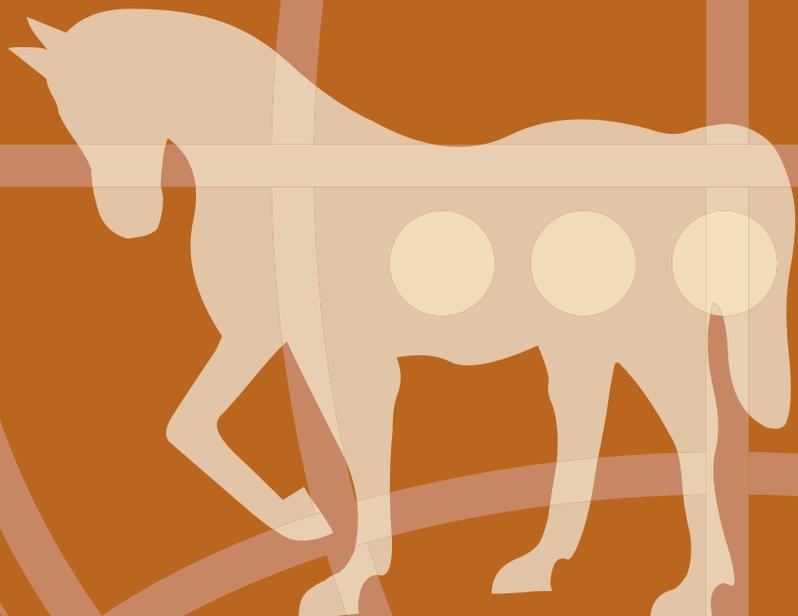
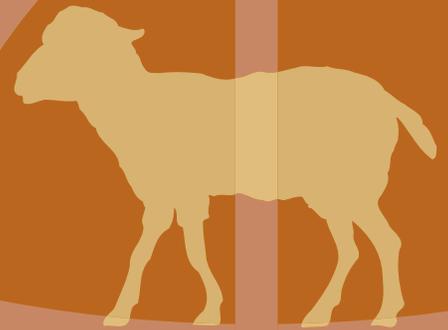
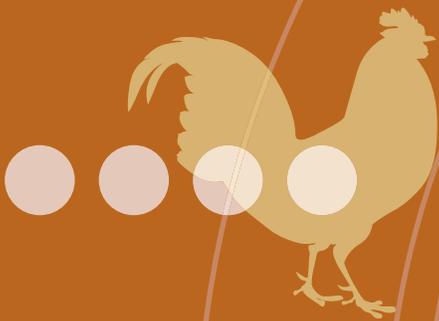


Protecting Animal Health in a Global Environment



Today's global marketplace means greater access than ever before to agricultural commodities from around the world, but it also requires greater vigilance to ensure that imports and exports comply with international standards for trade.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) works to maintain clear rules for trade involving animals and animal products arriving in and leaving the United States. The international credibility of APHIS' Veterinary Services (VS) unit is a key factor in sustaining favorable trade status for U.S. animal exports.

Through its various programs, centers, and laboratories, VS ensures the integrity of all animal imports and exports, whether the commodity at hand is a live animal, an animal product or byproduct, or a veterinary biologic. This diligence helps protect the United States against foreign animal diseases that could compromise the health and marketability of U.S. livestock. VS also helps reassure our trading partners that U.S. agricultural exports comply with their animal and animal product health standards and regulations.

Regionalization

A major new focus in the animal health trade arena is the concept of regionalization. Under this concept, APHIS will consider the importation of a commodity from a specific region of a country even though other parts of that country may be affected by an animal disease that does not exist in the United States. Before any decision is made, however, APHIS carefully assesses the risk associated with the disease and the boundaries between disease-free and disease-affected areas of a country to determine the safety and feasibility of allowing imports from a specified area.

An example of regionalization is the U.S. recognition of African swine fever-free regions in Italy. While Italy is not completely free of the disease, agriculture officials there presented APHIS with information including surveillance data, which was reviewed by APHIS specialists. A risk assessment conducted by APHIS personnel supported the conclusion that Italy, except for the island of Sardinia, was free of African swine fever and can without significant risk export swine and pork products to the United States.

Negotiating Agreements

The negotiations required to establish such technical agreements as those needed to apply the concept of regionalization are worked out with the assistance of VS' Sanitary Issues Management (SIM) staff. This team negotiates both import and export agreements that ensure the free flow of agricultural trade between the United States and other nations. The SIM staff has the primary responsibility for planning, coordinating, and helping to resolve animal health issues that impede trade. To make such agreements possible, SIM works to harmonize international standards, agency policies, and foreign and domestic quarantines that deal with the movement of animals and animal products and byproducts. The SIM team also makes science-based risk-management decisions on

petitions from foreign trading partners who want to export regulated articles to the United States.

The SIM staff is the primary USDA source for addressing science-based animal health concerns affecting agricultural trade. First and foremost, the SIM staff is concerned with safeguarding American agriculture. With that in mind, the team provides authoritative technical expertise for interpreting the intent and applicability of animal health requirements. Such interpretations are provided in response to inquiries from Federal, State, international, and territorial officials, private industry, and the public. In addition, SIM employees consult and advise U.S. agricultural attachés and animal health officials of foreign countries on issues of foreign animal quarantine laws and regulations. The team is instrumental in resolving questions that could lead to misunderstandings or ambiguity. Members of the SIM staff often travel to foreign countries to resolve trade disputes or clarify regulations that could affect market opportunities for U.S. exports.

By ensuring appropriate U.S. representation and participation in regional and global animal health organizations and in the development of policies and standards, the SIM team is protecting the future of U.S. agriculture and promoting new opportunities for trade.

Setting Standards for International Trade

In order to ensure that international animal health standards represent the interests and concerns of the United States, VS plays an active role in meetings of the Office International des Epizooties (OIE), a 155-member-country standards-setting organization. OIE works continuously to update old standards in the International Animal Health Code. Each member country has an opportunity to comment on the updated drafts, and VS takes this responsibility seriously. By sending the proposals out to experts

throughout the United States, VS ensures that new animal health standards are fair and scientifically justified. If U.S. experts disagree with a proposed standard, VS then has the opportunity to send alternative language to OIE and explain why the United States disagrees with the position.

While OIE is not obligated to make changes suggested by member countries, each country does have a chance to vote on the proposals at the organization's annual meeting. VS is focused on building coalitions with countries such as Canada, Mexico, Australia, and New Zealand in order to strengthen the United States' position and move OIE away from traditionally Eurocentric positions.

These new international standards will shape the future of animal trade, and it is important that the United States have a strong voice in the organization. In addition to updating animal health standards, OIE sets international standards for handling diagnostic tests and vaccines as well as fish health.

While working to establish and test international standards and regulations, VS also focuses on maintaining a safeguarding system for U.S. animal and animal product and byproduct imports and exports.

VS' Partner in Protection

With the help of APHIS' Agricultural Quarantine and Inspection program (AQI) in the Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) unit, VS oversees and implements the importation of animals and animal products and byproducts. Through their stringent import procedures, VS and PPQ work to prevent foreign animal diseases from entering the country. The close proximity of some foreign animal diseases to the United States highlights the importance of APHIS' import procedures.

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For instance, classical swine fever (hog cholera) has been diagnosed in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In April 2000, the United States and the Dominican Republic signed a cooperative agreement that initiates a passenger predeparture inspection program in order to decrease the risk of pork products possibly infected with classical swine fever virus entering the United States.

Such nearby threats to our animal health pose a serious problem, but threats traveling across the ocean can be just as dangerous. For instance, between 1997 and 1999, contagious equine metritis was detected in several horses imported from overseas while the animals were being held in quarantine at U.S. ports of entry. In each instance, the individual animal had been certified as free of that disease prior to shipment.

These threats to U.S. animal health, whether coming from nearby or faraway areas, cause personnel from VS and PPQ to be especially vigilant in their work. Together they make sure animals and animal products and byproducts entering the United States do not pose a significant risk of spreading foreign animal diseases. AQI personnel inspect incoming baggage at ports of entry and confiscate any prohibited products. PPQ inspectors also enlist the aid of the Beagle Brigade, dogs specially trained to detect various prohibited agricultural products, including meats and animal products.

Establishing Import Rules

Rules regarding the importation of animals and animal products and byproducts already established by VS and other international standards-setting organizations are enforced through the AQI program and VS' National Center for Import and Export (NCIE). NCIE bases these regulations on scientific findings of risk. While VS allows the importation of a variety of animals and animal products and byproducts from around the world, some commodities are not even considered for

import because the disease risk associated with the product is too great. For example, the United States does not allow the importation of ruminants or ruminant products from the European Union because of the threat of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, also called mad cow disease.

Strict rules have been established to ensure that animals and animal products and byproducts that are allowed for importation to the United States meet VS' requirements. All live animals and poultry must be accompanied by a health certificate issued by an official of the exporting country. Imports of livestock and poultry must also be quarantined and thoroughly inspected at an animal import center to confirm they are disease free.

APHIS also regulates the importation of veterinary biologics, such as vaccines, bacterins, diagnostics, etc., that are used to prevent, treat, or diagnose animal disease. VS' Center for Veterinary Biologics ensures that all veterinary biologics produced in, or imported into, the United States are pure, safe, potent, and effective. Foreign manufacturers may only export such biologics to the United States by permit.

To save importers time and streamline the application process, VS now allows importers to apply for animal product permits online. Importers can access the Import Authorization System at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/NCIE/fac_imp.html. Not only does the site allow importers to fill out a permit application online, but importers can also track the status of a pending application or amend a current application. Although importers still must apply for live animal permits and veterinary biologics permits by printing out a copy of their filled-in application forms and mailing them to VS, the agency is developing interactive forms that will enable importers to do all their permits entirely online.

Protecting America's Exports

While border inspection and participation in international standards-setting organizations pay huge dividends in keeping disease out and allowing our producers to raise animals in a disease-free environment, these efforts, along with emergency preparedness and surveillance activities, also enable the United States to capitalize on world export markets. APHIS is in the forefront in facilitating the export of live animals and germplasm due to the agency's ability to confidently certify the United States' animal health status to foreign trading partners.

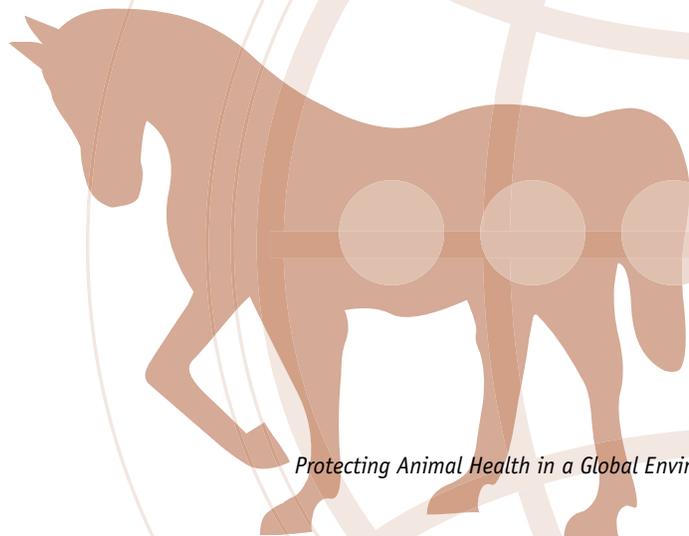
To maintain the world's confidence in the integrity of the health of U.S. animals and animal products, VS ensures that livestock headed to other countries meets the standards required by those nations. Physical examinations and blood tests—usually done by USDA-accredited veterinarians—cover both U.S. export requirements and the frequently complex requirements of the receiving nation. A VS veterinarian endorses export health certificates only after all tests and other requirements have been met. Then a final examination is conducted by a VS veterinarian at the port of export before the livestock or poultry leave the country.

NCIE works closely with exporters who engage in trade with foreign nations. The International Regulation Retrieval System, a database maintained by VS, lists the animal health requirements of other countries. Both exporters and veterinarians can access this retrieval system on the Internet.

Exporters realize that, if the United States were to become known for harboring a foreign animal disease, other countries would be hesitant to accept U.S. commodities. That could be disastrous for the U.S. export industry, and efforts are in place to protect the integrity of U.S. exports. VS' National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) collects information on the status of animal health in the United States. The program, which began

in 1983, estimates the level of selected domestic diseases and also estimates producer awareness of foreign animal diseases. In addition, serums are collected and banked through NAHMS as a possible resource for determining the presence of new diseases. Additional efforts are being made to strengthen the systematic monitoring of animal diseases at the State level. State veterinarians already voluntarily submit monthly reports to OIE on the presence or absence of clinical diseases in their States, and then OIE informs governments worldwide on the existence of animal diseases.

In order to monitor an illness, however, one must first be able to identify its origin. The National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL), with locations in Ames, IA, and Plum Island, NY, are especially valuable in this regard. For instance, in the fall of 1999, a mysterious illness appeared in birds, horses, and humans in upstate New York. Working with laboratory personnel from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, personnel at NVSL quickly isolated the cause of the illness, which was soon identified as West Nile virus. This was the first appearance of West Nile virus in the Western Hemisphere.



Safeguarding American agriculture is a responsibility that requires constant diligence in order to maintain trade markets for animal exports and ensure that animal imports are disease free.

If the United States ever has an outbreak of a foreign animal disease, VS stands ready to contain or eradicate the disease immediately. This readiness allows trade to continue with minimal interruptions and provides insurance for farmers and producers that dreaded animal diseases will not become established in this country. With its state-of-the-art Emergency Management Operations Center at its headquarters in Riverdale, VS can coordinate efforts to manage disease outbreaks all over the United States. VS also conducts test exercises regularly to practice its response techniques. In the rare event of a serious foreign animal disease outbreak, a VS task force known as the Regional Emergency Animal Disease Eradication Organization (READEO) team can be onsite rapidly to implement the measures necessary to contain the disease. The last time a READEO was called into action was in 1983 to eradicate an outbreak of avian influenza.

CITES-Protected Animals and Birds

In addition to their other duties, APHIS employees cooperate with the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in honoring the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species in Flora and Fauna (CITES). CITES is a protective treaty that regulates the commercial trade of endangered plants and animals and monitors trade involving species threatened with extinction in the near future. More than 123 countries, including the United States, have endorsed this treaty.

Although FWS is responsible for overseeing all aspects of CITES within the United States, wildlife officials consult with APHIS to ensure that exotic animal species entering the country under CITES meet animal quarantine requirements so that these animals will not introduce pests and diseases that could endanger animal health of the livestock industries of the United States. When U.S. zoos apply to FWS for CITES permits to import protected animals, FWS verifies with APHIS that these facilities are in compliance with the Animal Welfare Act. APHIS inspectors at ports of entry are also trained to identify CITES-protected species and to notify the Department of the Interior if these species are found during inspection.

Safeguarding American agriculture is a responsibility that requires constant diligence in order to maintain trade markets for animal exports and ensure that animal imports are disease free. VS never lets its guard down in the fight against foreign animal diseases. At ports of entry, APHIS headquarters, VS laboratories, and field offices across the Nation, veterinarians are working to ensure that domestic livestock is protected against disease and that all trade policies are in the best interest of U.S. producers and continue to safeguard American agriculture. After all, tomorrow's animal health depends on today's activities.

For more information about APHIS programs, visit the APHIS homepage at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov>

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