

Meeting Minutes: Quarterly Board Meeting

Date: April 12, 2023

Location: Minnesota Farmers Union (305 Roselawn Ave E, St. Paul, MN 55117) and teleconference on Microsoft Teams

Attendance

Board Members

- Erica Sawatzke, President
- Peggy Anne Hawkins, Vice President
- Dean Compart
- Jessica Koppien-Fox
- Alex Stade
- Jim Vagts

Consultants to the Board

- Michelle Carstensen, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Stacy Holzbauer, Minnesota Department of Health
- Michelle Medina, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- Laura Molgaard, University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine
- Albert Rovira, University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory
- Stephan Schaeffbauer, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services

Guests

- Paul Anderson, Minnesota Veterinary Medical Association
- Robyn Corcoran, USDA APHIS, Veterinary Services
- Amy Cordry, member of the public
- Nikki Deyle, Minnesota AgriGrowth
- Amanda Doran, USDA APHIS, Veterinary Services
- Jenna Fier, USDA APHIS, Veterinary Services
- Todd Froberg, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Katlin Gralish, USDA APHIS, Veterinary Services
- Elaine Hanson, Minnesota Pet Breeders Association
- Brenda Hartkopf, Elk producer
- Justin Hoffman, Veterinary student
- Lucy Hunt, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- Barbara Keller, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Ashley Kohls, Minnesota Turkey Growers Association
- Stuart Lichtenberg, Minnesota Center for Prion Research and Outreach
- Daryn McBeth, Lobbyist, Minnesota Milk Producers Association, Minnesota Pet Breeders Association
- Nicole Neeser, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- Michael Oehler, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Jill Resler, Minnesota Pork Producers Association
- Marc Schwabenlander, Minnesota Center for Prion Research and Outreach
- Kelly Straka, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Michael Streitz, USDA APHIS, Veterinary Services
- Mary Wasche, member of the public
- Julia Wilson, Minnesota Board of Veterinary Medicine
- Tiffany Wolf, Minnesota Center for Prion Research and Outreach

Staff

- Jessica Aho
- Michael Crusan
- Erik Jopp
- Brad Peterson
- Carissa Allen
- Lisa Ehlen
- Samantha Kappel
- Kayla Pierson
- Veronica Bartsch
- Addie Evans Engelke
- Bliia Kha
- Allison Pollock
- Marita Bliven
- Diane Englin-Elliott
- Tony LaBarre
- Nancy Reeck
- Jason Cater
- Duane Fox
- Krista Lautenschlager
- Laura TeBrake
- Katie Cornille
- Brian Hoefs
- Betsy Lempelius
- Shauna Voss
- Erin Crider
- Melissa Jantzen
- Rachael Okerlund
- Bekah Weitz

Call to Order/Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Ms. Erica Sawatzke called the meeting to order. After introductions, she asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Alex Stade made a motion, and Dr. Peggy Anne Hawkins seconded it. Ms. Sawatzke called for a vote, with all board members voting aye to approve the agenda.

Ms. Sawatzke then asked for a motion to approve the draft minutes from the February 8, 2023, quarterly meeting. Mr. Dean Compart made the motion, and Mr. Stade seconded it. Ms. Sawatzke called for a vote, with all voting aye to approve the minutes.

Office of Animal Protection Bill Overview

Ms. Jena Wasche and Mr. Michael Frye, authors of the Office of Animal Protection bill (SF 1411 and HF 1850), introduced themselves. Mr. Frye is a lieutenant with the Minneapolis Police Department, and Ms. Wasche served as his civilian partner on animal cruelty investigations and cases for six years. She has 12 years of experience in animal cruelty investigations.

Ms. Wasche said Minnesota has no central agency to handle animal cruelty, and there are several avenues one can take to report animal crimes (Minnesota Federated Humane Societies, the Animal Humane Society, local animal control, etc.). Ultimately, this responsibility is left to local law enforcement agencies, and police do not have any training in animal crimes.

The proposed Office of Animal Protection (OAP) would act as the central point of contact for training and outreach efforts, domestic animal questions or concerns related to laws and investigations, including animal crimes, disaster relief coordination for domestic animals, and general questions or inquiries from law enforcement. They would also create a statewide dangerous animal database, set standards for what a dangerous animal is, create steps for enforcement of the current Dangerous Animal Law, and provide training for law enforcement and animal control employees.

Ms. Wasche said the OAP is not related to the Companion Animal Bill (CAB) and highlighted key differences between the bills. The CAB would take away the Companion Animal Program from the Board, but the OAP would support the Board's current work. The CAB would create new laws, they could not enforce laws. OAP staff would be a unit within the Department of Public Safety and would enforce current laws concerning animal welfare.

Dr. Paul Anderson stated the Minnesota Veterinary Medical Association (MVMA) approves the proposed OAP bill. The OAP could support the Board's field staff in their work, as sometimes local law enforcement does not have the time or expertise for animal welfare investigations. Ms. Wasche thanked the MVMA for their feedback to help write the bill and support it.

Mr. Compart asked if animals deemed dangerous fall through the cracks when their owners move. He asked the OAP has plans for how to keep track of these animals. Ms. Wasche said current law states any dog declared dangerous must be microchipped, and owners must report to the jurisdiction they are leaving and the one they are entering when they

move with the dog. The OAP would create standards for declaring a dog dangerous and a central database to keep track of these animals so there is one point of contact for that information.

Ms. Sawatzke asked if the OAP bill would include livestock. Ms. Wasche said the OAP is focused on dogs, cats and other house pets, not animal agriculture. This is defined in the bill language.

Dr. Hawkins asked if the OAP would provide support in a situation of animal neglect on a farm. Mr. Frye said the OAP has a law enforcement aspect, so they would assist with that as needed. Ms. Wasche added that dog or cock fights happen on farms, and she and Lieutenant Frye have assisted because there was animal cruelty involved.

Dr. Anderson asked for more detail on the disaster response portion of the bill. Ms. Wasche said the OAP would be the main point of contact for any resources for animals in a disaster. In a natural disaster, they would provide a place for animals to stay, trained volunteers to care for them, and help with organizing resources donated for animals.

Dr. Brian Hoefs asked about the OAP's anticipated staffing levels. Ms. Wasche said they submitted a budget proposal for around 38 staff (agents, office staff, director, training and outreach) at a cost of \$4 to 6 million to start and about \$3 million to continue. Mr. Frye added the Senate Finance Committee has reviewed and accepted their budget proposal. They continue to talk with legislators, and there are senators and representatives who have agreed to help push the bill forward.

Ms. Elaine Hanson asked if they had talked to the chairs of the committees that would hear the OAP bill. Ms. Wasche said they have made multiple attempts to reach out to them; however, this session has been very busy. They have met with most of the committee members, but they did not get meetings with the committee chairs. They are still trying to schedule.

Legislative Update

Ms. Michelle Medina said the legislative session continues and is scheduled to end on May 22. She hopes all agricultural bills will be completed on time, though the session has seen a large number of bills introduced (3,208 bills in the House and 3,248 bills in the Senate).

Board funding in the House Agricultural budget includes \$560,000 each year for emergency preparedness and response, \$6,000 each year for expenses for the additional board members added by HF 911, and \$166,000 the first year and \$332,000 the second year to maintain current service delivery. Funding in the Senate Agricultural budget is \$170,000 each year for increased costs associated with animal imports from countries at a high risk for animal diseases and \$560,000 each year for emergency preparedness and response. These bills will go to conference committee to agree on final funding amounts.

Ms. Medina mentioned other bills, including HF 911, which would increase the Board's size from six to 11 members. This is not included in the Senate omnibus bill. The House omnibus bill also includes \$65,000 for fur farmer registration requirements, permits for restricted species, and a feral pig and mink report. This money would go to the DNR to work with the Board and MDA on these projects. The House Environment bill includes HF2310, which provides money to the DNR for inspection of white-tailed deer (WTD) farms done in conjunction with the Board, makes changes to Farmed Cervidae statute, and includes a report on feral pigs and mink (no funding provided for the report). SF2438 makes similar changes to the Farmed Cervidae program, though it specifies that annual testing of farmed WTD with RT-QuIC will not be required until the USDA approves it as an official test. This bill also transfers the farmed WTD oversight from the Board to the DNR.

The CAB and OAP bills have been introduced and referred to committees in both the House and Senate, but neither have had hearings. It is unlikely they will move forward this session, but they will be available to be moved forward during next year's session.

Mr. Compart asked if how much money was proposed in HF2310 for turning over the farmed WTD to the DNR. Ms. Medina said she did not see a funding amount specified for that, but she would need to look into it. The amount

proposed for inspections, investigations and enforcement activities is \$2.25 million the first year and \$5.734 million the second year, with the base for fiscal year 2026 and beyond being \$3.25 million.

Mr. Compart asked about HF911 and if there was a companion bill on the Senate side that changes the Board's makeup. Ms. Medina said the Senate Ag bill only includes language on the Board's funding. Ms. Sawatzke asked if the bill currently requires the Board to increase to 11 members. Ms. Medina said that is the current language, though it could change when the bill goes through the House Ways and Means Committee next week. Dr. Hawkins asked how those positions are specified in the bill. Ms. Medina stated the bill requires two at-large members, one from a federally recognized tribe, and eight regional members, with no two regional members residing in the same congressional district. Dr. Hawkins asked if the bill required animal or agriculture experience. Ms. Medina stated the bill requires members to be knowledgeable in animal agriculture, animal health or pets and companion animals, with at least two members who represent the public and are not employed in agriculture, natural resources, veterinary medicine, the pet industry, or a related field.

Ms. Sawatzke asked about SF2438 and the required annual RT-QuIC testing once the test is approved by the USDA. She asked if the Senate has been informed of a timeline for approval, or if it will be approved. Ms. Medina said there is no timeline for approval of this test, as it has not been submitted to the USDA for approval yet. The concern with this bill is it is very specific about the way the testing needs to be done, which may not match up with the testing method the USDA approves. The Board and MDA have discussed this with the authors of the bill to stress the importance of following required USDA testing protocols if they are approved.

Dr. Fox asked what the response to this has been. Ms. Medina said the response has varied, depending on which legislators they talk to. Most are receptive, but some have difficulty understanding the testing process. Others are under the impression that the USDA has already received the test for approval, which is not true.

USDA Update

Dr. Stephan Schaeffbauer gave an overview of the combined African Swine Fever (ASF) and Classical Swine Fever (CSF) surveillance plan, which has been in place since May 2019. She said on April 3, the USDA approved spleen and whole blood swabs as sample types for ASF and CSF active surveillance testing. They are working toward using easier sample types. She said over 3,000 samples were tested at the Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (VDL) from October 1, 2021 to January 31, 2023.

Yesterday, USDA APHIS announced \$12 million is available to fund Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) projects at state departments of agriculture, natural resources, or animal health agencies, or federally recognized Native American Tribal governments. Possible activities include CWD management, response, research activities, surveillance and testing, or indemnity. The Board has taken advantage of similar funding opportunities in the past. Applications are due in June.

Dr. Schaeffbauer gave a brief hiring update. Their new Program Assistant will start on April 24. They have extended a tentative offer for the Ready Response Corps VMO position. Epidemiologist interviews will be held soon. They have received applications for the Animal Identification Coordinator, and their offer to hire an Animal Health Technician was declined, so they will need to re-advertise the position.

Finally, she introduced Dr. Amanda Doran, who is their new VMO in the Duluth area. She comes from a large dairy family and spent 4.5 years in mixed animal practice and 2.5 years in small animal practice. She relocated to Duluth in 2019 and operated a mobile in-home euthanasia service for almost four years.

Mr. Compart asked about the USDA's involvement in ASF surveillance/response in the Dominican Republic. Dr. Schaeffbauer said the USDA has been focusing its efforts on surveillance in Puerto Rico and Florida. They have not done as many team deployments to the Dominican Republic. Their lab capacity is not large, and updates on the situation are not readily available. The USDA has sent lab technicians to help with capacity.

Mr. Compart mentioned the reports that there are feral pigs in Canada, about 40 miles from the border. He expressed concern that if they entered the northern part of Minnesota, it would be impossible to eradicate them. Dr. Schaeffbauer suggested this may be a good topic for the next Board meeting. Dr. Brian Hoefs said there have been discussions with the DNR and USDA Wildlife Services on creating better surveillance in Northern Minnesota. They have discussed getting traps like the ones used in the South. Mr. Compart asked what Canada is doing to stop feral swine. Dr. Hoefs stated Canada feels it is impossible to keep up with the population, but they have issued warnings and do a lot of surveillance, trapping and shooting. The pigs have adapted to the cold weather, so the number of feral swine continues to increase.

Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Update

Dr. Stacy Holzbauer stated that backyard poultry continue to increase in popularity, and with that comes an increase in infections associated with backyard poultry, particularly Salmonella and Campylobacter. In Minnesota, MDH sees 30 to 70 cases of Salmonella related to backyard poultry each year, with 81 percent of cases in rural counties, and 66 percent bought poultry for the first time.

Dr. Holzbauer reviewed the investigation process in these cases and the recommendations handouts that go home with any person who purchases chicks. This season, they are working on a new pilot project with the Board, CDC and seven other states to collect chick papers (the material on the bottom of boxes in which chicks are shipped to feed stores) and testing them at the VDL for salmonella. Any positive results will be reported to MDH and the source hatchery.

Dr. Holzbauer discussed MDH's investigation into a Minnesota who died of rabies in January 2021, six months after being bitten by a bat and receiving post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), as recommended. This was the first instance of a human rabies death in the Western Hemisphere when PEP was given in a timely manner. The investigation showed the PEP was potent, and there were no storage or other quality assurance errors. The man had undiagnosed prostate cancer that had metastasized to his bone marrow, compromising his body's response to the PEP. As a result, the MDH is advising clinics to consider an additional vaccine and testing patients for immunocompromising conditions if suspected.

Dr. Holzbauer discussed human risk for contracting avian influenza. She stated the infection is spread through direct contact with infected birds, which makes infection an occupational risk, not a public safety risk. She mentioned the few documented human cases of H5N1 around the world all had contact with sick poultry.

Mr. Compart asked if the MDH has seen an increase in diseases related to pets, as they have become more important in families. Dr. Holzbauer said dog bites are a major public health problem, but the MDH does not track how many occur. They do test for rabies and have data on other reportable infections, and they are not seeing anything unusual now. As diagnostics get better, they may find more.

Ms. Carissa Allen asked if there have been any changes to recommendations for rabies exposure or PEP since the MDH's investigation of the human rabies case Dr. Holzbauer described. Dr. Holzbauer said this case was the first of its kind recorded, so nothing has changed in CDC protocols. However, these cases need to be taken on a case-by-case basis. If a person is immunocompromised, they should likely have an extra vaccination and a rabies titer to make sure the vaccine is working.

Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (VDL) Update

Dr. Albert Rovira stated the VDL recently renewed its contract with the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN). They remain a Level 1 laboratory. Their funding from the NAHLN will remain flat for the next year. They are working with the American Association of Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratories (AAVLD) to lobby for increased NAHLN funding in the Farm Bill.

Dr. Rovira said the VDL has been assisting with testing samples for HPAI this spring. All but one backyard farm has tested negative so far. They have also run several tests for Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in swine and cattle, and all have

been negative. They have begun testing a few samples for canine influenza, as the disease was recently reported in Minnesota. The VDL is discussing what their role should be in assisting the Board during this outbreak.

The University is supporting the replacement of the current digester housed at the VDL. The project is moving quickly, and there is an engineering company and several units at the University working on it. The plan is to have the new digester in place by Fall of 2024, and both the Board and the DNR will use it for disposing materials.

The search for the Director of the VDL is ongoing. The first round of applications did not result in any interview candidates. The Dean of the College has decided to hire a search firm to help find candidates, which is not unusual for these types of positions. They have interviewed for the Food Animal Diagnostician position and extended an offer. They are now waiting for a response.

Dr. Schaeffbauer asked how much time there will be between the removal of the old digester and the installation of the new one. She also asked if it will be placed in the same location. Dr. Rovira said the new digester will be installed in the same place the current one is housed. The timeframe from removal to installation is estimated to be about three months. The University and the VDL are working on plans for those three months.

Mr. Compart asked what the University will do with the waste that would normally go in the digester during that downtime. Dr. Rovira said the Waste Management Division is looking into options, which could include companies that can come and take the waste and dispose of it. Also, some landfills are approved to take this kind of waste. They are still looking at what is feasible and available.

College of Veterinary Medicine Update

Dr. Laura Molgaard reiterated that University's Waste Management office owns the digester and is working on plans to replace it. She warned there would be downtime during the removal of the current digester and installation of the new one, and possibly more if the current digester breaks down before then. The CVM continues working with Waste Management on alternatives for disposal.

On April 22, the CVM will hold its white coat ceremony, when third-year students transfer from their classroom/laboratory time to their clinical year. Commencement will be in mid-May, and Dr. Joni Scheffel will be the speaker.

The Two-Plus-Two program has its accreditation site visit soon, and Dr. Molgaard will be making a trip to Sioux Falls for a reception and then to Brookings to be there for the visit.

Dr. Molgaard encouraged application to the Student Loan Repayment Program, which awards \$15,000 per year to graduates who work in rural areas with at least 50 percent of work in food animal practice for up to five years. The pool of applicants is small, so acceptance to the program is likely.

The CVM has been at the legislature discussing a bill to make the State Practice Act less restrictive, making it easier for the CVM to hire internationally trained faculty. The Senate has included language on this in the Agricultural policy bill, but it is unlikely to pass this year.

The CVM continues the hiring process for six leadership positions, including recruiting for the VDL Director position.

Mr. Compart asked what percentage of graduates go into large animal versus small animal practice. Dr. Molgaard prefaced her answer by saying the CVM has more graduates go into large or mixed animal practice than other veterinary schools, and the Two-Plus-Two program will increase that number. In a typical year, the CVM has six or seven VetFAST students, and almost all will end up in food or mixed animal practice, and about another five graduates will go into food animal practice. Dr. Molgaard offered to bring numbers to the next quarterly meeting.

HPAI Update/IMT Overview

Dr. Shauna Voss discussed a case of avian influenza found during NPIP pre-market testing in a commercial turkey flock in Murray County. The tests came back positive for H1 AI. The area has had a history of swine influenza, and testing at the National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) confirmed H1N1 swine influenza. Dr. Voss said this is a reminder that pre-market testing catches more than just HPAI. The flock was monitored and marketed with no issues in mid-March.

Dr. Voss also talked about an upland gamebird farm that had delivered birds to Michigan, and then the Michigan farm tested positive for HPAI. The farm had previously been infected HPAI. The Board quarantined and tested the Minnesota farm for 14 days, and all tests stayed negative. The Board worked closely with Dr. Carol Cardona on a Secure Gamebird plan to make sure the testing strategy would be effective.

The first case of HPAI in Minnesota was in a backyard flock of chickens, ducks and geese. The grower's private veterinarian sent a few mortalities for the VDL for diagnostics. The mortalities continued, so he contacted the Board. NVSL confirmed H5N1 HPAI on April 3. The flock was classified as World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) non-poultry, so no control areas were established, and the Targeted Disease Freedom date was not changed.

The total number of Minnesota HPAI cases since the outbreak began in March 2022 is 111, which were in primarily commercial turkey and backyard flocks.

Mr. Compart stated, in Murray County, the birds got influenza from swine. He asked if the Board has seen influenza transmit from poultry to swine. Dr. Voss said there is risk that it could spread to other poultry farms, but there has not been evidence of transmission back to pigs.

Ms. Lucia Hunt gave an overview of the HPAI Incident Management Team (IMT). She covered the MDA Emergency Response structure and showed a graphic of the USDA Incident Command System organizational chart. Many people are involved to cover all the positions within these structures.

Ms. Hunt gave an overview of the MDA IMT's history. It was organized after the 2015 HPAI outbreak to better prepare for, and respond to, future animal health emergencies. The IMT watches for potential risks and works on response plans through organized training sessions and performing exercises for responders and the industry not only to be prepared, but also to maintain and grow partnerships. The MDA IMT was instrumental in the meat packing plant shutdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they learned to do many things virtually through that experience.

There has been a longstanding Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Board and MDA regarding emergency response efforts. The Board will manage animal disease control and eradication, and MDA promotes a profitable agricultural industry and food safety, as well as providing support for preparedness and planning emergency notification, response and communication. USDA staff and temporary/contract staff also help fill the different positions in the IMT. Ms. Hunt shared that she was very pleased with how well everyone has worked together on the response.

The Agricultural Emergency Account provides funding for emergency preparedness and response activities. Last year's response totaled \$1.8 million out of the Ag Emergency Account. The 2022 legislative session boosted the account's value, as they saw how much the response was helping eradicate the disease.

RT-QuIC Research Update

Dr. Stuart Lichtenberg from the University of Minnesota's Center for Prion Research and Outreach (MN PRO) presented an update on RT-QuIC testing technology.

RT-QuIC's sensitivity has been compared with those of conventional testing methods using CWD positive brain homogenate dilutions, and it has been proven to detect CWD with a dilution of 10^{-7} . This allows for testing of tissues that have less disease but are easily accessible on live animals.

Dr. Lichtenberg described a study where farmed deer infected with CWD and were tested periodically using tonsil and RAMALT (rectoanal mucosa-associated lymphoid tissue) samples. These sample types do not have as much disease as the brain stem or lymph nodes. He noted RT-QuIC tests are run multiple times before calling the tests positive or negative. Six months after infection, both IHC and RT-QuIC tests were still negative. At nine months, IHC was still negative, but multiple RT-QuIC tests were coming back positive. By 12 months and 15 months, both RT-QuIC and IHC tests were more consistently positive.

Dr. Lichtenberg discussed assessing diagnostic assays by sensitivity, the ability to correctly determine that an animal has a disease, and by specificity, the ability to correctly determine that an animal does not have a disease. RT-QuIC has been assessed for both in two separate studies using ear tissue samples, and it had an 81 percent sensitivity and a 91 percent specificity in one study, and 95 percent sensitivity and 100 percent specificity in the other.

Dr. Lichtenberg showed a slide comparing possible best- and worst-case scenarios (based on the two studies discussed above) in testing samples as proposed by a bill currently in the state legislature. This would call for an initial skin biopsy, which, if positive, would be followed by additional testing. Sensitivity in these scenarios would range from 55 to 94 percent, and specificity would range from 99 to 100 percent.

Ms. Sawatzke asked what is required for the USDA to validate this testing method. Dr. Lichtenberg said he did not know, other than they are running many tests to find what works the best and most consistently. MN PRO has asked about their process but has not received a specific response.

Mr. Compart noted this test needs to be run multiple times, and that MN PRO runs it eight times. He asked how much the test costs if it must be run several times. Dr. Lichtenberg said he calculated the cost a year and a half ago, and at that time, the cost for labor and materials was about \$10 - \$20 per tissue sample, which is near the same cost as the ELISA test.

Mr. Compart expressed concern over one of the worst-case scenarios, where the sensitivity is no better than 76 percent, with a higher possibility of false negative results. False negatives would have very serious consequences not only for the farm of origin, but also for any farms these animals moved to while thought to be CWD negative.

There was discussion on the USDA validation process for RT-QuIC testing. Dr. Lichtenberg clarified that this test does not belong to MN PRO; it is a test developed by the broader scientific community. USDA is pursuing RT-QuIC as an option for testing, and they have not shared their validation process. Dr. Schaeftbauer said that she does not know much about USDA's testing processes, but she would be willing to ask for more information at the request of the Board.

Dr. Tiffany Wolf recognized the desire for more research on RT-QuIC as a CWD testing method and asked if there would be any opportunities for MN PRO to work with farmed cervid producers to collect samples for testing in a research capacity, separate from any official regulatory testing. Board members expressed a need for a process or program for how to handle RT-QuIC positive test results. Ms. Hartkopf stated, as an elk producer, she would willingly allow MN PRO to test her animals as Dr. Wolf is proposing. However, the state's current political and regulatory climate would not support this. She doubted such research would be allowed.

Mr. Gary Olson questioned how the legislature could propose deer farmers use a test that is not yet approved for official testing. Dr. Hawkins agreed, saying she is disappointed in the state legislature for trying to tell farmers what test and sample type they should use on their animals. She also cautioned that, while RT-QuIC is being validated, a better test could be developed. If RT-QuIC becomes required by law in Minnesota, another legislative change would be required to use any new testing technology.

MVMA Recommendation on Heartworm Disease Testing for Imported Dogs and Cats

Dr. Paul Anderson, a representative for the Minnesota Veterinary Medical Association's (MVMA's) Small Animal Welfare Committee, presented a recommendation approved by the full MVMA:

The MVMA Small Animal Welfare Committee recommends that the Board of Animal Health change Minnesota rules for importation of dogs and cats (Minnesota Rules 1721.0500) to require heartworm disease testing by an accredited veterinarian of all dogs within 30 days prior to importation and to allow entry of dogs that test positive only under permit issued by the Board of Animal Health for immediate treatment by a specified veterinary clinic. Treatment should follow guidelines as specified by the American Heartworm Society.

Dr. Anderson explained that heartworm disease is caused by a blood-borne parasite. Adult heartworms live in the heart for up to five years. Their offspring are microscopic and go out to the capillaries in the body. Mosquitoes pick up and transmit heartworm by biting an infected dog and then biting an uninfected dog.

While most mosquitoes die in winter, heartworm continues to spread in Minnesota from undiagnosed and untreated dogs, dogs that get heartworm while in southern states where mosquitoes are active year-round, and dogs imported to Minnesota from southern states. Importation of dogs from southern states has grown exponentially in recent years. Humane societies, rescues and shelters have become leading sources of pet dogs.

Several veterinarians from the Animal Humane Society (AHS) are on the Small Animal Welfare Committee. The AHS placed 12,000 in homes in 2022, and most were imported from southern states. One-third of these dogs were positive for heartworm. With about 600 Minnesota rescues also importing dogs from southern states, the potential for spread of heartworm from undiagnosed or untreated dogs is a great concern.

Dr. Anderson stated the MVMA's Small Animal Committee is asking the Board to change the rules for importation of dogs and cats. The MVMA does not want to stop the importation of dogs from other states. Though heartworm treatment is expensive, it can be done.

Ms. Elaine Hanson asked if the Board could change its policy in lieu of a rule change. Dr. Veronica Bartsch said the Board could start by changing their policy. The Companion Animal Advisory Task Force's major concern is importing disease. They have been working out changes to Board's importation policy, and heartworm testing requirements could be added to this.

Dr. Fox asked Dr. Bartsch for her opinion on this recommendation. Dr. Bartsch said she is in favor of it, as is the Companion Animal Advisory Task Force. Several papers by the American Heartworm Society show that heartworm is increasing in northern states due to importation of dogs from southern states. Implementing testing and treatment requirements helps stop the spread of heartworm.

After further discussion, Board members requested that Board staff examine this issue and draft a policy for heartworm testing and treatment for dogs imported to Minnesota. An update will be presented at the September meeting.

Companion Animal Program Update

Dr. Bartsch provided information on the current H3N2 canine influenza outbreak in the Twin Cities. This is a Type A influenza that primarily spreads dog-to-dog. Dogs in confined spaces, such as in shelters or day cares, are at higher risk of infection. The virus can live in the environment, including on clothing, for up to 48 hours, and dogs can shed the H3N2 virus for up to 28 days.

Dogs with canine influenza have symptoms such as a runny nose, coughing, lethargy, and loss of appetite, though some will be asymptomatic. Some animals will get pneumonia or a secondary bacterial infection. Most dogs feel better in two to three weeks. There are vaccines that reduce the illness severity and the amount of virus dogs shed. Unfortunately, demand for these have skyrocketed with an ongoing outbreak in the southern states, and the manufacturer is experiencing supply chain issues. Veterinarians cannot order vaccines at this time. Testing is mostly done by PCR, which can give false negatives if not performed by Day 4 after infection. A blood test can be performed later in infection, but it is more expensive than the PCR test.

On March 22, a local animal shelter with locations in Hennepin, Anoka, and Washington Counties took in 22 dogs from an Oklahoma shelter. These dogs had a baseline respiratory illness. By March 31, the shelter noted a significant increase in the number of dogs with respiratory illness. The Oklahoma shelter notified them they would be closing for 30 days due to canine influenza. On April 6, the local shelter notified the Board that they had respiratory disease that could be canine influenza. On April 11, testing confirmed four dogs were positive for canine influenza, with two of those having the H3N2 strain.

This shelter will be quarantined for at least 30 days and could be for up to six weeks. The Board is working with them on biosecurity personal protective equipment (PPE) to keep the virus contained to the shelter, though Dr. Bartsch noted there was some time between exposure and when the Board was notified. The shelter had people coming in to adopt animals and attend dog training classes. They have done outreach to notify these people of possible exposure and recommend isolation for affected dogs.

The Board's recommendations for animal shelters and rescues include biosecurity and isolation for dogs from areas with outbreaks, vaccination, and routine testing and surveillance. Dog owners should isolate their dog 30 days if it has signs of respiratory illness. They should also know that dog parks and day cares can increase the risk of infection and consider vaccination for their dogs. Veterinarians should practice strong biosecurity at the clinic and encourage testing dogs for canine influenza.

Board of Animal Health Update

Dr. Brian Hoefs began with a staffing update, saying the Board currently is seeking applications for its permanent Executive Director. This position is posted until May 4. Dr. Hoefs stated the Board welcomed Dr. Katie Cornille as the new Senior Veterinarian in charge of the cattle program, traceability and livestock concentration points, and Ms. Rachael Okerlund as the new Human Resources Technician. They have interviewed candidates for the Emergency Response Coordinator position and are working on final details to extend an offer. Several other positions, including the one previously held by Annie Balghiti, are in the process for hiring.

There were two reported cases of Equine Herpesvirus Myeloencephalopathy (EHM), one in Washington County and one in Dakota County. The cases were unrelated, and both were in geriatric horses. The Board issued 30-day quarantines for both animals, and the temperatures of all horses at each facility were taken twice a day during that time. No additional cases were detected. Dr. Hoefs commended Board staff and the facility managers for their work and cooperation.

The Swine Emergency Disease Management Committee (EDMC) is continuing work on response plans in the event of an African Swine Fever outbreak. They are currently focusing on identifying areas that the industry could help with to lessen the Board's responsibilities during a disease response.

Dr. Wheeler, Mr. David Wienand and Ms. Myah Walker are working on creating a Composting Subject Matter Expert (SME) class and training. These courses are for company personnel, with the goal of having trained people within companies if the Board needs to assistance with carcass disposal in an emergency response.

Pipestone will be hosting a traceability exercise using AgView, a database to track the movement of pigs This exercise will be held in May. Dr. Hoefs participated in a tabletop exercise with Canadian counterparts during the Minnesota Pork Congress. He proposed they do a similar exercise with the Board, which is tentatively planned for late summer.

Dr. Hoefs will be attending Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostician (FADD) training in early May. He has completed the virtual portion and attend in-person training at the Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (FADDL) in Plum Island, New York in early May.

Mr. Compart referred to CWD and asked if there was a determined cause of the wild deer infections in the Bemidji, Grand Rapids and Climax areas, as a recent media story pointed to deer farms as the reason for CWD spread, though there are no CWD positive farms in these areas. Mr. Michael Oehler said Dr. Michelle Carstensen would best address

this question. He added the media does not always characterize information correctly. There is no “smoking gun” for CWD.

Election of Board Leadership

Ms. Sawatzke called for nominations for Board President. Dr. Hawkins nominated Ms. Sawatzke. There were no other nominations. Ms. Sawatzke called for a vote, and Ms. Sawatzke was unanimously voted Board President.

Ms. Sawatzke then called for nominations for Board Vice President. Mr. Stade nominated Dr. Hawkins. There were no other nominations. Ms. Sawatzke called for a vote, with all Board member voting to elect Dr. Hawkins as Board Vice President.

Ms. Sawatzke then moved the meeting into closed session.

Closed Session: Appointment of Interim Executive Director

Board members met in a closed session to discuss the appointment of the interim executive director until a permanent executive director can be appointed. After discussion took place, Ms. Sawatzke asked for a motion to continue Dr. Brian Hoefs’ appointment as Interim Executive Director. Mr. Compart made the motion, and Mr. Stade seconded it. Ms. Sawatzke called for a vote, with all voting aye to appoint Dr. Hoefs as Interim Executive Director.

Adjourn and Next Meeting

The next quarterly meeting of the Minnesota Board of Animal Health will be held either on September 20 or 27, 2023, at a location to be determined.

Ms. Sawatzke asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Hawkins made the motion, and Mr. Compart seconded it. Ms. Sawatzke called for a vote, and members voted unanimously to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Hoefs
Interim Executive Director
Interim State Veterinarian