

## **National Animal Health Surveillance System: A Network of Alliances**

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The National Animal Health Surveillance System (NAHSS) is a Veterinary Services' (VS) initiative to integrate existing Federal, State, and local animal health monitoring programs and surveillance activities into a comprehensive and coordinated system. The NAHSS will systematically collect, collate, and analyze animal health data and promptly disseminate animal health information to the appropriate agencies, especially those obligated to respond to a given situation. Through the NAHSS, VS is dedicated to forming a network of alliances and partnerships among multiple government and private entities whose common goals are to protect animal health, public health, and national economic viability associated with the animal population.

One of the top priorities of the NAHSS is to establish and maintain a national surveillance system that incorporates science-based approaches for the rapid and efficient detection of domestic, foreign, and emerging diseases. To accomplish this, current surveillance and disease monitoring programs are routinely evaluated and updated to ensure program efficacy, efficiency, and coordination. The integrated approach of the NAHSS will facilitate VS' compliance with Homeland Security Presidential Directive 9.

### **Key partnerships**

Numerous organizations play important roles in the maintenance and coordination of the NAHSS. The National Surveillance Unit (NSU) serves as coordinator of surveillance related activities. The NSU was created in 2003 by VS to coordinate activities related to U.S. animal health surveillance; focus on surveillance evaluation, integration, and enhancement; and address the recommendations regarding surveillance in the 2001 Animal Health Safeguarding Review. The NSU is committed to working with its partners within VS and collaborating with agencies outside of APHIS to enhance U.S. animal health surveillance initiatives.

The National Surveillance Steering Committee is a key component of the NAHSS. The steering committee includes representatives from the livestock and poultry industries, state animal health agencies, diagnostic laboratory organizations, academic institutions, and relevant Federal agencies. The specific functions of the steering committee are to ensure consideration of all safeguarding review recommendations, guide strategy planning, interact with constituencies to obtain stakeholder input and support, request and review documents and plans, seek outside expertise for assistance, provide quality control, and guide research projects. The steering committee ensures that a wide array of viewpoints is considered before taking specific actions.

NAHSS partners include, among others: National Center for Animal Health Programs (NCAHP), other centers at the Centers for Epidemiology and Animal Health (CEAH), VS Emergency Management, VS regional offices, VS field personnel, National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL), Wildlife Services, FSIS, industry, State animal health officials, and private veterinarians. Through partnerships between these and other organizations, the NAHSS will be able to create a more effective system that better

protects the U.S livestock inventory from the threat of domestic, foreign, and emerging disease issues.

**BSE response**

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) is an international issue and has become a top priority within USDA involving many NAHSS partners including industry officials, producers, State and Federal animal health officials, private veterinarians, national organizations, public health officials, and others. The successful integration of many NAHSS partners toward national surveillance was demonstrated in the response to the latest BSE case discovered in the United States. The National Animal Health Laboratory Network development was accelerated and the system deployed to combine the large amount of data collected during the enhanced BSE collection period into one universal database. NCAHP and CEAH staff members were involved in surveillance planning and design.

The next step is for NSU, in collaboration with stakeholders, to evaluate the efficacy of the BSE surveillance plan once it has been active for several years. The continuing cyclical process of design, analysis, and evaluation of surveillance systems is an integral function of the NAHSS. Through ongoing cooperation between Federal, State, and local officials, the NAHSS will help ensure improved disease detection and surveillance capabilities in the United States for many years to come.