

## Meeting Minutes: Quarterly Board Meeting

Date: 12/08/2021

Location: Aurora Pharmaceutical (1196 MN-3, Northfield, MN 55057) and  
Teleconference via Microsoft Teams

### Attendance

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#### Board Members

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

#### Consultants to the Board

- Michelle Carstensen, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Mary Donahue, USDA-APHIS, Veterinary Services
- Stephan Schaeftbauer, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS), Veterinary Services
- Joni Scheftel, Minnesota Department of Health
- Jerry Torrison, University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory

#### Guests

- Paul Anderson, Veterinarian and former Board staff
- Jeff Bender, University of Minnesota School of Public Health
- Robyn Corcoran, USDA-APHIS, Veterinary Services
- Tony Dank, USDA-APHIS, Veterinary Services
- Margaret Dexter, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Jenna Fier, USDA-APHIS, Veterinary Services
- Brad Finstad, Minnesota Turkey Growers Association
- Elaine Hanson, Minnesota Pet Breeders Association
- Brenda Hartkopf, Elk Producer
- John King, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- Michelle Medina, Minnesota Farmers Union
- Greg Moulton, USDA-APHIS, Veterinary Services
- Tamara Nelsen, Minnesota AgriGrowth Council
- David Preisler, Minnesota Pork Producers Association
- Albert Rovira, University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory
- Allison VanDerWal, Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association

## Staff

- Beth Thompson
- Linda Glaser
- Dale Lauer
- Brian Hoefs
- Greg Suskovic
- Shauna Voss
- Courtney Wheeler
- Annie Balghiti
- Kara Schmidt
- Michael Crusan
- Erin Crider
- Tony LaBarre
- Heather Damico
- Susan Chapman
- Susan McClanahan
- Lisa Ehlen

## Call to Order/Welcome and Approval of Agenda

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Mr. Dean Compart called the meeting to order and introduced Dr. Peggy Anne Hawkins. Dr. Hawkins welcomed everyone to Aurora Pharmaceutical, a livestock pharmaceutical product development and manufacturing company headquartered in Northfield. The company has run a Current Good Manufacturing Practices (CGMP), FDA-approved manufacturing facility since 2010 and produces products for the equine, swine, poultry, and companion animal industries. They continue to grow and expand their facility to meet their needs and development goals.

Mr. Compart thanked Dr. Hawkins and then asked for any additions or changes to the agenda for today's meeting. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Ms. Erica Sawatzke made the motion, and Dr. Hawkins seconded it. Mr. Compart took a vote by roll call (Dr. Jessica Fox participated in the meeting remotely), with all voting aye to approve the agenda.

Note: The September 15, 2021, draft meeting minutes will be approved by the board at the next meeting.

## Board of Animal Health Update

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Dr. Beth Thompson began by saying the 2022 legislative session will begin at the end of January/beginning of February and will be a shorter session. The most recent budget forecast predicted a \$7.7 billion surplus for Minnesota, when the previous forecast had been for a budget deficit. She noted with 2022 being an election year, a Democratic-controlled House of Representatives and a Republican-controlled Senate, it could be an interesting session.

Dr. Tom Hagerty passed away this fall. Civic engagement was very important to him and his family; he was involved with many organizations. Dr. Tony Forshey, Ohio State Veterinarian, also passed away recently, and more than 10 state veterinarians have retired in the past year. Dr. Thompson said a lot of new talent is coming into the state animal health official field, making this an exciting time.

Dr. Thompson stated the United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) Annual Meeting will be in the Twin Cities in October 2022. She said she may be inviting board members to participate in the event.

Dr. Thompson was involved in several of this year's USDA sector meetings, including the swine sector meeting. She shared the USDA's plans for the swine industry in the next year. Plans include an APHIS-led African Swine Fever (ASF) response exercise, which will include feral swine. APHIS will also continue ASF sampling in feral swine in the U.S., as there were 22 feral swine morbidity or mortality events in Fiscal Year 2021 (October 2020 to September 2021). The USDA is committed to working with the Dominican Republic (DR) on their ASF response, including assisting with laboratory setup and providing incident command staff. APHIS is supportive of the Swine Health Improvement Plan (SHIP), so the USDA is helping with that. The USDA is considering the feasibility of implementing Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) surveillance. They are also looking at evaluating the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) to tighten market channel movements to improve animal disease traceability.

## USDA Update

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Dr. Stephan Schaeffbauer gave an overview of the APHIS, Veterinary Services (VS) structure. VS works in partnership with five sister programs: Animal Care, Biotechnology Regulatory Services, International Services, Plant Protection and Quarantine, and Wildlife Services. She then showed a basic VS organizational chart and the VS national district map. Minnesota is located in District 2, and there are four total districts, which were realigned in the past few years.

Dr. Schaeffbauer went on to discuss the National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program (NADPRP). NADPRP funds aim to boost U.S. efforts to keep high-consequence diseases from entering and spreading across the U.S. and to collaborate with animal health partners throughout the country on high-value projects that enhance prevention, preparedness, detection and response. All proposals for 2021 were submitted by August 6, and applicants will be notified about project funding today, and a stakeholder announcement will go out tomorrow.

APHIS is assisting with the response to African Swine Fever (ASF) in the Dominican Republic (DR). They continue to work on determining where the DR would like help. They also are continuing ASF prevention efforts in Puerto Rico by sampling and testing feral swine for ASF. APHIS has also stopped 89 illegal boat landings on Puerto Rico since August, 89 percent of which were from the DR.

The USDA has established an OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) protection zone to preserve the animal health status of the continental U.S. A federal order establishing the protection zone was issued on September 17, which suspended interstate movement of all live swine, swine germplasm, products and byproducts from Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. On December 2, the order was revised to authorize interstate movement of certain swine products and byproducts from PR and the USVI that are cooked, shelf stable and in hermetically sealed containers.

Dr. Thompson asked if trading partners have expressed concerns with the amended federal order. Dr. Schaeffbauer said she had not heard what the response has been. APHIS has started having weekly calls with the state animal health officials; that would be a good place to ask that question.

Mr. Compart asked if the DR is going through depopulation efforts. If so, what is the process for getting them back to pork production? Dr. Schaeffbauer did not know; Dr. Torrison said he would look into it. Mr. David Preisler said the issues are highly political. Pork is the main food source in the DR. If pork is taken away, there needs to be humanitarian aid provided to feed them, or there will be resistance.

## College of Veterinary Medicine Update

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Dr. Torrison said the College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) received a record 1,402 applications this year, which is a 32 percent increase from the three-year average. Of these, 225 were from Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota applicants. He noted the CVM had dropped General Record Examination (GRE) requirement this year. The College will start interviewing applicants in January. He also noted South Dakota State University (SDSU) had over 200 applicants for the 20 spots in the “Two-Plus-Two” program.

The CVM is working to improve on the veterinary profession’s record on diversity, equity and inclusion. In addition to bringing in a new Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, the College is experiencing a significant increase in non-white and/or multi-ethnic students. In the Class of 2025, 28.3 percent of students identify as non-white or multi-ethnic, up from 16 percent in the Class of 2024.

The CVM is examining its future curriculum using changes made during the pandemic, including timing, hybrid locations and group sizes. They also will address the need for more food animal veterinary classes. There might also be a possibility of changing class sizes to help address the current veterinarian shortage.

Dr. Hawkins asked if the male-to-female ratio in classes has changed. Dr. Torrison said the male-to-female ratio is still 85 to 90 percent compared against 15 to 10 percent, depending on the class.

Mr. Compart asked if the CVM gives consideration to applicants from underserved or rural areas who have expressed an interest in returning to serve those areas. Dr. Torrison discussed the VetFAST program, which allows undergraduates to be accepted to vet school after one year, but they need to fulfill their prerequisites and maintain a minimum GPA to continue. He also noted part of the application process is an interview. The interview team makes considerations for where the applicant grew up, whether that is in a rural or a suburban school district.

Dr. Fox asked if the GRE requirement was dropped only at the CVM or at other veterinary schools, and why was it dropped. Dr. Torrison said he only knows that the CVM dropped the requirement, and he does not know why it was dropped. Dr. Schaeffbauer said she is not speaking for the University or the CVM, but she has heard on podcasts that the GRE is being dropped from some graduate programs because it isn't necessarily an indicator of how successful a student will be. Sometimes standardized tests can be a hindrance to underrepresented populations.

Dr. Fox asked if there are statistics on the VetFAST and similar programs that show program participants stay in large animal medicine, as often, veterinarians who start in large animal practice change to small animal over time. Dr. Torrison said almost all the VetFAST graduates have stayed in large animal practice, and he could get exact numbers for her. He added that the CVM was concerned at the start of the program that it would lead to having students with lower academic abilities, but VetFAST students have stayed on track academically with students who applied through the traditional process.

Dr. Fox noted the external review team members were all from other universities. She asked if they had considered bringing in a reviewer from outside of academia for a different viewpoint. Dr. Torrison stated the review will have an industry perspective, as a consultant with an industry background is guiding the review process, and others involved also have industry experience.

Dr. Torrison said the Veterinary Medical Center (VMC) has been experiencing workforce shortages that have impacted patient services. They have done some restructuring and are partnering with the MVMA to address the overall shortage of veterinary technicians. The VMC is also going through an external review to examine the organization structure, barriers, and the relationship between the VMC and departmental roles and responsibilities.

The Veterinary Population Medicine (VPM) department has several faculty members who have retired, are retiring soon, or are moving to new positions. Faculty searches are ongoing. Several meetings have provided VPM outreach opportunities, including the Minnesota Dairy Health Conference Webinar Series, the Minnesota Turkey Growers Association Summer Summit, and the Allan D. Leman Swine Conference.

The Leman Conference, an international swine conference hosted by the College, was held as a hybrid in person and online meeting in St. Paul in September. The Leman China conference was held as a hybrid meeting in October. The first-ever Leman Conference in the Spanish language was held in early December, and over 400 people from 17 countries attended.

The Center for Animal Health and Food Safety (CAHFS) has been officially designated by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations as a reference center for Veterinary Public Health. This is a major accomplishment for the College and CAHFS. The head of CAHFS has been to the Dominican Republic a couple times and is working with local practitioners and the university there.

Dr. Thompson noted the Board gets calls from rural veterinarians seeking help with loan forgiveness. She recently signed off on applying for several Veterinary Medical Loan Repayment Program shortage areas in Minnesota. The pay in rural areas is not high, so these areas need help attracting and retaining veterinarians. Dr. Torrison acknowledged

that tuition had gotten high very quickly, but the College has made it a focus not to increase tuition. They are making efforts to be mindful of that going forward.

## **Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory Update**

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Dr. Torrison stated that poultry drinker swab testing at the Mid-Central Research and Outreach Center (MCROC) remains suspended. The poultry industry continues to search for other alternatives.

Dr. Torrison shared the timeline of the testing done at the Minnesota Poultry Testing Laboratory (MPTL) at the start of the current low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) outbreak. All poultry testing is done at the MPTL. Dr. Torrison thanked the MPTL staff for their great work and said Dr. Dale Lauer would give a more in-depth update on the LPAI outbreak during his presentation.

The Minnesota House Agriculture Committee visited the VDL on October 12 to see state-funded equipment which expanded the VDL's capacity for foreign animal disease and day-to-day testing. On November 4, USDA Undersecretary Moffitt visited the VDL while she was in Minnesota for the AgriGrowth conference. Her focus was to see the workings of a National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) laboratory.

Dr. Torrison said the VDL currently cannot test Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) samples in house. The VDL's supplier could not get some of the ingredients needed to make a key stain needed for testing, and the VDL ran out of their supply at the end of November. They are sending their slides to Michigan State University for testing and diverting hunter harvested samples to other states to preserve the VDL's current testing supplies for farmed cervid samples, as directed by NAHLN. The VDL has filed for a blanket deviation for a NAHLN-approved alternative protocol for IHC, and they have ordered the new stain for that protocol.

## **Farmed Cervidae Program Update**

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Dr. Linda Glaser said there are about 6,756 farmed cervids and 241 registered herds in Minnesota. She showed a map of herd and breed locations. On October 11, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) placed a movement ban on farmed white-tailed deer (WTD), including any movements within the state. This was primarily in response to the CWD infected herd in Wisconsin that sent animals to three Minnesota farms. The Board received the traces from Wisconsin promptly when CWD was identified, and they traced the animals the same day. Animals that remained alive in Minnesota were indemnified and put down to be tested for CWD: no CWD was detected. The Board also made sure animals sent from the Wisconsin farm to other states did not move into Minnesota later. In addition, the Board searched their database for ID tag numbers that matched animals from the positive Wisconsin farm, but they did not find any matches. This Monday, the DNR lifted the movement ban, and a press release went out on Thursday. The DNR also sent this information to producers by email and mail. Dr. Glaser also notified neighboring states to let them know the movement ban had been lifted.

Dr. Glaser then discussed the Beltrami County CWD investigation. She showed a diagram of all the herds involved in the investigation. The CWD-exposed Kanabec County herd, which provided animals to the CWD positive Beltrami County herd, was depopulated in November, with indemnity funds provided through a cooperative agreement between the USDA and the Board. If no CWD is found with testing all the animals in the herd, the quarantine on the farm will be released. If any results come back CWD positive, then the Board will work with the herd owner to develop a herd plan, including cleaning and disinfection inspections, maintaining fencing, and posting biohazard signs for five years. The Winona County CWD exposed herd, which also provided animals to the Beltrami County herd, has requested a USDA appraisal and indemnity. This is a larger herd with over 100 animals, and USDA will not make decisions on indemnity for larger herds until the federal budget is finalized for this fiscal year.

Mr. Compart asked if the Kanabec County herd was depopulated in two separate events. Dr. Glaser confirmed this, explaining the herd was larger and in a more densely populated area. They depopulated about 60 to 70 percent of the animals one week, and the rest of the animals the following week. Results are likely over a week away.

Dr. Glaser gave an update on current compliance actions. A Mille Lacs County WTD producer who has had chronic compliance issues and will not disperse his herd has been ordered by the district court to depopulate the herd. He was ordered to submit a herd inventory to the Board by November 30, which he did. The deadline for depopulation is April 1, 2022. The herd owner needs to notify the Board when depopulation is scheduled so staff can collect samples for CWD testing.

Mr. Vagts asked if the herd owner sent in the inventory or if it was verified by Board staff. Dr. Glaser said Dr. Wheeler worked with the herd owner to make sure the inventory included everything the Board needed, and they are in the process of reconciling it now. Mr. Vagts asked if the herd was large or small. Dr. Glaser replied that there are 26 animals in the herd. He asked for confirmation that there was no Board staff on site at the farm to verify the inventory. Dr. Thompson said the court did not order Board staff to be there to verify the inventory; they ordered the herd owner to prepare the inventory and submit it to the Board.

Mr. Vagts expressed frustration with the length of time the compliance proceedings for the Mille Lacs County farm are taking. Citing this example, he suggested the Board consider adding to their rules to give themselves more regulatory authority over non-compliant herd owners.

Dr. Glaser said the Board continues to work with the DNR on their concurrent authority over farmed WTD. The DNR's CoreOne database (used to keep farmed cervid data) is active; and staff are learning how to navigate and use it. Both agencies are working with Alliant Consulting, Inc. to develop their report for the legislature by the February 1, 2022, deadline. DNR staff continue to participate in WTD herd annual inspections with Board staff. Dr. Glaser noted that the Board staff workload has increased with concurrent authority work, including answering questions, providing training and information for DNR staff, and database information migration.

The Board participated in the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee Hearing on October 27. At the end of the hearing, Rep. Hansen formally requested the DNR and the Board consider testing all farmed cervids for CWD using RT-QuIC and then necropsy any positive animals. Dr. Glaser explained that RT-QuIC is a research tool, not a diagnostic test. Considerations need to be made for the test's availability and the fact that no indemnity could be claimed for animals tested with RT-QuIC and depopulated. Ms. Sawatzke asked if this was explained to Rep. Hansen. Dr. Glaser said his request came toward the end of the hearing, and he then moved on to another topic, and she was unaware of any follow-up conversations. The Minnesota Center for Prion Research and Outreach (MN PRO), which developed RT-QuIC, is working on language to explain where they are in the process of developing the test to give people a better understanding of its status and for what it can be used.

Mrs. Brenda Hartkopf asked what the legislative report on the Board and DNR concurrent authority would include. Dr. Glaser said the statutory language outlines what needs to be in the report: An explanation of progress made on concurrent authority, identification of challenges, and recommendations for farmed cervid industry management and CWD control. Mrs. Hartkopf asked if the recommendations will be made jointly by both agencies or separately. Dr. Glaser said she thought both agencies' opinions would appear in the report, though the writing phase has not started yet.

Ms. Annie Balghiti stated the Board had paused the farmed cervid rulemaking process in July, when the legislature implemented concurrent authority over farmed WTD. The Board plans to resume the rulemaking process in January. Going forward, the Board's plan for rule changes would be changes to rules for all farmed cervids except for WTD, as the development of concurrent authority over WTD is ongoing. Once the Board resumes rulemaking it will publish a

new Request for Comments and a new proposed rules draft, which will incorporate all the work done since June 2020. The formal comment period will be a minimum of 60 days. The draft rules will leave the existing rules for WTD in place. The Board and DNR will work on a joint farmed WTD rulemaking process once concurrent authority is more established.

Mrs. Hartkopf asked if the Farmed Cervid Advisory Committee would be resuming. Ms. Balghiti said they are working on determining the process, but at a minimum, the Board would circulate the draft rules to advisory committee members for their comments. Mrs. Hartkopf asked if this new plan brings the rulemaking process back from where it was in July. Ms. Balghiti said the process will not be moving backward; the Board is doing a new Request for Comments to exceed the minimum requirements under the Administrative Procedure Act to let everyone have a chance to review and provide new comments on the rules draft. Mrs. Hartkopf recommended keeping the advisory committee members informed on any developments in the rulemaking process, as they have put much time and effort into the process. Ms. Balghiti agreed to keep them informed.

Ms. Sawatzke asked about the rulemaking process for rules pertaining to WTD, would the Board and DNR have separate sets of rules or shared rules? Ms. Balghiti said with concurrent authority, neither agency should move forward with a rulemaking process for WTD on their own. There could be two sets of rules, one for WTD and one for other farmed cervids, but the Board and DNR need to see what comes out of their report to the legislature. Dr. Glaser said the DNR will likely recommend statutory changes in the legislative report, and rule changes would follow any changes to statute.

## DNR CWD in the Wild Update

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Dr. Michelle Carstensen shared the DNR has six CWD surveillance areas in the state this fall, and all had mandatory sampling on opening weekend of firearms season. Areas defined as management or control zones also have voluntary self-service sampling stations and dumpsters for carcass disposal throughout the hunting seasons. Opening weekend numbers for overall harvest and compliance were lower than expected.

Dr. Carstensen gave an overview of sampling and results from their surveillance areas:

- **Northwest Surveillance Zone (around CWD-positive Beltrami County farm):** 1,821 samples collected with no CWD detected. Over 400 samples were collected close to the positive farm. Dr. Carstensen noted the fence the DNR built on the carcass dump site was not due to the results of RT-QuIC testing done by MNPro researchers on deer carcass remains. The fence was planned when the DNR understood that the Beltrami County farmed cervid producer admitted to dumping carcasses from his CWD positive herd on the site.
- **East Central Surveillance Zone (around Pine County CWD-positive farm):** The DNR collected 1,371 samples with no CWD detected.
- **West Central Surveillance Zone (around Douglas County CWD-positive farm):** The DNR is piloting a risk-based model to collect samples from animals at a higher risk for disease (adult males, sick deer, etc.). They have tested 431 deer, with no CWD detected.
- **North Central Management Zone (Crow Wing County):** 1,238 samples collected with one CWD positive. The 1.5-year-old buck was located about 7.5 miles southwest of the first positive wild WTD and a half mile from the CWD-infected farm. Dr. Carstensen noted the DNR has not found a positive deer in this area since January 2019, so this would have been the last year for testing in this area. However, the new positive case means surveillance will continue through fall 2024.
- **South Metro Management Zone and Surveillance Area (around Dakota County wild positive case):** Collected 1,079 samples in the management zone, with two new positive animals. One was detected in the previous

infection area, and one was found about ten miles west. The DNR collected 1,325 samples in the surveillance area, with no CWD detected.

- **Southeast CWD Management Zone:** The DNR detected 23 new cases (17 confirmed, six suspect). Dr. Carstensen said CWD prevalence in this area remains below one percent. The DNR will continue all efforts to curb CWD spread, including special hunts and winter culling.

The DNR continues its “Adopt a Dumpster” program for disposal of hunter harvested deer carcasses in CWD management and control zones where carcasses cannot be taken out of the zone. Dr. Carstensen noted problems with dumpsters in Houston County (missing second dumpster) and Caledonia (dumpster removed), which resulted in inappropriately dumped carcasses at the sites. However, both issues were satisfactorily resolved.

Dr. Carstensen discussed the new CWD detection in Polk County. This was a hunter-submitted sample from a 2.5-year-old buck in good health. Samples have been collected on both the North Dakota and Minnesota sides of the border, with no additional positives detected. The closest wild positive in Minnesota is in the Brainerd area, and the closest North Dakota positive is over 200 miles away. DNR will hold special hunts in the area next weekend and New Years’ weekend to get a better understanding of CWD in this location.

Dr. Carstensen covered the current DNR actions and plans to stop CWD spread. They have expanded deer feed and attractant bans to include the counties where new CWD-positive cases have been found. They are continuing voluntary sampling in all CWD management and control zones through the end of December, will hold special late hunts, may offer landowner shooting permits in areas with higher disease risk, and will contract with USDA for culling in the southeast and south metro areas with new disease cases.

Mrs. Hartkopf asked what compliance actions the DNR takes when they find a hunter not complying with CWD testing requirements on opening weekend. Dr. Carstensen said they are discussing this issue with DNR. Mrs. Hartkopf asked if that has been discussed in the past. Dr. Carstensen replied that in 2019, the DNR took steps to educate non-compliant hunters, asking them if they understood the rules, and they also followed up by sending them a letter to explain the DNR’s efforts to reduce CWD spread.

Dr. Hawkins asked if, when a dumpster site is found to have CWD positive deer, does the DNR place signage to alert people that the site is contaminated to reduce disease spread. Dr. Carstensen said they are only removing the carcasses from the dumpster sites. While CWD prions may be at the dumpster sites, the animals were harvested in natural areas, and prions are in those places as well.

Dr. Fox asked Dr. Carstensen to explain the difference between the dump site in Beltrami County, which will be fenced for 20 years, and the dumpster sites where people have dumped carcasses inappropriately, which the DNR has no plans to fence. Dr. Carstensen said CWD is not known to be in the wild in Beltrami County, so as a preventive measure, the DNR constructed the fence to keep wild animals out of the area where carcasses from the positive farm were dumped. Dumpster sites are in CWD management and control zones, where there is known infection in nature. These areas encompass multiple counties, so the DNR is performing risk mitigation efforts through CWD testing and managing carcass movement to keep infection from spreading beyond the zones.

Mr. Compart asked how roadkill deer carcasses are handled. Dr. Carstensen said the DNR can write a permit for a private individual to take a roadkill deer. However, the DNR prohibits this in areas with known CWD infection. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) and counties handle carcass disposal in different ways, and that is acceptable as long as it stays within the disease management zone.

Mr. Vagts commented his farm is in the Southeast CWD Management Zone. He contacted the DNR to offer his farm as a dumpster site for hunter-harvested deer carcasses. Although his farm may be contaminated with CWD, having a dumpster on site is a way he can help to minimize disease spread to other parts of the state.



## Task Force on Zoonotic Disease and Traceability in Companion Animals

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Dr. Connie Sillerud, MVMA President, brought a request from the MVMA that the Board form a task force on zoonotic and species-specific diseases in dogs and cats coming into Minnesota. This request comes out of the MVMA's concern over the unknown number of animals imported through rescue organizations, shelters and breeders from other states or countries. The lack of regulation over rescue groups raises the risk of zoonotic diseases entering and spreading in the state. The task force would work to better identify these animal movements for improved understanding of disease risk and disease traceability.

There was discussion on, and concern expressed over, the lack of national or state oversight of animal rescues and the risk of disease spread from the movement of these animals. There was agreement on the need to improve the state's understanding of rescue animal movements. Dr. Joni Scheftel and Dr. Courtney Wheeler expressed support for the task force.

Mr. Compart asked for a motion for the Board to authorize a task force coordinated by Board staff to address zoonotic disease and traceability in companion animals. Dr. Hawkins made the motion, and Ms. Sawatzke seconded it. There was no further discussion, a vote was taken by roll call, and the motion passed unanimously. Dr. Thompson recommended a task force update be added to the next Board meeting's agenda. Dr. Wheeler said she would start work on the task force and plan to report on progress at the next meeting.

## Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus 2 (RHDv2) Update

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Dr. Greg Suskovic gave a brief history and overview of rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus 2 (RHDv2), which affects wild and domestic rabbits and hares. Since 2019, there have been multiple outbreaks of RHDv2 in the U.S. Two have been resolved (OH and NY), but two areas have ongoing outbreaks: Washington State on San Juan Island and the Southwestern U.S. Many affected states imported a European Union (EU)-licensed vaccine with USDA approval. In September, the USDA granted approval to South Dakota-based Medgene Labs for its experimental RHDv2 killed baculovirus vector vaccine.

Dr. Suskovic discussed Minnesota's RHDv2 case. A Ramsey County rabbit owner had two rabbits die suddenly: one on Sept. 10, and the other on Sept. 12. The second rabbit was submitted to the VDL for necropsy. On Sept. 17, the VDL pathologist contacted Dr. Suskovic after viewing suspicious lesions. He initiated a foreign animal disease investigation (FADI), and liver samples were sent to the National Veterinary Services Laboratory Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory, which confirmed RHDv2 on Sept. 23.

The Board started their investigation on Sept. 17 and quarantined the premises on Sept. 24. They did not find any strong epidemiological links; the best link was that the owner's family had returned from California on Sept. 4 after hiking in national parks. All cages, living quarters, food utensils and carriers were cleaned and disinfected with a 1:10 bleach solution. After a 60-day fallow period, the quarantine was released on November 24, 2021.

Minnesota has allowed state licensed veterinarians to order and administer the RHDv2 vaccine from Medgene Labs. Many rabbit organizations have organized vaccination clinics, which have been very successful.

Dr. Suskovic also gave a brief update on 2021 FADIs. As of this meeting, the Board has conducted 47 FADIs, which is down from the last few years. This includes 29 swine investigations (28 vesicular and one septicemia), only four of which were at slaughter plants. Other investigations included two in poultry, one each in cattle and goats, and 13 in rabbits.

## Avian Influenza Update

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Dale Lauer stated the response to a finding of non-H5/H7 low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) in poultry is led by the poultry industry with support from the Board. An H5/H7 LPAI introduction will have a state-led response, which includes assigning a case manager as outlined in the Minnesota Plan, with financial support from the USDA for surveillance, indemnity and compensation for depopulation, disposal, and cleaning and disinfection (virus elimination) activities.

Dr. Lauer said a case of H5N3 LPAI of North American wild bird lineage was detected in a flock of 19-week-old commercial turkey toms in Kandiyohi County. Antibodies were first detected during routine pre-market testing on November 18. On Nov. 22, testing of tracheal swabs were H5 PCR positive at the MPTL. Samples were submitted to and tested at the National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL), which identified an H5N3 LPAI virus on November 24. The Board worked with the flock owner to develop a flock plan to contain the virus on the premises and eliminate the virus from the premises after the flock was controlled marketed. The flock tested PCR negative yesterday (December 7) and will be controlled marketed December 9-11.

Dr. Lauer shared an interactive map and said the H5N3 case was in the same general vicinity as the H6N1 outbreak last winter/spring (2020-21). During surveillance testing, a second case of H5N3 was detected in a flock of nine-week-old commercial turkey hens, located about three quarters of a mile from the first flock. Turkeys in one barn of the five barns on the premises tested positive. The company is considering either controlled marketing or on-site depopulation for the turkeys on this premises. Dr. Lauer said all birds on the site would need to test virus negative to be controlled marketed, which can be a challenge for multi-age sites.

He then discussed highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) around the world. Europe, Africa, and Asia have many HPAI cases. He noted the H5, which holds the virus' capacity to cause disease, is very stable causing many birds to become sick and die. The poultry management and production systems in the countries on those continents are different from those in North and South America, which, as of this meeting, have no HPAI infections. Dr. Lauer showed a map of the 2014 movement of H5N8 HPAI into North America and another map of global wild bird flyways. He stressed the importance of routine surveillance of wild birds migrating through states in the Midwest which serves as an early warning system for the poultry industry in order to be ready for a HPAI introduction.

Dr. Lauer showed a diagram of the steps the USDA would take in the event of an HPAI detection. The Board is promoting the importance of strong biosecurity measures on each poultry premises. Previous AI outbreaks have exposed vulnerabilities in biosecurity. Strict enforcement of perimeter buffer areas, lines of separation, visitor restrictions, and shared equipment restrictions can greatly reduce the risk of virus spread.

Dr. Lauer shared recent changes to the World Organization of Animal Health (OIE) Chapter 10.4. The revised rules state that H5 and H7 LPAI detections in poultry are not notifiable to the OIE unless there is a sudden and unexpected increase in virulence or there is proven natural transmission to humans. However, in the U.S. there is required reporting of all H5/H7 LPAI or HPAI detections to federal and state animal health officials. In Minnesota, all influenza detections in poultry must be reported.

Ms. Sawatzke asked for an explanation of the Board's process for preparing a press release. Mr. Michael Crusan said when an event happens, he gathers details from experts and veterinarians and generates a draft press release, which is submitted to other relevant state agencies (in the case of the H5N3 press release, Minnesota Departments of Health and Agriculture), stakeholders and the Governor's office. Once a draft is approved by these groups, he sends the final draft to the Board veterinarians working on the event and Dr. Thompson. Once approved, it goes to the Governor's office for approval, along with a timeline for publishing the release. Mr. Crusan noted the special circumstances surrounding the H5 LPAI positive case, which occurred Thanksgiving week and right before a planned media event

with the turkey industry and the Governor the day before Thanksgiving (Wednesday). He timed the release for Tuesday so everyone had time to digest the H5 LPAI news and the focus could be on the positives of the turkey industry during Wednesday's media event.

Ms. Sawatzke asked what direction the Poultry Communicators Group gave on this press release. Mr. Crusan stated he had sent the press release to the group for comment the night of Monday, November 22, with a deadline for response. No one replied with any major concerns. He noted participation in the group ebbs and flows, as some companies do not have communications people, but the Board requests feedback and edits from them for any poultry-related communications.

## **SARS-CoV-2 Surveillance in Wildlife**

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Dr. Jeff Bender, faculty at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health and College of Veterinary Medicine, shared information on a pilot project to establish surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 in wildlife. Overall goals include developing a One Health approach to dealing with animal cases through work with human, animal and environmental health agencies; understanding the role of animal transmission in SARS-CoV-2 in the U.S., and identify existing mechanisms and legislation related to zoonotic disease to support continuing surveillance efforts.

Dr. Bender said their current work involves detecting SARS-CoV-2 in humans and animals at wildlife rehabilitation centers and understanding precautions taken in these facilities during human-animal interactions. Facilities participating in the study were the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center (WRC) in Roseville, zoos, and the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (VDL).

The study at the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center runs from June 3 to December 31, 2021. They are testing animals that are considered high risk or a susceptible species, or animals involved in a mass mortality event. These species include mustelids (weasels, badgers, otters, etc.), bats, felids, cervids, rabbits, squirrels and mice. Human care team members voluntarily collect their own nasal swabs that are tested weekly via PCR. The University's Genomics Center tests the samples. Any positive cases are reported to appropriate state health officials, and samples are sequenced by the Genomics Center.

Sixty-nine individuals volunteered to participate in the study. All tests have come back negative. All test subjects were vaccinated, and the WRC requires masking. The study also performed 23 serologic (antibody) tests, and seven of them came back positive for previous SARS-CoV-2 infection. Of the 347 animals tested so far, all have been negative.

Dr. Bender noted the recent studies in Ohio, Iowa and Pennsylvania showing a high SARS-CoV-2 prevalence in white-tailed deer (WTD). Researchers with the Minnesota study approached the DNR before the hunting season to ask permission to collect samples around the metro area. With approval, samples were collected from animals left at DNR checkpoints in Rosemont and Forest Lake during opening weekend. They sampled 163 animals, and PCR results are pending. Another study is performing antibody testing on 18 WTD and several other species at the WRC and the Twin Cities Coyote and Fox Project. Results on these tests are also pending.

Dr. Hawkins asked how WTD are getting infected at such a high rate. Dr. Bender said it was disturbing to see that Iowa WTD had such a high prevalence, and virus was found on a nasal swab in the Ohio study, but why is unknown. The Pennsylvania/Iowa study showed there were likely multiple introductions, as there were different sequences. Human infection spreading to deer is likely, but whether that is a direct infection or is being transferred through an intermediary species is unknown.

## Minnesota Department of Health Update

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Dr. Joni Scheftel said an 84-year-old man died in January 2021 from human rabies contracted from a bat bite in July 2020. The man had received post-exposure rabies vaccinations and still died of rabies. This is the first time this has happened in North America. MDH and federal rabies experts did extensive testing to determine how this happened. It was discovered the man had two immune-suppressing cancers at the same time, which left him with no immune system to respond to the rabies shots. Based on these findings, Federal officials decided no changes needed to be made to current rabies procedures.

Dr. Scheftel also mentioned a North Dakota five-year-old was identified with influenza A H1N1v of swine origin. This child visited the Minnesota State Fair animal barns. This happens occasionally, and no further action was required.

Dr. Scheftel mentioned two unrelated cases of *Cryptosporidium canis* in people. One works in a dog kennel, and the other boards dogs in their home. She also discussed two cases of Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC) in visitors to an apple orchard/pumpkin patch at a heritage dairy farm. Unsupervised visitors waiting for a hayride went into areas where calves were kept and took pictures of themselves in calf hutches. Two calves were later identified with the same strain of STEC as was found in the people. MDH worked with the farm to make sure visitors knew those areas were off limits.

Dr. Scheftel gave an update on COVID-19 in Minnesota, which has the highest rate of transmission of all its neighboring states. The Delta variant accounts for 99.99 percent of sequenced isolates and is the longest lasting COVID surge in the state. The current counties with the highest incidence rates per 10,000 people are Dodge, Goodhue, Benton, Mille Lacs, Sherburne and Douglas. Counties with the highest incidence rate over the entire pandemic are Nobles, Benton, Kandiyohi, Wadena, Stearns and Douglas.

Sixty-six percent of Minnesotans have had at least one vaccine dose (this number includes young children who cannot get vaccinated). Fully vaccinated people account for three percent of positive cases, 0.13 percent of those hospitalized with COVID, and .022 percent of COVID deaths. This shows vaccination is keeping people from getting very sick and needing hospitalization.

She also discussed the first small study from South Africa on the Omicron variant. The study showed that vaccines are still useful against Omicron; however, among individuals with a two-dose Pfizer series, they have seen a 40-fold reduction in Omicron virus particles neutralized compared to the original virus. Among people with the two-dose series and a previous infection, neutralizing antibodies were less effective than before Omicron but are still relatively protective. An increase in breakthrough cases is likely, especially in those with two vaccines and no booster.

Ms. Sawatzke said she lives in Douglas County and asked why certain counties have a high COVID prevalence. Dr. Scheftel said did not know about Douglas County specifically, but in the cases of Todd and Clearwater Counties, their prevalence appears to be related to vaccination rates.

## Enhanced Swine Disease Surveillance in Minnesota

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Dr. Susan McClanahan said that state swine surveillance is done by USDA and Board field staff that have assigned areas covering much of Minnesota. There is also a significant threat of African Swine Fever (ASF) in the world and a risk to the U.S. and the state. The Board wants to increase their knowledge and understanding of swine movement in Minnesota by obtaining information on custom exempt and equal-to plants that slaughter pigs. They also aim to strengthen the state's surveillance by increasing sampling at qualifying facilities, including sale barns. Board staff would be trained on how to collect samples.

Dr. Mary Donahue shared information on the USDA's Classical Swine Fever/ASF surveillance plan. Up to the first quarter of federal fiscal year 2021, Minnesota staff collected 300 samples per year. At that point, the national swine staff increased the target quantity of samples to 500. Minnesota staff have exceeded that total by collecting 599 samples. Most of these came from federally inspected plants. However, in communication with Dr. McClanahan, they were also able to collect samples from state-inspected facilities (pigs with access to the outdoors) and a custom slaughter plant, two from a garbage feeder farm, and one from a market. A second custom slaughter plant recently agreed to participate in surveillance.

This plan will require monthly monitoring and communication with Board staff to make sure sampling is meeting targeted goals. Dr. McClanahan added that they want to use this opportunity to reach out to premises and plants that are slaughtering smaller groups of pigs to make sure they know who to contact if they see lesions.

Dr. Torrison asked what the level of concern is among smaller plants and if the Board has adequate materials to provide them. Dr. McClanahan said they have been sharing information on lesions with inspecting veterinarians at state-inspected facilities and with owners, some of which are very knowledgeable about ASF and are concerned for the swine industry.

Mr. Preisler said that only a few pigs from smaller production sites will be kept in Minnesota for slaughter. Dr. Thompson noted that if disease were detected in any of them, the Board would be responsible.

## **Election of Board Vice President**

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Mr. Compart asked for nominations for Board vice president. He noted Ms. Sawatzke has completed her first term and has applied for re-appointment. Dr. Hawkins nominated Ms. Sawatzke, and Mr. Vagts seconded the nomination. Mr. Compart asked for any other nominations. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to accept a unanimous ballot. Dr. Hawkins made the motion, and Mr. Vagts seconded it. Mr. Compart took votes by roll call, with Ms. Sawatzke abstaining. All voted aye to elect Ms. Sawatzke as Vice President.

## **Next Meeting and Adjourn**

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Mr. Compart requested a discussion on genetics and CWD resistance at the next Board meeting. Dr. Glaser said she would look into who could present on this topic.

The next quarterly meeting of the Board of Animal Health will be held on Tuesday, February 8, starting at 9:30 a.m., at a location to be determined. [NOTE: The February meeting has since been moved to Tuesday, February 1.]

Mr. Compart asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Sawatzke made a motion; Mr. Vagts seconded it. A vote was taken by roll call, with all voting aye to adjourn.

Respectfully Submitted,

Beth S. Thompson  
Executive Director  
State Veterinarian