

April Quarterly Board Meeting Minutes

Date: Tuesday, April 1, 2025

Location: Minnesota Farmers Union (305 Roselawn Ave. E., #200, St. Paul, MN 55117) and online via Microsoft Teams teleconference

Attendance

Board Members

- Erica Sawatzke, President
- Peggy Anne Hawkins, DVM, Vice President
- Jessica Koppien-Fox, DVM
- Steve Neil
- Alex Stade
- Abigail Maynard, DVM

Consultants to the Board

- Nicole Neeser, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- Michelle Medina, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- Michelle Carstensen, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Stacy Holzbauer, Minnesota Department of Health
- Hemant Naikare, University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory

Guests

- Stephan Schaeftbauer, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services
- Mary Wood, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Staff

- Brian Hoefs
- Michael Crusan
- Erik Jopp
- Shauna Voss
- Melissa Smith
- Myah Walker
- Steven Kivisto

Call to Order/Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Ms. Erica Sawatzke called the meeting to order. After introductions, Ms. Sawatzke asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the February meeting. Mr. Alex Stade made the motion. Dr. Peggy Anne Hawkins seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Sawatzke asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Dr. Abigail Maynard moved to approve the agenda for the meeting, and Mr. Steve Neil seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Board of Animal Health Update

Dr. Brian Hoefs, State Veterinarian and Executive Director of the Board of Animal Health, gave an update on actions of Board staff since the last meeting.

The biggest concerns facing the Board have to do with the budget, the current legislative session, the return to office order from the governor, and on-going HPAI/H5N1 outbreaks.

The USDA rolled out the interim rule concerning the Biosecurity Compliance Audit Program on January 1, 2025. The program ties indemnity payments for HPAI outbreaks to biosecurity compliance. The initial rollout was a little clunky and the comment period has been extended. Board staff has conducted three audits so far. A final rule from the USDA will come after comment periods have concluded.

The USDA is still considering a new horse protection rule. The rule is specific to the walking horse industry, which has a troublesome reputation. As written, the rule was too broad and would impact other types of horse shows. The comment period has been extended.

A federal pilot program was going to be put in place for preslaughter HPAI surveillance testing 72-hours before a bird goes to slaughter in Minnesota and South Dakota. The project has been postponed with no updates coming since February.

Questions remain about whether the new federal administration is willing to push vaccines in the fight against HPAI. Minnesota has always advocated for vaccine use, and the Board will approve and use vaccines if they are available. Avian Metapneumovirus (aMPV) vaccines have been approved for import, but it is a killed virus vaccine, which have been shown to be less effective. A live virus vaccine has been approved but is not yet available in the market. Bottlenecks in production and distribution have stood in the way of use. These impacts are being seen across the country. USDA's approval of the live virus expires at the end of the calendar year, and there is a 6- to 8-month lead time on production. Staff are hopeful USDA extends the approval.

African Swine Fever (ASF) has been creeping across Europe. The virus is still circulating quite a bit in the western world. Wild boar hunting is culturally significant in eastern Europe, and pockets of infection have appeared across that area. ASF remains endemic in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

The incursions of New World Screwworm (NWS) into southern Mexico are of particular concern it moves closer to the U.S. USDA has worked closely with its counterparts in affected countries to implement sterile fly programs to slow the advance of flies northward. Unchecked cattle movements, cattle smuggling, and ignoring international import laws have led to the insects spreading despite efforts at mitigation. The economic impacts to the United States agricultural industries would be significant if it were to make it this far north.

Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) virus has been found in several European countries, including Germany (water buffalo), Slovakia, and Hungary/Austria (“guilt by association,” as it was close to the border with Hungary). FMD affects any cloven-hoofed animal, and any cases are of concern, particularly when there is not a clear path of infection. At this point, evidence for how the case appeared in Germany has not been found.

Response plans for ASF and FMD are being reviewed and updated to best prepare for any appearance of the disease in the United States generally and Minnesota specifically.

HPAI, aMPV and H5N1 in dairy cattle remain top priorities for the Board. The incident management team is still operating to combat HPAI. The last detection in the state was Jan. 21, 2025, so we are close to declaring the state free of the disease in commercial poultry. This is likely to change with spring wild bird migrations, which will bring increased chances of infection. This virus is not going away, and Board staff are preparing for another wave of infections in the spring. We could see positive cases appearing within a week or less due to migrations. While HPAI is still labeled a foreign animal disease, it has become clear that there are now local reservoirs harboring the virus; it’s not just moving with migratory birds anymore. The best tools we can implement are biosecurity protocols. A vaccine would also be helpful.

aMPV is still circulating in Minnesota. The opportunities for access to more effective live virus vaccines is an exciting development for poultry producers in the state.

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture is leading the H5N1 Milk Surveillance Sampling program. The Board will notify producers of any positive cases found through the testing program. If there is a positive premises, the Board will issue a quarantine, which permits milk movement to pasteurization, but prevents any unpermitted animal movement on or off infected farms and places other limitations on the premises until the quarantine can be lifted. Nationally, as of March 25, 2025, 996 premises in 18 states have tested positive in milk sampling efforts. California and Idaho have seen the largest number of cases, with California having by far the most (757).

A case of H5N1 has been detected on a Minnesota dairy farm through the milk sampling program. The premises is a repeat detection from 2024. The sampling resulted in a very low virus count, making it hard to tell if it is a new infection or a continuing infection. Sequencing the virus would give a clearer picture of whether it is a repeat infection or not, but because of the low virus count, it is unlikely we’ll be able to figure it out.

A California company has issued a recall on raw pet food that appears to be infected with H5N1, with positive cases appearing in domestic cats. The recall impacts many states. Raw pet food is often found to contain bacteria that can make animals sick and is not safe for them to consume. In this case, raw pet food was found to be directly related to California poultry products.

Ms. Sawatzke asked if the repeated infection at the dairy farm in Minnesota was a new infection or the result of a continuing infection. Dr. Hoefs said we’re working to figure that out. Many questions remain, and research is being developed to determine the answer. The low levels of virus make it hard to sequence, which makes this question harder to answer.

Ms. Sawatzke asked how the Board is working with producers to make sure they can safely move manure off farms quarantined for H5N1. Dr. Hoefs said it is handled on a case-by-case basis. Some farms have lagoons that can hold the manure for extended periods, and other farms move it daily. Dr. Erik Jopp said the Board tracks routes of manure trucks to keep manure from infected premises away from susceptible herds and flocks and

tracks how it is being used, i.e., sprayed on fields, injected, etc. Dr. Hoefs said research is being done to see if the virus is active in the manure or just the waste milk.

Dr. Fox asked about sharing information on raw pet food to combat the spread and use of raw pet food. Mr. Michael Crusan said the Board has not created collateral, but it is a media talking point. Dr. Hoefs said we would consider generating graphics to be shared on social media, etc. Dr. Hoefs said it is important to know these diets are not necessarily safe. Dr. Fox noted the risk of severe infection associated with a raw food diet.

Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory Update

Dr. Hemant Naikare, director of the University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (VDL), gave an update on the lab's work.

The VDL and Minnesota Poultry Testing Laboratory (MPTL) both received full accreditation for all species from the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians Accreditation Committee (AAVLDAC). The accreditation extends through Dec. 31, 2029. This accreditation endorses that the work is of high quality and meets standards established by AAVLDAC. This allows both labs to participate in the National Animal Health Lab Network (NAHLN).

After extensive searches, the VDL has hired Dr. Meghan Moore as Anatomic Pathologist, Dr. Talita Resende as Food Animal Diagnostician, and Dr. Varvara Semenova as Poultry Diagnostician. Dr. Stephanie Rossow, food animal diagnostician/pathologist, will retire as of July 7, 2025.

The VDL has now tested more than 1,400 samples collected for H5N1 in dairy herds as part of the Minnesota milk surveillance program run by MDA. As of February 27, 2025, only one test has resulted in a positive result. That sample tested positive for H5N1 by PCR and ELISA. A research project has been initiated to investigate co-morbidities to H5N1 in dairy cattle. In partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the lab will host 6+ fellows at the VDL and/or MPTL to work on multiple projects. The fellowship will last 1 or 2 years.

In light of work on H5N1 and HPAI, the lab has received increased media coverage. The goal for the VDL when dealing with media is always to let people know what the labs are doing to better safeguard human and animal health. In line with this ideal, the VDL has also ramped up outreach activities. Lab representatives have attended industry tradeshow and conferences around Minnesota and elsewhere, including Minnesota Pork Congress, American Association of Swine Veterinarians Conference, Swine Producer Symposium, PEAK Poultry Show, and the National Animal Disease and Diagnostic Center meeting. Staff are working on a residency survey program to see what sort of specialists are available soon in the market.

College of Veterinary Medicine Update

Dr. Naikare also gave an update on the on-going programs at the University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM).

The first cohort of the South Dakota State University 2+2 program students will graduate in May. This program is a collaboration between SDSU and the University of Minnesota for veterinary medicine students. Third year students will mark the start of their clinical year during a ceremony on April 21, 2025. This is known as the White

Coat Ceremony when students are given a white lab coat in honor of beginning their work in veterinary medicine.

The college's Spectrum of Care Clinic program has received a \$5 million gift from the Stanton Foundation, which paves the way for a new educational facility and clinic. The clinic takes a One Health approach of serving both the medical needs of pets and their owners. The new facility is planned to be situated near the small animal clinic on the University's St. Paul campus.

The St. Paul Campus is undergoing strategic planning. A task force will setup a study in the next 3-5 years to shape the campus moving forward.

Funding for the college is in a state of constant flux. Recent disappointing news is that the Minnesota Veterinary Loan Repayment program may be cut from the Minnesota state budget. More than 40 vets have benefited from this program since 2018. CVM is working hard to ask the governor and legislature to preserve the program. There are misconceptions circulating that the dollars allocated are not being spent. In fact, the money is simply encumbered for future payments over the five years of the program.

Legislative Update

Ms. Michelle Medina, legislative liaison for the Board and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), gave an update on the current legislative session.

The session is at about the halfway point, with many bills yet to be considered. It is a budgeting year, so dollars are the focus of many bills. The governor's original budget recommendation allocated the Board a slight funding increase in future years. After the February budget forecast, it is likely the state will see shortfalls in the tails, or non-budgeting years. At this point, there would not be a change in the Board funding, but there would be a decrease in funding allocated to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's accounts for emergency uses that can be shifted to the Board if the need arises. The governor's recommendations are just recommendations and not a done deal. Usually, negotiations in committees in both the house and senate will result in both bodies agreeing on funding targets. This year, we have a DFL senate target, a House target and a GOP senate target. Since there are varying estimates and priorities, these targets are all different numbers. Quite a bit of negotiation will have to happen before budget bills are submitted, which could happen this week. Then conference committees between the house and senate will be needed to get those budget numbers to the same place.

Ms. Medina said this session has been odd in a few ways. In the house, district 40B was filled by a DFL candidate after a special election, which puts the house at a tie. The DFL still has a one-seat majority in the senate.

Committees must act on bills by April 4, 2025, for them to move forward. By April 11, committees must act on major appropriations or finance bills. The Easter/Passover recess runs from April 11 at noon to April 21 at noon, and no meetings will be scheduled during this time.

Ms. Medina said there have been thousands of bills submitted to the legislature, and the final tally will likely be even higher before the session is done. Among many others, both the house and senate are considering versions of bills to make commercial dog and cat breeder data public, authorizing harvesting of feral swine if they are causing damage, increasing the number of members on the Board to 11 appointees by the governor and making the executive director position an appointment by the governor, abolishing the Board of Animal Health and

transferring its duties and responsibilities to MDA, prohibiting pet stores from selling dogs and cats, establishing a companion animal board and removing those duties from the Board, and numerous others making changes to rules governing cervid farming. Not all these bills will make it out of committee or even be considered by committee in some cases, but Board staff are tracking them closely.

Dr. Peggy Anne Hawkins asked how Board of Directors' members should participate in the legislative process. Should they attend hearings or testify? Ms. Medina said board members can attend any hearing as a member of the public. However, if they wish to represent the Board, board members should do some preparations with her and the state veterinarian ahead of time.

Ms. Sawatzke asked if Dr. Hoefs could give a brief overview on what he has done with testifying this year. Dr. Hoefs said we are usually called to be present in committee hearings to answer any questions from legislators. Bills have been introduced, but not many have been up for debate yet. Ms. Medina said we usually only testify when it is something to do with the governor's budget or if it is part of our agency policy. Ms. Medina tries to make sure SMEs are available at pivotal points. Also, the executive director often meets with legislators outside of hearings to give agency perspective. The goal is to be upfront and honest and not surprise bill authors by speaking up in committee without warning. Ms. Medina said that generally the Board is neutral and does not take a position on bills. Exceptions come in when bills impact the work of the Board and result in changes in funding needs.

Dr. Hoefs said many of the bills presented are running out of time before deadlines, but those bills will still be "alive" for next session as well.

USDA Update

Dr. Stephan Schaeffbauer, USDA Area Veterinarian in Charge of Minnesota, gave an update on the actions of USDA.

Since the HPAI outbreak was declared in February 2022, 1,650 poultry flocks across the country have been affected. Of those flocks, 708 are commercial operations. All 50 states in the U.S. and one territory have been touched by HPAI. Around 153 million birds have been affected. Seventy-seven percent were pullets and egg layers, 12% commercial turkey, 9% broilers or meat chickens, and 2% other types of poultry. Minnesota is a large turkey producing state, so local effects have been largely felt in the turkey industry.

Tracking the spread of HPAI has resulted in some useful information. Around 82% of detections are consistent with wild bird introductions based on genetic testing. The same testing shows about 18% are consistent with farm-to-farm transmission. This illustrates an interesting distinction from the 2015 HPAI outbreak, where genetic testing shows the bulk of detections to be due to farm-to-farm transmission.

APHIS case control studies of commercial table egg layer and commercial turkey disease events (infections) show that biosecurity practices can reduce the spread of infection. The most impactful measures are:

- Keeping rodents away from feed sources.
- Requiring farm personnel to change clothes and shoes.
- Cleaning and disinfecting shared vehicles and equipment.

The New APHIS Biosecurity Assessments and Incentives Program is intended to address biosecurity gaps and enhance biosecurity measures on commercial farms. The incentive program includes a cost share up to 75% USDA, 25% producer for biosecurity improvements. Reimbursement can be made after an eligible audit or assessment is done and key biosecurity measures are addressed.

- Biosecurity Compliance Audit Program (BCAP)
 - An in-person audit is required to provide indemnity eligibility for commercial premises intending to move poultry into a buffer zone of a control area. Also, an audit is required for previously infected premises to provide indemnity eligibility prior to restocking. Administration of the program is a state and federal cooperative effort. In Minnesota, three audits have been successfully completed.
- Biosecurity Incentive-Focused Assessment (BIFA)
 - A virtual voluntary assessment of commercial operations conducted using the BCAP biosecurity audit tool for premises outside of a control area. Evaluates structural and operation biosecurity measures.
- Wildlife Biosecurity Assessment (WBA)
 - An in-person voluntary assessment conducted in select states to identify options for managing wildlife and facility repairs to shield poultry from HPAI. Minnesota was part of the pilot program. These assessments are made at no cost to producers.

Both the BCAP and BIFA review the premises' biosecurity documentation, maintenance of line of separation such as signage, handwashing and footwear changing or footbaths, mortality monitoring procedures, wildlife mitigation, and sanitation of vehicles, equipment and tools.

After requesting an assessment, USDA personnel reach out to the premises to confirm their request and schedule an audit or assessment. The goal is to have initial visits within 2 to 4 weeks of a request. Structural or operational assessments may be conducted virtually using an on-site farm employee. For wildlife assessments, the process is multi-phased and takes several weeks to months to complete. After satisfactory completion of assessments, producers may submit a claim for reimbursement. The timeline for payments is variable. If no critical issues are found on an audit or assessment, producers can submit a proposal for biosecurity improvements that, if approved, can qualify for the same cost-share program with USDA. If the proposal is approved, the producer can then make the improvements and submit a claim for reimbursement.

Minnesota Department of Health Update

Dr. Stacy Holzbauer, State Public Health Veterinarian, gave an update from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH).

Nationally, there have been 70 human cases of H5N1 detected. Of those, 41 cases are associated with dairy cattle exposures, and 24 are associated with poultry farms and processing facilities. Three cases were found through routine influenza surveillance. There have been no new human cases since February. In Minnesota, 2,457 exposures have been reported to MDH, the vast majority of which (2,304) are associated with poultry, with just 129 associated with dairy exposures and 24 exposures associated with companion animals. Six people are currently in monitoring, but of 82 people tested, no cases of human infection of H5N1 have been found in Minnesota. Personal protective equipment is still available to dairy and poultry production, milk processing, and slaughter facilities. Most requests have come from dairy operations.

MDH has hired two people to work with local public health departments and offices to promote seasonal influenza vaccines to farm workers. Eleven vaccination clinics have been scheduled, with 4 farms hosting the clinics.

MDH has been working with the Public Health Laboratory (PHL) and University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine to examine how Carbapenem-Resistant Enterobacterales (CRE) arise, how they spread, and to identify populations of people and pets that are most at risk. Resources are available from CDC, MDH and elsewhere on this. Antimicrobial resistance happens when infection-causing bacteria and fungi defeat medications. Carbapenems are a class of antibiotics that are commonly used in human healthcare for multi-drug-resistant infections but are rarely used in veterinary medicine. Enterobacterales is an order of Gram-negative bacteria. These types of bacteria are a common cause of infections in hospitals and in the community.

Couples in households with dogs have more similar microbiomes than those living alone because of additional shared microbial sources. Humans and pets can share gut and skin bacteria. We care about CREs in companion animals because pets often receive broad spectrum antimicrobials instead of targeted therapy, which raises the risk of antimicrobial resistance transmission between pets and people and among pets in homes and clinics. Reports of CREs in animals have exploded globally in the last five years, making it a growing area of concern for public health and veterinary medicine. Overall incidence in the U.S. is unknown, but multiple reports of CREs have been identified among U.S. cats and published in peer-reviewed literature.

MDH is being forced to lay off over 233 people including 176 employees and 57 contractors due to budgetary concerns from a sudden loss of federal funding.

Board of Animal Health Budget Update

Ms. Melissa Smith, Business Manager for the Board, gave an update on the Board's budget.

A general breakdown of the fiscal year 2025 Board of Animal Health budget shows that salaries are the largest expense at 72% of the budget, with vendor services and MNIT support accounting for an additional 11% each. Travel and fleet expenses is roughly 2% and space rental and utilities on office space accounts for the remaining 4%.

Since the December Board meeting, there have been several key developments impacting the Board's budget. In January, USDA conducted sessions for groups with cooperative agreements and said that funding was to remain stable. In February, federal funding in the form of cooperative agreements with USDA became uncertain. Board staff immediately began discussions on contingency plans if federal funding was to disappear. In March, new cooperative agreements were slated to begin in April, but USDA was unable to give assurances that new agreements would be in place. On March 5, 2025, Board leadership enacted a spending freeze to control expenses and reduce overall spending. Around \$350,000 in salary expenses and about \$290,000 in testing costs were covered by cooperative agreements with USDA. The Board elected to cancel contracts in place to cover costs of disease surveillance testing. As of this meeting, it appears federal funds are once again available. With this resumption of federal funding, we plan to execute new contracts for our cooperative agreements and resume covering some testing expenses. The Board will continue efforts to restrict expenses and reduce costs.

Looking into FY2026 and moving forward, we expect costs to increase in salary, MNIT expenses, and testing rates for disease surveillance. The biennial budget still has to be determined pending the legislative session. We

asked for \$500,000 in increased funding, but budget bills so far have included less than this amount when there are increases at all. Without an increase in funding, the Board may have to make difficult decisions about what will be cut.

Dr. Hawkins asked if this all means we are good for now, but the future is uncertain. Ms. Smith said that we are set through the end of the fiscal year at the end of June. Usually by the end of the legislative session in May we have a pretty good idea of what budget we are dealing with for the next fiscal year. The current session is slated to end May 19. We currently have budget estimates, but until we have a final number, fiscal year 2026 to 2027 is still unknown.

MDA Milk Sampling Surveillance Program Update

Dr. Nicole Neeser, Director of the Dairy and Meat Inspection Division at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), gave an update on the milk sampling H5N1 surveillance program.

In accordance with the USDA order for H5N1 milk sampling and the creation of the National Milk Testing Strategy, the Minnesota milk sampling program has been established to test samples of milk taken from all dairy farms in Minnesota for H5N1 infection. This is a collaborative effort led by MDA with the Board, VDL and MDH.

The National Milk Testing Strategy includes a five-stage approach. We are currently in the second and third stages of determining a state's H5N1 dairy cattle status and conducting bulk milk tank testing in stage 2 and detecting and responding to the virus in affected states in stage 3. In Minnesota, the decision was made to skip the silo testing and instead focus on testing samples taken from individual premises. Processing plant silos can contain milk from many dairy producers and testing at this stage would require significant trace back work to find where the milk originated. Instead, Minnesota's sampling program involves taking subsamples from samples already collected by milk haulers and having those samples tested for H5N1 at industry-specific labs and/or the VDL. The positive case detected in Minnesota designates the state as an affected state. Of the 46 states participating in the National Milk Testing Strategy, 3 (Colorado, Pennsylvania and Mississippi) have been designated unaffected through sequential testing. Minnesota, Texas, Arizona, California, Nevada, and Idaho are affected. The rest of the states participating are provisionally unaffected while testing is ongoing.

Minnesota's program is based on the goal of all cow dairy farms to be sampled within each "effort," which is a month. In the state, there are 1,623 cow farm permits in place. The goal is to have a sample from each farm every month. Statistical analysis shows that we would have to collect around 1,400 farms to be confident that we do not have the disease at any given point in time. Sampling will continue until we demonstrate the state is unaffected by having three consecutive months of negative samples. All producers are tested regardless of where milk is shipped, even out of state. Producers cannot decline to participate since the samples are obtained using samples already collected for other regulatory purposes. As a cooperator with USDA, MDA has the regulatory authority to collect these samples in the dairy supply chain.

As of March 28, 2025, 1,466 farms were sampled through the program, which is roughly 90% of cow dairy farms in Minnesota. Aside from small logistical issues with double submissions or incorrect deliveries, the process ran smoothly. The original plan was to begin testing in January and early February, but federal funding issues delayed the start of the program. MDA has received a pre-award letter from the USDA to pay for most of the sampling costs including testing supplies, shipping containers, and industry lab sampling rates. Any costs not covered until the cooperative agreement with USDA will be covered by the state Ag Emergency Fund.

Mr. Alex Stade asked if the milk sampling program includes goat dairy operations. Dr. Neeser said that goats are not included in the testing due to not being included in the USDA order for animals to test. The health effects of goats contracting H5N1 are not the same as in dairy cattle. Dr. Hoefs noted that the only detection in goats nationally was in Minnesota, but it was an odd case associated more with backyard poultry than with dairy operations.

Poultry Update

Dr. Shauna Voss, Interim Assistant Director in charge of Poultry Programs, gave an update on poultry diseases in Minnesota.

Between 2022-2025, the National Veterinary Services Laboratory has confirmed H5N1/HPAI in 185 poultry cases in Minnesota. Fifty counties in the state have been affected and 9.1 million birds have been depopulated. On March 28, 2025, the State of Minnesota completely fulfilled the necessary actions and surveillance requirements to again self-declare the state free from HPAI in poultry. This covered commercial operations only. There are still three backyard operations under a 120-day fallow period. The incident in Minnesota will be considered final, closed, and resolved after all fallow periods have been met and all premises quarantines have been lifted. It should be another couple of months before this can happen.

In the last 30 days, there have been 50 confirmed positive flocks (11 commercial and 39 backyard flocks) affecting 2.08 million birds nationwide. Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois continue to be the hot spots. Ohio particularly saw many cases occurring in egg layer flocks, and nearly 23 million birds had to be depopulated. This could be partially why egg prices have increased nationally.

- Board staff have conducted three audits as part of the USDA Biosecurity Compliance Audit Program (BCAP). There are 11 auditors trained to conduct the audits. On average, audits have taken anywhere from 3 days to 45 days based on the time from when documentation was requested from a premises to when the auditor could sign off as complete. Initial audits involved a bit of a learning curve for recently trained auditors, but the process should get easier and more efficient over time. In efforts to assist with that efficiency, outreach is being conducted with producers, encouraging them to evaluate their current written biosecurity plans now to ensure all the items in the BCAP audit are addressed. Dr. Voss noted that she has requested audit guidelines from USDA to ensure there is consistency in how the audits are conducted.

Avian Metapneumovirus (aMPV) continues to be a problem in Minnesota with significant impacts on producers. Mortality rates have met or exceeded rates seen with HPAI in some cases. Until a vaccine is available and in use, rates of aMPV infection will continue to be high. MDA's Rural Finance Authority has declared an emergency for three animal diseases: aMPV, HPAI and H5N1 in dairy cattle. This is not an indemnity program but does provide zero-interest loans for farmers whose operations have sustained losses due to the diseases from April 1, 2024, to February 24, 2025.

There are two types of vaccines available for aMPV: inactivated or killed virus vaccines and modified live virus vaccines. Killed virus vaccines are less effective at providing protection compared to live virus vaccines and being injection-only may prohibit use. The newly approved live virus vaccines are more effective. Due to limits on availability, priority in distribution has been given to hatcheries. They are expected to become more available as the supply increases.

The Board will be once again partnering with MDH, the MDH Public Health Laboratory (PHL), and the University of Minnesota on a project to track zoonotic disease in backyard poultry through testing chick papers. Backyard poultry keeping is increasing in the U.S., with more than 50 million birds sold annually. Each life stage presents a potential risk for disease transmission, particularly with *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*. The objective of the project is to determine which strains of *Salmonella* are present in specific varieties of birds and in specific shipments and to share this information with source hatcheries so they can act on the information to reduce the risk to consumers. In 2023 and 2024, the MDH PHL sequenced 168 *Salmonella* isolates that were identified from chick papers collected at feed stores and cultured by the University of Minnesota at the Mid-Central Research and Outreach Center (MCROC); 7 different serotypes of *Salmonella* were identified. Four of these *Salmonella* serotypes were found in sick people who reported exposure to backyard poultry. In total, 74 cases of human *Salmonella* infections in Minnesota could be tied back to backyard poultry exposure. The 2025 plan is to enroll up to 11 retail feed stores in the program and deliver sample collection kits to each store. Chick papers (bedding) are collected by store employees, and Board/MDH/USDA staff retrieve the samples for testing and culture and isolation is performed by MCROC. Positive cases found are then sent to the PHL for whole genome sequencing to determine the serotype.

Dr. Hoefs asked Dr. Voss to clarify the connection between BCAP audits and the state self-declaring freedom from HPAI. Dr. Voss said until the state declares disease freedom, the affected farms need to be reaudited every six months. Dr. Voss said that the March 28, 2025, declaration should free farms from the repeated audit requirement, but additional clarification may be necessary on this detail from USDA. This would essentially halt the need to do BCAP audits until another infection is detected.

Dr. Naikare asked what sorts of gaps in biosecurity have been found during the BCAP audits that require remediation. Dr. Voss said what has been found so far are largely gaps in what is written in the farm's biosecurity plan. For example, the audit notes whether dogs and cats are allowed into a premises' barns. If the farm's written biosecurity plan does not specify that, the auditor cannot sign off on the farm following this rule. The other issue that has come up, said Dr. Voss, are sign-in sheets for who is able to cross perimeter buffer areas on affected farms.

DNR Wildlife Veterinarian Introduction

Dr. Mary Wood, State Wildlife Veterinarian with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, gave a brief introduction. Dr. Wood detailed her experience working across the country and noted that she looks forward to partnering with the Board to prevent animal disease in the state.

Appointment of Executive Director

After closed discussion, Ms. Sawatzke asked for a motion to reappoint Dr. Brian Hoefs as Board of Animal Health Executive Director and State Veterinarian for another year. Dr. Hawkins made the motion. Mr. Stade seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Board Officer Elections

Ms. Sawatzke opened the floor for nominations for President of the Board of Directors and Vice President of the Board of Directors. Dr. Hawkins nominated Ms. Sawatzke for president. Dr. Hawkins made the motion to approve Ms. Sawatzke as president. Dr. Abigail Maynard seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Ms. Sawatzke accepted the role.

Nominations were then opened for vice president. Mr. Steve Neil nominated Dr. Hawkins for vice president. No other nominations were made. Mr. Neil moved to approve Dr. Hawkins as vice president. Mr. Stade seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Dr. Hawkins accepted the role.

Closed Hearings

The Board of Directors went into closed session to conduct two hearings with producers not in compliance with statute governing cervid farms.

The meeting was reopened to discuss the results of the closed session.

Ms. Sawatzke gave a summary of the first closed session: We took a vote. The vote was 4-2 to provide the cervid producer 6 months and 9 days to come back fully into compliance, which is by our September meeting, our quarterly meeting.

Dr. Hawkins made a motion to go back into closed session to conduct the second hearing. Mr. Neil seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

After the second closed session, Ms. Sawatzke summarized the hearing: Our Board has voted to provide the cervid producer 6 months and 9 days to come fully into compliance by our September quarterly meeting, which is September 10.

Next Meeting

Ms. Sawatzke stated the third quarterly meeting of the Board will be held Wednesday, September 10, 2025, at a location to be determined, as decided at the February 4, 2025, meeting.

The fourth quarterly meeting of the Board will be held Wednesday, December 3, 2025, at a location to be determined.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Hoefs
Executive Director
State Veterinarian