



The Animal Health Safeguarding Review and VS 2015

As the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services's (APHIS) Veterinary Services (VS) program seeks input about its strategic vision for the year 2015, it also presents an opportunity to discuss how the current VS 2015 initiative relates to the Animal Health Safeguarding Review (AHSR) that was completed in 2001. In many ways, the vision for VS 2015 is an extension of the work that has already been done in association with the Safeguarding Review. This document provides a side-by-side comparison between the two initiatives to illustrate the intent of each project and accomplishments to date. Since VS 2015 is a new initiative that is just getting underway, the final results are still to be seen but, expected outcomes have been identified.

Animal Health Safeguarding Review

Purpose

In 2000, VS requested that the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) conduct a review to assess the efficacy of activities, authorities, infrastructure, partnerships, policies, and procedures that comprised the U.S. animal health safeguarding system at that time.

Recommendations

In October 2001, NASDA provided VS with a report that contained 152 individual recommendations related to domestic detection and surveillance, exclusion, international information, and response. From there, VS established 7 issue groups that generated 44 action plans to address NASDA's recommendations.

Implementation

Many of the recommendations resulting from the 2001 Safeguarding Review have been implemented and have significantly improved the ability of VS and its partners to protect American agriculture. While the accomplishments are too numerous to detail, the following list provides some highlights based on the four key areas identified in NASDA's report.

Domestic Detection and Surveillance

- Formation of a National Surveillance Unit
- Integration of animal health monitoring programs and surveillance activities into a national, comprehensive coordinated system called the National Animal Health Surveillance System
- Development of the National Avian Influenza Surveillance Plan
- Initiation of collaborative, interagency surveillance for highly pathogenic avian influenza in wild waterfowl

Exclusion

- Construction of a new Miami Import Center and facility upgrades at the New York Animal Import Center

VS 2015

Purpose

In 2008, Dr. John Clifford, APHIS chief veterinary officer, announced VS 2015—a strategic vision developed by the VS Management Team to guide the organization in making holistic changes that will ultimately position the organization to better meet animal health needs in the 21st century. By embracing the VS 2015 vision, VS is committing itself as an organization to building upon the ideals of the Safeguarding Review, especially in the areas of emergency response and surveillance. VS 2015 presents an opportunity to continue the culture change that was initiated with the AHSR.

Recommendations

VS 2015 is still in its infancy, but ultimately the expectation is that VS 2015 will provide a roadmap for VS to implement internal changes that will allow the organization to place greater emphasis on disease prevention, preparedness, detection, and early response; expand its veterinary health mission to one that is responsive not only to issues that impact animal agriculture but include all animal species; address public health concerns that arise from zoonotic diseases; and expand its portfolio of interstate and international certification services.

Implementation

VS has developed its own vision for 2015, and now the organization plans to work with its external partners, including States and industry to get their input. In order to be successful, VS must develop an implementation plan that incorporates both the ideals of VS and its external stakeholders. VS will seek stakeholder participation on work teams that will chart further details of this new course and its implementation at State and local levels. To effectively transition VS and the broader U.S. animal health community from the pressing needs of 2009 toward the impending realities of 2015 will require active involvement from multiple parties.

- Enactment of the 2002 Animal Health Protection Act
- Development of foreign animal disease (FAD) practitioner courses to provide training on FADs and sampling/diagnostic techniques
- Notification to State animal health officials when bovines destined for the United States are released from Canadian ports of entry

International Information

- Establishment of an international capacity-building office within APHIS
- Development of a Pathways Assessment Mapping Tool to assist VS in identifying various pathways FADs could enter the United States
- Publication of the annual U.S. Animal Health Report

Response

- Establishment of incident command teams to respond to disease outbreaks
- Creation of Area Emergency Coordinator and Emergency Support Function #11 field positions
- Expansion of the National Animal Health Laboratory Network
- Modernization and expansion of USDA's National Centers for Animal Health in Ames, IA
- Initiation of a National Veterinary Stockpile

Benefits

The Safeguarding Review was a call to action to rebuild the State and national infrastructure for animal disease control, emergency disease preparedness and response. It helped VS and the animal health community as a whole to identify key areas where changes could be made to strengthen existing program activities and improve processes. VS is a more effective and responsive organization as a result of the review and the action plans that were generated from the review.

Next Steps

It has been nearly 8 years since NASDA issued its report and recommendations. Since that time, significant progress has been made by VS and its partners in addressing the issues raised by the report. Improving safeguarding and animal health remain at the core of VS' mission. Although VS has closed its formal activities around the Safeguarding Review, the VS 2015 vision commits the organization to continue its progress in these areas while taking into account new circumstances that have arisen since 2001.

Benefits

The VS 2015 strategic vision recognizes the continued importance of the themes identified in the AHSR and the need for continued vigilance. Safeguarding is a never-ending task. VS 2015 is also a recognition of the fact that the national animal health landscape continues to change—sometimes in ways not anticipated by the AHSR. Disease prevention, preparedness, detection and early response activities continue to take more and more of VS' time. Diseases that were once a concern only to the animal health community now make national headlines because of potential public health implications. In addition, import and export services have grown exponentially in recent years. VS 2015 presents a collaborative mechanism to address these new realities and place greater emphasis on these activities. The end result will benefit VS as well as our external partners and global customers.

Next Steps

VS plans to establish work teams, comprised of VS employees as well as external stakeholders. These work teams will each be tasked with providing their feedback and recommendations for implementing specific aspects of the VS 2015 vision. For example, one group may be asked to focus on import/export issues, while another addresses emergency response. VS is also launching a collaboration site that will provide an on-line forum for VS 2015 discussion, information, and other resources. Feedback from the workgroups and the collaboration site will be used to develop a blueprint that will be presented to VS employees and external stakeholders for further comment. VS can then initiate pilot projects to test new and innovative approaches before making large-scale changes. Overall, VS envisions a continual evolution of program policies and practices that will ultimately result in a more efficient, effective, and responsive organization by the year 2015.