

Accredited vets provide first line of surveillance

By Todd Behre, NVAP program coordinator

The National Veterinary Accreditation Program (NVAP) authorizes veterinarians to perform regulatory functions on behalf of APHIS Veterinary Services (VS) in a manner that is consistent with international trade requirements and safeguarding animal health. The program is voluntary, and approximately 80 percent of veterinarians in the United States are accredited.

In addition to working to ensure that exported animals do not introduce disease into other countries, accredited veterinarians also provide the first line of surveillance for reportable domestic and foreign animal diseases. These duties help provide safeguarding to prevent U.S. animal agriculture from becoming a bioterrorism target. When large-scale animal disease or other emergency events occur, accredited veterinarians are often enlisted to help with APHIS' containment and eradication efforts.

Most countries exclusively use government-salaried veterinarians for regulatory purposes. First established in 1907 by the Bureau of Animal Industry (now APHIS) in response to large numbers of horses being exported to Canada, the program filled the need for regulatory oversight at a time when there were inadequate numbers of federally employed veterinarians to meet such a demand. The Canadian government agreed to accept health inspections and certificates performed by private practitioners, and the NVAP was formed.

Currently, once a veterinarian becomes accredited, she or he is accredited for life. Pending regulatory changes include mandates that accredited veterinarians complete certain types of training uniquely relevant to their accreditation responsibilities, and renew their accreditation every 3 years. The NVAP is currently working with industry, academic, and veterinary practice experts to design these training tools, which will be available online, in print, and in PowerPoint presentation formats.

While the NVAP is overseen nationally, the 41 VS area offices oversee veterinarians' authorized activities, as well as the processing of most documentation. In order to become accredited, a veterinarian must be either licensed or otherwise legally able to

practice (via reciprocity or other agreement with State licensing officials) in the State in which they wish to perform regulatory activities. When an accredited veterinarian wants to perform regulatory activities in additional States, authorization to do so must be acquired through the area office servicing that State. A brief introduction to animal agricultural issues that are particularly important or prevalent in that State also will be required.

The interaction between the VS area offices and accredited veterinarians is dictated by their geographical regions' magnitude, variety, and seasonal aspects of animal movement.

Each area office has at least one team member, referred to as an Area Office NVAP Coordinator, whose responsibilities include processing applications from veterinarians seeking initial accreditation or authorization to perform accredited duties in an additional State. These coordinators call or e-mail the NVAP staff in Riverdale directly for help in resolving questions. The solutions to some of the less frequent challenges area offices encounter provide material for NVAP's newsletter, "Exchange," which is e-mailed directly to all Area Office NVAP Coordinators as well as anyone else who wants to receive it.

VS Memorandum No. 576.1 is the official resource available to Area-Veterinarians-in-Charge. This document outlines procedures to follow when an accredited veterinarian allegedly violates the Standards for Accredited Veterinarian Duties and provides sanction guidelines for established accreditation violations. Sample letters to resolve veterinary accreditation violation cases are provided in VS Memorandum No. 576.1 Supplemental No. 1. Both documents are available online at

<http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/vs/downloads/memos/>

Contact information for all area offices is located at:

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/area_offices/

The NVAP home page is:

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/vet_accreditation/