engineering firm has been selected to design laboratory space at the Ames, Iowa ARS/APHIS facilities. The Bioterrorism Preparedness Act authorizes \$180 million for

biosecurity upgrades including \$100 for renovation, upgrading, and expansion of the biosafety level 3 laboratory and animal research facilities at the Plum Island Animal Disease Center and \$80 million for ARS/APHIS facility in Ames. Funding has yet to be appropriated. Safeguarding Review recommendations 18, 73, and 94 supported implementation and full funding of the Modernization Plan.

- Security enhanced at laboratory facilities – APHIS has installed new equipment and enacted new procedures to enhance the security at its laboratory facilities. These measures continue to assure that the laboratories are able to carry out their critical safeguarding roles (recommendation 18 from the Safeguarding Review).
- New technologies utilized to deliver foreign animal disease training - Video conferencing was used successfully at April 29-May 9th FAD school. Utilizing new technologies will allow the Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (FADDL) to enhance its training programs (recommendation 68 from the Safeguarding Review).

Veterinary Accreditation

- JAVMA article on National Veterinary Accreditation Program – An article entitled “New Directions for the National Veterinary Accreditation Program” co-authored by USDA, APHIS, VS and the American Veterinary Medical Association was published in the May 15th issue of the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association. The article contains recommendations for a 2-tiered accreditation system, a requirement for regular supplemental training, and an accreditation renewal requirement. Five recommendations in the Safeguarding Review (#s 69, 101, 145, 146, and 147) call for revising and strengthening the accreditation program.

Organizational Dynamics/Communications

- Quarterly conference calls initiated - On May 23rd the first quarterly conference call was held between State Animal Health Officials, AVICs, and the Deputy Administrator. These calls will be used to communicate information of national interest from VS and as a forum to gather feedback from State veterinarians. Regular calls have also been initiated with the USAHA Executive Board and the AAVLD Laboratory Directors. Communication issues and working relationships between APHIS and other organizations was the focus of several Safeguarding Review recommendations (#s 126,142).
- Consulting firm to provide assistance on communication - APHIS PPQ utilized a consulting firm to evaluate its communication strategies and procedures. VS is planning to utilize the same firm to examine its communication system. Safeguarding review recommendation 85 calls on APHIS VS to improve its ability to communicate animal health information internally and externally

Information Technology

- Working to improve access to Customs data at ports of entry – APHIS VS has initiated an effort, supported by Homeland Security funding, to: 1) interface with PPQ and Customs data and 2) augment this data with additional information needed to track the importations of animals and animal products. Improving access and utilization of Customs data by APHIS was the focus of Safeguarding Review recommendations 77, 78, and 102.
- Emergency Management Response System (EMRS) given a workout by Virginia avian influenza task force - APHIS' new EMRS has been utilized in managing the Virginia avian influenza situation. Many areas for improvement in the system have been identified and work has begun to address these issues. Safeguarding Review recommendation 130 discussed capabilities needed in an emergency response system.
- Meeting held to discuss Generic Disease Database (GDB) - The Generic Disease Database is a core national database for animal health information. A federal/state meeting was held to identify improvements needed to maximize the usefulness of the GDB. Short and long term initiatives were identified. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations addressed concerns about the compatibility of state/federal systems and the need for access to animal health information (#s 82, 129)
- Progress made toward wider use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) - APHIS has completed training for 60 VS staff members to implement the National Mapping Project. Under this project, VS will map the location of animal concentration points. These VS staff members will train others in their states in GPS techniques, GDB entry of spatial data, and GIS access of spatial data for mapping and analysis. APHIS has also awarded a contract to have GIS enhancements made to the EMRS. Safeguarding Review recommendation 129 recommended expanded use of GIS.

II. Implementation activities:

APHIS Safeguarding Implementation Issue Groups have initiated their activities. Each Issue Group has been provided with templates to guide the development of action plans for addressing their assigned safeguarding recommendations. A meeting of all issue groups took place June 25-27th in Riverdale, Maryland. At the June meeting, APHIS leadership discussed their perspectives on safeguarding implementation. In addition, the NASDA Animal Health Safeguarding Review Committee Chairs provided the issue groups with their perspectives on the key findings from their review of animal health safeguarding activities.