

Meeting Minutes: Quarterly Board Meeting

Date: 9/27/2023
Minutes prepared by: Daniel Callahan
Location: The Upper Room (100 W. College Dr., Suite 300, Marshall, Mn 56258) and teleconference on Microsoft Teams

Attendance

Board Members

- Erica Sawatzke, President
- Peggy Anne Hawkins, Vice President
- Steve Neil
- Jessica Koppien-Fox
- Alex Stade
- Brandon Schafer

Consultants to the Board

- Michelle Medina, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- Stephan Schaeffbauer, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services
- Joni Scheftel, Minnesota Department of Health
- Albert Rovira, University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory
- Laura Molgaard, University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine
- Mackenzie Reberg, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services

Guests

- Albert Canturri, University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory

Staff

- Heather Damico
- Veronica Bartsch
- Shauna Voss
- Krista Lautenschlager
- Daniel Callahan
- Erin Crider
- Melissa Smith-Jantzen
- Lisa Loots
- Courtney Wheeler
- Erik Jopp
- Katie Cornille
- Brian Hoefs
- John King
- Myah Walker
- Allison Pollack
- Brad Peterson
- Kayla Pierson
- Jason Cater
- Betsy Lempelius
- Susan Chapman
- Jesica Aho
- Blia Kha
- Addie Evans
- Terry Sistad
- Robert Predmore
- Tony LaBarre
- Carissa Allen
- Laura TeBrake
- Diane Elliott-Englin
- Jeanne Rothfork

Call to Order/Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Ms. Erica Sawatzke called the meeting to order. After introductions, Ms. Sawatzke then asked for a motion to approve the draft minutes from the April 12, 2023, quarterly meeting. Dr. Peggy Anne Hawkins made a motion, and Dr. Jessica Koppien-Fox seconded it. Ms. Sawatzke called for a vote, with all board members voting aye to approve the minutes.

Ms. Sawatzke then asked for a motion to approve the meeting agenda. Mr. Brandon Schafer made a motion, with Mr. Alex Stade seconding. Ms. Sawatzke called for a vote, with all board members voting aye to approve the minutes.

Board of Animal Health Update

Dr. Brian Hoefs, Executive Director of the Board of Animal Health, spoke on staffing changes at the board, ongoing work with tribal nations in the state, and the transfer of the White-Tail Deer program from Board supervision to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), as well as other topics.

Dr. Hoefs noted that since the April meeting staffing at the board as seen a general boost with more in office and field veterinarian positions filled. A few positions remain pending. Additionally, Dr. Hoefs welcomed new board members Mr. Brandon Schafer and Mr. Steve Neil and thanked them for their willingness to serve.

Dr. Hoefs discussed tribal relations training with the Red Lake Nation, including recent meetings on cultural learning, agricultural programs in schools, walleye reintroduction, the tribe's bison herd and general relationship building between the Board and the Tribe.

As of July 1, 2023, the White-Tail Deer Program transferred from the Board's supervision to the Minnesota DNR. The transfer is on-going with many unknown factors; however, the process is moving forward. The DNR and the Board have established an interagency agreement to continue to work together on the program, with review in 90 days.

The Board has been tasked to work with DNR/Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) on a feral swine and mink report for the state Legislature. Currently, mink is somewhat unregulated in the state. The Board will give input on the report.

Ms. Sawatzke asked Dr. Hoefs to clarify the future of the swine program leadership at the Board, as Dr. Hoefs transitions to executive director. Dr. Hoefs noted the process would take some time, but Dr. Erik Jopp would be taking the lead in the swine program.

Legislative Update

Ms. Michelle Medina, legislative liaison for the Board and Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), gave an update on the state of a possible federal government shut down and its potential impacts for the Board and MDA. Ms. Medina noted that the Board would face lesser impacts due to different funding streams, but MDA could possibly see larger impacts. Additionally, farmers should expect to see payments pause during a shutdown. Both agencies are planning proactively for the possibility, but there are many unknowns and impacts could vary, said Ms. Medina. Notably, the Farm Bill has not yet been completed.

Ms. Medina noted that the 2024 Minnesota Legislative session begins Feb. 12, 2024, and is due to be a policy session, but could include passing a supplemental budget. The policy updates for the Board will likely include reviewing and updating policies that are out of date and removing obsolete statutes or rules.

Dr. Hawkins asked Ms. Medina to clarify what communications to legislators would be appropriate at this time. Ms. Medina said talking points can be provided as well as details for board members for speaking as a private citizen versus speaking as a board member.

USDA Update

Dr. Mackenzie Reberg gave an update from the USDA on the National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) Sheep 2024 Study. The study is an ongoing project taking many years to prepare, implement, and utilize. The study asks questions of producers related to herd management, biosecurity and non-regulatory disease management. Dr. Reberg noted that the data is important for shaping policy on the commodities. The process is slow, said Dr. Reberg, but important.

The scrapie surveillance program is extremely busy, said Dr. Reberg. The target for the fiscal year is 40,000 samples tested. So far in fiscal year 2023, 24,511 samples have been tested. Dr. Reberg gave kudos to the Minnesota field team for exceeding sampling goals.

Hiring has proven difficult, said Dr. Reberg, with several open positions, including a newly created position in the Ready Response Corps ready to begin in December. With two internal hires, three new positions are filled on the MN-VS team.

Dr. Wheeler noted that Dr. Steve Just deserved recognition for excellent work coordinating sample collection for scrapie program.

Minnesota Department of Health Update

Dr. Joni Scheftel introduced Ms. Kelly Schenck to give an update on the July 2023 animal anthrax cases. In Minnesota, animal anthrax pops up roughly every 10 years. Current cases have been in the northwest of the state, but historic cases were in the southwest. MDH typically is not involved in animal anthrax cases, said Dr. Scheftel. In the July cases, the Board notified MDH of the outbreak. Six people were exposed, the veterinarian and five producers. Two of the cases were low risk and four of them were moderate risk. Notably, said Dr. Scheftel, personal protective equipment, such as gloves and long pants, was missing.

The Board and MDH have coordinated on an educational document for producers titled “Animal Anthrax Exposure: How to Protect your Family and Farm.”

Dr. Hawkins requested an update on COVID-19. Dr. Scheftel replied that her team was no longer working on COVID-19.

Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory Update

Dr. Albert Rovira gave an update on the University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (VDL). Dr. Rovira noted that fiscal year 2023 went well for the lab. Revenues increased by 11 percent, testing increased by 2 percent and the lab ended the year in the black. Despite a busy year, Dr. Rovira noted that the lab is

understaffed with the director position and other positions remaining open. Dr. Rovira said the lab is looking forward to a balanced budget in FY 2024 and a smaller surplus due to fully staffing the lab.

Dr. Rovira said the VDL is seeing fewer samples this year, though summer is a variable season. Plans to retrain and recruit staff are in place with hopes for increased salaries. The costs of supplies have gone up quite a bit over the last year, but internal discussions are in place to increase fees to compensate for increased costs.

The laboratory has several open positions but has staffing plans in place. Dr. Albert Canturri is the new pathologist. Dr. Canturri studied in Spain and is originally from Andorra. As far as the director position, Dr. Rovira noted that they have conducted interviews with some promising candidates. The poultry pathologist position is vacant, and a committee has been established to conduct the search. Dr. Rovira said the VDL is not competitive on salary, but benefits are good for recruiting new staff. They are focusing on job fairs and advertising positions for recruiting candidates.

Dr. Rovira said the state legislature allotted \$1.25 million for equipment purchases. A lot of equipment was back ordered, but more than 100 pieces of equipment have been ordered. Every section of the VDL has had equipment updated, including saws, tables, hoists, PCR machine, and others. The university has agreed to replace the digester as they own the machine. The VDL managed the digester to dispose of infectious materials. A new digester should be in place by December 2024.

New testing processes are in place. Dr. Rovira noted that automation for PCR testing was an identified area for improvement and automation. Additionally, chronic wasting disease testing is not done in-house, but Dr. Rovira said the lab is working on bringing it back in house.

Dr. Scheftel noted increased cases of tularemia, also known as “rabbit fever” in cats and people and inquired about possible PCR testing for the disease. Dr. Rovira answered that an internal meeting had been recently held to discuss future testing needs and said he would add tularemia to the list.

Mr. Schafer asked if there will be no digester in place until a new one is installed. Dr. Rovira replied the current machine can still be used, but it’s getting old and failing. Processes are in place when it fails. There will be a time 2-3 months when there will be no digester while substantial remodeling is done to accommodate the new machine.

College of Veterinary Medicine Update

Dr. Laura Molgaard, Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Minnesota, gave an update on the college. Dr. Molgaard said the leadership team is almost complete after four years of transitions due to a hiring freeze during the COVID-19 pandemic. The college has created a new strategic plan for 2023-2026 focusing on engagement of people, infrastructure, and partnerships and constituents.

The class of 2028 has recently accepted 1800 applications for its 125 seats, said Dr. Molgaard. The college has recently created a new veterinary skills laboratory as the first phase of redevelopment of student spaces for education.

The college’s 2024 legislative agenda includes revamping licensure for veterinary technicians and looking to change rules to allow special temporary licenses for university faculty who have studies in places not currently recognized by Minnesota’s Veterinary Practice Act

Dr. Hawkins asked: Do you have any information on the makeup of the class that just started this fall? I.e., from South Dakota in the later program?

Dr. Molgaard said the total applicant numbers are up, and applicants from South Dakota are up. She did not know exact numbers for the freshman class. Don't have the breakdowns in front of me.

Ms. Sawatzke asked how many students come in with an interest in large animals or being farm vets and how many actually stick with that. Dr. Molgaard replied that there are two answers to that question: Generally, there is a 98 percent retention in the Vet Fast Food program, an early decision program. A lot of them also come through the general admissions process. More info to come. "Vastly more successful" at training food animal vets than many other programs due to training programs, mentorships from instructors, etc.

Poultry Update

Ms. Krista Lautenschlager gave a brief overview of the poultry program at the Board. She noted that the program is based at the Minnesota Poultry Testing Laboratory (MPTL) in Willmar, Minn., a shared venture between the Board and the UMN Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory. The regulatory work onsite is done by Board employees, and the lab work is performed by VDL workers.

The MPTL exists as part of the National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP), a national plan set up in the 1930s to combat Salmonella Pullorum-Typhoid, a disease in birds, said Ms. Lautenschlager. The NPIP runs multiple programs and has recognized standards for the evaluation of poultry with respect to freedom from NPIP diseases. As part of the NPIP and the work of the MPTL, trainings are conducted throughout the year for authorized poultry testing agents, NPIP participants are inspected annually with program testing compliance verified, and the three live bird markets in Minnesota are visited monthly and tested for avian influenza. Biosecurity audits on commercial facilities continue to be conducted biennially per NPIP Program standards.

Dr. Shauna Voss, senior veterinarian in charge of the Board's poultry program, gave an update on the 2022-2023 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) event.

According to Dr. Voss:

- After 531 days the HPAI event is officially over.
- March 25, 2022 - we saw first cases in Meeker and Mower counties.
- Feb. 17, 2023 – fulfilled requirements to self-declare free from HPAI in poultry.
- Sept. 7, 2023 – last quarantine was released after 120-day fallow period.
- In all 112 cases with 109 premises, over 39 counties, 4.2 million birds depopulated.

Dr. Voss also explained that the ongoing shortage of Pullorum-Typhoid antigen continues, making testing for the disease difficult. There is only one manufacturer of the antigen, AVS Bio, and the material is on back order. Dr. Voss said the MPTL is working with the NPIP office on a contingency plan should the antigen on hand run out.

Dr. Hoefs asked about the timeline of the migration pattern for wild birds carrying HPAI. Dr. Voss answered that spring migration and fall migrations are times for HPAI spread because birds are moving. Until roughly the end of November, extra vigilance is required. She said that fewer cases have been appearing nationally, but that does not mean HPAI is gone.

Mr. Stade inquired about the risks of HPAI to backyard poultry flocks and the impacts of the 2022-2023 event. Dr. Voss replied that there was a backyard flock impacted in Nobles County in May 2023.

Update to Swine Vesicular Testing Plan at High Incidence Swine Plants

Dr. Reberg gave a presentation on the Swine Vesicular Testing Plan at High Incidence Swine Plants. There are a few different diseases that cause similar lesions, particularly some foreign animal diseases. The lesions occur on the snout, in the mouth, all around the oral cavity, or on the coronary bands of the feet. Since the clinical signs for some foreign animal diseases can be similar to those found in, for example, the endemic Seneca Virus (SVA), reporting and testing triggers a Foreign Animal Disease Investigation (FADI). Said Dr. Reberg, if something like Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) were to be found in the U.S., there would be large economic impacts to the swine industry. In 2023, 1277 FADI's took place.

Dr. Reberg said conducting FADI is a huge strain on partner organizations and difficult for processing facilities. While ending the FADIs is tempting, it would allow for the possible spread of FMD, which would have negative impacts on industry. A pilot program is in place to streamline the process and make it easier to get animals who were under investigation to slaughter with the following goals:

- Continue to investigate lesions at high incidence plants.
- Maintain continuity of business at the facility.
- Reduce the number of FADI submissions.
- Reduce the strain and resource demand on stakeholders, state and federal animal health staff.

Dr. Reberg explained the criteria for SVA High Incidence Facilities:

- Four weeks with 3 or more FADI.
- Area vet in charge may request the facility be added to the list.
- Approval from National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN), the Federal Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (FADDL) and swine health staff

Dr. Reberg asked for questions.

Dr. Hawkins commented that the process appears to be accommodating of the needs of all involved, but expressed concern that complacency might allow for disease to enter the swine population. She then was asked what the rate of finding the vesicles at the slaughter plant versus finding them before the animal leaves the farm. Dr. Reberg stated that the majority of investigations are on the farm level and are often reported by area veterinarians. Thankfully, said Dr. Reberg, vets know that reporting is necessary.

Companion Animal and Rabies Update

Dr. Veronica Bartsch of the Board's companion animal program gave an overview of the program. The program investigates reports of disease in companion animals, including the following:

- Canine Brucellosis
- Canine Influenza
- Blastomycosis
- Tularemia
- Plague, etc.

Many of the diseases, such as rabies, tularemia and blastomycosis, investigated by the program are zoonotic, meaning they can be passed between animals and humans, requiring partnership with USDA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and MDH.

Dr. Bartsch noted that the program has seen a large increase in the number of contacts from the public including calls from veterinarians and animal owners. With the large increase in program work, streamlining and process improvement has become a priority.

Ms. Betsy Lempelius gave an update on the Board's Rabies Program. Domestic animal rabies infection rates have dropped since 1970 due in part to vaccination and in part to decrease in skunk populations, which are the primary reservoir for the virus. Also, the eradication of the type of rabies that dogs usually get has helped decrease the number of cases.

Ms. Lempelius explained that in Minnesota, there are multiple organizations that make up the rabies response. The UMN VDL does the specimen preparations, the MDH Public Health Laboratory does the testing, the MDH Zoonotic Diseases Unit does the human exposure investigation, the Board does any animal exposure investigations, and the CDC laboratory in Atlanta does any confirmatory testing.

So far in 2023, there have been 197 investigations conducted on rabies. Of those cases, MDH conducted 197 for human contact, and the Board investigated 123 for animal disease. As Ms. Lempelius said, there is "never a dull rabies day."

Ms. Sawatzke asked why Hennepin County appears to have the most reported rabies cases and inquired if it was due to the higher population of humans. Ms. Lempelius answered that the answer is multi-fold: There are more people in Hennepin County, and housing is typically older, thus having more gaps for bats to squeeze into. More people, more bats, more submissions.

Ms. Kayla Pierson gave an overview of the Board's Commercial Dog and Cat Breeder Program. Due to law passed in May 2014, as of July 1, 2015, commercial breeders of dogs and cats must be licensed by the Board. As of June 30, 2023, said Ms. Pierson, 107 breeders were licensed in the state.

A Breeder Excellence Program has been created by the Board to encourage breeders to go above and beyond the standards set by Board rules. Breeders can earn badges in multiple areas:

- Behavior and Socialization
- Continuing Education
- Facility Management
- Canine Brucellosis
- FeLV and FIV Screening
- Health Screening

Being a part of the program allows breeders to be listed on the Board website. Breeders must reapply for the program annually.

Dr. Fox asked why the program had relatively low enrollment compared to the number of licensed breeders. Dr. Bartsch said it was largely an opportunity for education; not enough breeders are aware of the program and many want to participate once they know about it.

Dr. Fox asked if there are illegal unlicensed breeders in Minnesota and who tracks them down. Dr. Bartsch replied that the Board does not have the resources to hunt down people operating without a license but does take complaints and investigates any reports.

Dr. Courtney Wheeler noted the excellent graphics created by Ms. Erin Cider for the Breeder Excellence Program.

Ms. Lisa Ehlen gave a brief overview on the requirement for importation of dogs and cats into Minnesota. In short, said Ms. Ehlen, dogs and cats brought into the state are required to have a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI) and quarantine under certain circumstances as well as a current rabies vaccination. The Board is working to bring the process online to streamline and improve the usage of CVIs.

Ms. Ehlen noted that quarantine is required of dogs and cats that are brought into the state from places where diseases like African Swine Fever are known to exist. A 10-day quarantine is done to prevent the spread of infection. The quarantine is typically done in the home of the owner.

Dr. Fox asked if only topical medications are permitted for ticks and fleas. Dr. Bartsch said that oral medication is fine as long as it is approved by the EPA and FDA for the killing of ticks.

Exhibition and Fair Season Overview

Dr. Katie Cornille, senior veterinarian in charge of the Bovine Disease, Traceability, and Livestock Concentration Programs, gave an overview of the Livestock Concentration Points program, noted staff changes and discussed future planning for the program.

Dr. Cornille specified that livestock concentration points are events when livestock from multiple farms are concentrated in one area, like a sale or exhibition. A “community sale” is “the public sale of livestock or poultry for purposes other than immediate slaughter, from any location in Minnesota where two or more persons who own livestock offer the livestock for public sale. [This] includes regularly scheduled livestock auction markets, consignment sales of livestock and street markets of livestock.” Dr. Cornille also gave the definition of an “exhibition” as, “bringing livestock or poultry owned by two or more persons to one location in Minnesota for judging or for display to the public, except when there is only one animal of each species exhibited.”

Dr. Cornille specified that community sales require permits, an official veterinarian, facility safety rules, and a sale manager. The official veterinarian is required to verify health and movement requires and verify animal identifications. The official veterinarian for events can be a category 1 or category 2 accredited vet. Poultry-only sales still require certain disease testing be completed but do not require an official veterinarian. Additional requirements for state-federally covered markets were reviewed. Dr. Cornille said that a permit is required for all exhibitions with certain exceptions for horse-only shows and standalone rodeos.

Since the last Board meeting in April, the program has hired two new staff members: Dr. Cornille and Nancy Reeck, a state program administrator. Additionally, the program has begun outreach activities, including piloting a regional meeting for fairground managers, veterinarians and Board vets, a continuing education webinar for veterinarians and a webinar for livestock concentration point managers.

Dr. Rovira asked if there are regulations regarding duration of transport for livestock in Minnesota, noting that in Europe there are specific places where livestock rest. Dr. Cornille replied that there are regulations regarding duration of transport. Those regulations are federal.

Dr. Fox asked if having category 1 and 2 due to the difficulty in finding vets? Is there guidance for veterinarians taking on these responsibilities for different animals? Dr. Cornille acknowledged to challenge of finding official vets and said that the Board provides guidance in our handbooks as well as other resources for vets.

Horse Shows and Rules

Dr. Heather Damico, senior veterinarian in charge of the equine program at the Board, gave a presentation on equine exhibition permitting considerations.

Dr. Damico discussed the common equine diseases that spread easily at horse shows including:

- Equine infectious anemia
- Equine herpes
- Equine influenza
- Strangles
- Warts

Dr. Damico said the goal is to look for these diseases to prevent any of them from spreading at horse shows. There are plenty of other diseases that are vectorborne, etc., but these are the ones that affect shows.

Dr. Damico noted that the direct economic impact of the horse industry in Minnesota is \$541 million and more than 15,000 jobs. In Minnesota, about 680,000 households have horse enthusiasts, of which about 29,000 own a horse. Many horse owners take lessons, manage barns and train horses. Up to 14,000 Minnesota residents volunteer time toward horse-related events.

A shortage of veterinarians is causing permitting issues with horse exhibitions. A veterinarian is required to visit an exhibition at least daily, but in rural areas, it can be difficult to find a veterinarian to visit the exhibition. Rural areas are commonly where horse shows are held.

Dr. Damico said that, in effort to combat this issue, the Board, in conjunction with the University of Minnesota Equine Extension, held a listening session on Oct. 24, 2023, for show organizers, veterinarians, and other horse-related industry people. The goal is to find ideas for changing rules or finding solutions to ease the permitting process.

Historically speaking, said Dr. Damico, there are many industry misconceptions regarding rules and whether folks need permits, etc., so there is a lot of opportunity for education. The rules have not changed recently, but confusion exists in the community.

Dr. Hawkins asked how long the rules for permitting have been in place and whether the listening session could be considered process improvement. Further, Dr. Hawkins asked for a bulleted list of the rulemaking process at a future meeting. Dr. Damico said the rules have been in place for 37 years. Dr. Hoefs said staff can provide a bulleted list on rule making procedures.

Dr. Hawkins also asked for information about being Board members and being allowed to talk to task force or listening sessions. Dr. Wheeler said a flowchart could be provided to Board members on the subject.

Mr. Schafer asked if an opportunity exists to use a virtual format for veterinarians to “visit” animals before a show to lessen the impact on owners and show managers. Dr. Hoefs said this is the sort of idea staff hopes to collect from the listening session on Oct. 24.

Mr. Schafer asked if campgrounds that promote horseback riding are subject to the same scrutiny as horse shows for permitting. Dr. Damico said no.

Adjournment and Next Meeting

The next quarterly meeting of the Minnesota Board of Animal Health will be held Dec. 6, 2023, at a location to be determined.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Hoefs
Executive Director
State Veterinarian