



CHAPTER 4

Animal Health Initiatives

This chapter brings special attention to particular animal health initiatives of 2005, including the National Aquatic Animal Health Plan (NAAHP), the National Veterinary Accreditation Program (NVAP), and the continuing development of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS).

NAAHP

Under the auspices of the Joint Subcommittee on Aquaculture (JSA), the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is developing the NAAHP in partnership with the two other Federal agencies that have primary authority for U.S. aquatic-animal health: the Department of Commerce's U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The JSA is authorized by the National Aquaculture Act of 1980 (16 U.S.C. 2801 *et seq.*) and is composed of representatives from Federal agencies that participate in aquaculture activities in the United States. The JSA functions under the direction of the Office of Science and Technology Policy and the Science Adviser to the President of the United States. The purpose of the JSA is to ensure communication, cooperation, and collaboration among Federal agencies on matters related to aquaculture. The JSA has commissioned task forces to address and assist member agencies on critical issues for aquaculture such as research, aquaculture facility-effluent

regulations, registration of pesticides and medications used in aquaculture, and shrimp diseases. In 2001, the JSA directed APHIS, NOAA Fisheries, and FWS to establish a National Aquatic Animal Health Task Force on Aquaculture. The task force would be responsible for drafting the NAAHP.

The purpose of the NAAHP is to foster and support effective and efficient aquaculture, to protect the health of wild and cultured aquatic resources in the United States, and to meet U.S. national and international trade obligations. The NAAHP is being developed in partnership and cooperation with industry; regional organizations; State, local, and tribal governments; and other stakeholders. In December 2001, the task force brought stakeholders together in Washington, DC, to receive input on aquatic-animal health needs and to give direction on the necessary elements of the NAAHP. A second meeting was convened in June 2002 in Tucson, AZ, to further define the objectives of the plan. In April 2003, the outline and development process of the NAAHP was approved by the Federal Executive Committee of the task force.

The task force has continued its work in developing the NAAHP by convening a series of task-force-associated working groups. Working groups consist of 10 to 20 experts, each representing a sector of the aquaculture community. Each working group focuses on a specific element of the NAAHP, such as the roles and responsibilities of health professionals, laboratory

methodologies, and species-specific issues. Several working groups have met and provided recommendations for the NAAHP.

The first complete draft of the NAAHP is expected in spring 2007 with refining and implementation to follow. The NAAHP in itself will not be codified into regulation; however, implementation of certain elements, such as import requirements, may require revisions to existing laws, regulations, or policies.

NVAP

The NVAP was instituted in 1921 by APHIS–Veterinary Services (VS) to foster collaboration among accredited veterinarians, Federal and State animal health officials, and colleges of veterinary medicine. The goal was to improve the overall health and marketability of the U.S. domestic animal population while preventing the introduction of exotic disease agents.

The responsibilities of NVAP are to

- Form the first line of surveillance for reportable domestic and foreign animal diseases (FADs),
- Assist with interstate and international movement of animals and animal products,
- Ensure national uniformity of regulatory programs, and
- Participate in State–Federal–industry cooperative programs.

Recently, NVAP dealt only with initial certification of participating veterinarians. However, increasing world trade and international travel have heightened the risks the United States faces from disease introductions capable of threatening animal and human health. Therefore, the NVAP is being enhanced to provide accredited veterinarians with the tools needed to meet U.S. disease prevention, preparedness, and response challenges.

The new revisions to the NVAP will emphasize the lifetime education of accredited veterinarians via training modules that provide the latest information on the transmission, recognition, and reporting of exotic diseases, emerging diseases, and program policy and procedures.

To meet these requirements, the program will require participating veterinarians to renew their accreditation status as either Category-I or Category-II veterinarians by completing a specified number of training modules within each renewal period. Those seeking accreditation in companion animals only (excluding equids or food-animal species) will be classified as Category-I veterinarians and will be required to complete four supplemental training modules every 3 years. Category-II veterinarians will be required to complete nine supplemental training modules

for equids, food animals, and companion animals every 3 years. Category II veterinarians who wish to specialize can pursue additional training.

Key elements being implemented as part of the new NVAP include the following:

- Development of a two-tiered category system of accreditation for veterinarians;
- Renewal of accreditation status every 3 years;
- Completion of a series of supplemental training modules within the 3-year renewal cycle via the Internet;
- Opportunity for participating veterinarians to obtain specialized accreditation in areas such as quality control and certification programs, testing, Johne's disease, aquaculture, etc.; and
- Use of the electronic Veterinary Accreditation Program (eVAP) to provide up-to-date accreditation information.

The eVAP is a module within the VS Process Streamlining Web-based system that will offer a single access point for electronic forms, applications, and certification processes required for interstate or international movement of animals and animal products. The eVAP will serve as a gateway to other modules in the Process Streamlining system, including the electronic certificate of veterinary inspection (eCVI), electronic import, and electronic export. The eCVI, planned for release in 2006, will allow accredited veterinarians to access State regulations, request permits for entry, send electronic certificates of veterinary inspection directly to State officials, attach test charts and vaccination records, and interface with premises identification databases.

The improvements in the NVAP will provide accredited veterinarians with access to current animal health, food safety, and regulatory issues; greater awareness of national and international health events; and increased service marketability through specialization. Overall, the program will improve integration of the national veterinary community by providing a cohesive safeguarding and emergency response network through increased quality and accuracy of accreditation program activities, thus improving the quality and marketability of U.S. animals and animal products.

NAIS

USDA–APHIS is charged with developing and implementing a practical, cost-effective, and reliable NAIS to consolidate and standardize animal identification systems currently in use nationwide. Standardization of these systems will enable USDA and State animal health officials to respond more quickly and effectively to animal disease outbreaks.

The development and implementation of the NAIS has been, and continues to be, an evolutionary process. In May 2005, USDA published its draft strategic plan and program standards outlining a proposal for implementing and integrating the three components of the NAIS: premises identification, animal identification, and animal tracking. Through the NAIS, USDA hopes to have the capacity to identify all premises and animals that have had contact with an FAD or domestic animal disease of concern within 48 hours after discovery.

Since publication of the draft documents on the NAIS Web site, APHIS has received several hundred comments from interested stakeholders and continues to receive more each week. APHIS used this feedback in the development of an implementation plan for the program that sets an aggressive timeline for ensuring full deployment of the NAIS by 2009. It establishes benchmarks for incrementally accomplishing the remaining implementation goals to enable the NAIS to be operational by 2007 and to achieve full producer participation by 2009.

While the NAIS is being developed and refined, APHIS is implementing NAIS on a voluntary basis. Voluntary participation by producers and stakeholders during development and testing of the program will help provide practical solutions to any problems and challenges encountered.

Premises Identification

Identifying locations or premises where livestock reside or are managed is essential to meeting USDA's goal of completing animal tracebacks within 48 hours. By the end of 2005, nearly 170,000 premises had been registered within 50 States, 5 tribes, and 2 U.S. territories.

Animal Identification

In November 2004, APHIS published an interim rule adopting the use of a 15-character animal identification number as an alternate numbering system for identifying animals in interstate commerce and cooperative disease control and eradication programs. This new numbering system is a key element of the NAIS, and publication of this rule allows producers to convert gradually to the use of a one-number-for-one-animal system.

In 2005, APHIS finalized the testing of an animal identification number management system that allocates and tracks the use of these numbers. APHIS has also developed a training program for its State partners, who will play a significant role in implementing animal identification.



Other accomplishments include the integration of these numbers into existing animal disease programs (e.g., scrapie, chronic wasting disease, and bovine tuberculosis).

Animal Tracking

In August 2005, the Secretary of Agriculture announced that, under the NAIS, animal-movement tracking information will be held in a database maintained by industry. This decision was in keeping with USDA's commitment that the NAIS be a true Federal-State-industry partnership.

In response to questions and comments on the potential for the development of several different tracking databases, USDA is proceeding with a portal solution that would allow the agency to access animal tracking data stored in multiple private and State databases when needed for animal disease-control purposes. Concurrent with the release of the NAIS implementation plan, USDA released general technical standards for animal-tracking databases that will enable integration of private systems with the NAIS. Additionally, private database owners were invited to submit data for system evaluation to USDA and offer feedback as the final technical requirements are established. In moving the program forward, USDA's objective is to support privatization of the animal-tracking component of the NAIS in the most practical and timely and least burdensome manner.