Consensus Building for Unite

Animal health related issues are complex and require extensive ongoing efforts for the development and implementation of solutions. Although some animal health issues are unique to a local area or state, many pose shared challenges for all animal health officials nationally and internationally. Solutions to these issues require ongoing extensive communications, deliberations, and collaborations with multiple governmental entities, scientists, animal industry leaders and stakeholders.

The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) is a science-based, voluntary organization of State and Federal animal health officials, national allied organizations, regional representatives and individual members that works with state/federal governments, universities, livestock producers, national livestock and poultry organizations, research scientists and extension services to control livestock and poultry diseases and protect public health in the US. Since inception more than 100 years ago, the organization has successfully incorporated a consensus-building approach for development of workable disease eradication programs to protect animal and public health. With 32 active species and subject-oriented, science-based committees, the annual meeting serves as an important venue for sharing of new information and methods that may be incorporated into laws, regulations, policy and programs. Committees develop resolutions and recommendations to address animal health related issues. Membership consensus is the basis for resolution approval by the association. Leadership support and promotion of association-approved initiatives are cornerstones in the modifications of animal health laws, regulations, policies and programs. The USAHA Annual Meeting was held in Minneapolis, MN on November 12-17, 2010. Summaries of all committee meetings are beyond the scope of this article, but some of the highlights of this meeting follow.

The Plenary Session, entitled “One Medicine - It’s All Herd Health”, provided valuable One Health perspectives from producers and animal health, public health and environmental health practitioners. With 60% of the 1451 known infectious diseases of humans able to infect both animals and humans and 85% of new emerging infectious diseases being zoonotic, addressing emerging diseases requires coordination and collaborative efforts of inter-disciplinary, multi-organizational, working groups. It was opined that One Health is not a new concept for veterinarians, but a professional imperative. The establishment of trusting relationships, lines of communication and effective outreach programs are acknowledged as keys for the “One Health” concept and the dissemination of information on zoonotic and emerging diseases.

Presentations in the Committee on Infectious Diseases of Cattle, Bison, and Camelids focused on effective biosecurity plan development and implementation for cow/calf, feedlot, dairy and camelid production sectors. Risk assessments are aids in the identification and subsequent development of biosecurity practices and plans for the commodity group. Risk is a herd-specific issue depending on the herd type, the location of the herd, disease prevalence in the area, neighboring herd disease status, and the presence of reservoirs and vectors of disease. Multiple management practices influence risk, but the most important biosecurity risks are the purchase and introduction of new animals to the herd, disease testing programs, and premises quarantine procedures. Competing priorities often interfere with producer implementation of recommended practices. Inherent problems in designing biosecurity programs for emerging pathogens was exemplified in the discussions of the challenges being experienced in South America and Southeast Asia with the emerging HoBi-like viruses, a pestivirus causing a BVD-like disease with immune suppression and persistent infection in cattle. Current mitigations for BVD virus are ineffective.

The Committee on Infectious Diseases of Horses presentations provided updates on multiple equine-related disease issues of the past year. The updated known-scope of the equine piroplasmosis (EP) situation in the US received a great deal of attention. The extensive 2010 Texas investigation led to the EP testing of almost 2500 horses, identification of 412 Babesia equi-positive horses, and the determination that active natural transmission of the organism by Amblyomma cajennense and Dermacentor variabilis ticks had occurred over many years on the index premises. Subsequent EP testing entry requirements imposed for some states and racetracks revealed horses imported into the US before 2005 on a negative compliment fixation test.
and racing Quarter Horses as other high risk groups for EP infection. The Texas index ranch is maintaining all positive horses under quarantine and plans to pursue research treatment for many of the affected horses. EP treatment research results are encouraging, and research to develop and validate a method to demonstrate EP clearance after treatment is needed. A report on the Equine Viral Arteritis (EVA) outbreak in Argentina highlighted the challenges and consequences of the rapid dissemination of this contagious respiratory and reproductive disease through the importation of infected frozen semen and index mare exposure by artificial insemination. An insightful academic commentary reinforced the main risk of EVA spread as the national/international movement and use of semen from persistent-shedder stallions. It is notable that the US is the only country that allows the importation of EVA-infected stallions and semen. The USDA EVA Uniform Methods and Rules (2004) remain under review.

Numerous presentations in the Committee on Animal Welfare reinforced the myriad of animal welfare issues being addressed across the country. An AVMA legislative update noted that they sent Legislative Alerts to respective state chapters for 2500 bills introduced across the US in 2009/2010; 90 of these bills involved various aspects of pet breeding. An update on the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board revealed that the costs of the board activities greatly exceed their allocated budget. The Board is developing and evaluating dairy, beef and veal standards as a priority. Presentations from US and United Kingdom animal welfare scientists illustrated that there is no single, easy method to develop and implement welfare standards. Ongoing research efforts focus on developing an equation for animal welfare and defining qualitative measures for evaluation of procedures on animals.

The Committee on Livestock Identification focused on the new USDA approach to animal disease traceability. A section of requirements for the interstate movement of livestock will be added to the Code of Federal Regulations. Livestock being moved interstate, with some exceptions, will require official identification and an interstate certificate of veterinary inspection (ICVI) or other defined documentation. Implementation of the program will be phased in beginning with cattle. Additional program information may be viewed on http://www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability. The proposed rule will be published in early 2011 and the final rule in 2012. Since a large component of the proposed animal disease traceability framework includes the use of ICVIs, USDA and the States encourage all accredited veterinarians to stay informed and consider the use of the electronic ICVI systems offered by the USDA and private companies.

The Committee on Animal Emergency Management presentations provided updates and progress on numerous ongoing initiatives and activities at both state and federal levels. Overviews of the numerous activities of the USDA National Center for Animal Health Emergency Management and the USDA APHIS National Surveillance Unit, and an update on the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility project, reinforce the ongoing federal initiatives and commitment of resources for animal disease emergency management. Several presentations reflected the ever-increasing interest in Foreign Animal Disease (FAD) outbreaks and the logistics for implementation of an emergency vaccination response. Additionally, a Secure Milk Supply Workgroup progress report gave insight to the ongoing planning initiative that is focusing on risk assessments and continuity of business planning for the dairy industry in the face of a FAD outbreak.

The Committee on Tuberculosis and the Committee on Brucellosis each covered the national update for the respective diseases. Forty-six states have bovine tuberculosis-free status, California has Modified Accredited Advanced status, and Michigan, Minnesota and New Mexico have split-status states. All 50 states now have Brucellosis-free status. New approaches for the National Tuberculosis Program and the National Brucellosis Eradication Program are under consideration. The final plans for both disease programs will most likely be in a common framework. Proposed rules are expected in 2011 and final rules in 2012.