



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES

Updates from the State Veterinarian's Office Spring 2024

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As are many of you, I am blessed to have some of the very best colleagues, and I wanted to take the opportunity to highlight a few new, and some old, faces on our VDACS veterinary team.

After almost three years of searching, we are excited to have finally filled the laboratory diagnostician position in our Lynchburg lab with Dr. Taylor Young. And, Dr. Tom Lavelle is now the Wytheville diagnostician, replacing Dr. Chris Halsey, who recently retired after many years of service. They join our fantastic team of laboratory veterinarians, including Dr. Jaime Weisman in Warrenton, Dr. Jamie Horstmann and Dr. Hailey Quercia in Harrisonburg, all of whom are led by Dr. Jess Walters.



In our Office of Veterinary Services, we are happy that Dr. Chris Fletcher joined our Wytheville office, taking Dr. Lavelle's old position. Dr. Fletcher joins the rest of the great Veterinary Services Team, including Dr. Dan Hadacek and Dr. Tabby Moore based out of our Harrisonburg office. Dr. Abby Sage was also a wonderful part of the team, but she recently resigned to take a job with Zoetis; we are in the process of filling that position now. We also recently lost our Animal Care veterinarian to another position out of state, and welcome Dr. Lane Songer to that position, which focuses on the companion animal shelter inspection program. All of these fine folks are led by Dr. Carrie Bissett.

Finally, a couple of positions that have not changed recently; Dr. Susan Miller and Dr. Ginny Tatum are the veterinarians for our Office of Meat and Poultry Services, and do a great job with carcass inspections and making sure our slaughter and meat processing establishments are operating in compliance with the rules.

Especially considering the difficulties that we are all facing these days in hiring and retaining veterinarians, it is an honor to be part of such a great team. If any of us can help you in any way, please do not hesitate to reach out.

FREE TAGS AND TAGGERS PROVIDED



The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has been distributing 840-series radio frequency identification device (RFID) ear tags for use in cattle at no cost for over 13 years. To date, over 600,000 tags have been distributed to livestock markets, veterinarians and cattle producers in Virginia. Beginning in 2020, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) began providing free 840-RFID tags nationwide for distribution to veterinarians and cattle producers. The VDACS Office of Veterinary Services has 840-RFID tags in stock and practitioners are encouraged to begin using electronic ID if they

are not already doing so. All tags are button-style, white in color, half-duplex (HDX) devices and can be used for all regulatory activities that require official ID (testing, vaccination and interstate movement). The primary focus remains on tagging breeding cattle and replacement heifers since individual official identification is currently not required for interstate transport of beef feeder calves under 18 months of age to most states. In addition, RFID readers for scanning tags are also available to practitioners at no cost - contingent on continued availability of federal funding. To order tags or readers, practitioners may contact Richard Odom at **804.692.0600** or e-mail richard.odom@vdacs.virginia.gov.

Accredited veterinarians are required to keep records of all official identification devices distributed to clients or applied to livestock for 5 years, including the recipient's name, address and the tag numbers distributed or applied.

An amendment to the USDA Animal Disease Traceability Rule is currently under consideration to require the use of electronic ID for cattle involved in interstate commerce. This change has not been finalized, but practitioners are encouraged to transition to 840-RFID tags for cattle that require official identification for interstate movements. No change is anticipated for beef feeder cattle under 18 months of age that are not currently required to be individually identified under the ADT (Animal Disease Traceability) Rule. However, practitioners should be aware that some states require official identification on all imported cattle regardless of age or sexual status.

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FOREIGN ANIMAL DISEASE PREPAREDNESS

In addition to our role of reviewing Certificates of Veterinary Inspection, providing inspection and oversight of livestock marketing facilities, regulating and monitoring equine events, and administrating the ADT program, the Office of Veterinary Services (OVS) veterinarians and staff work to prevent and prepare for foreign animal diseases such as Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), African Swine Fever (ASF) and Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD).

The OVS has three distinct areas of concentration for the prevention and control of foreign animal diseases:

1. Investigate outbreaks

VDACS fields a variety of animal disease related questions from all over the Commonwealth. Residents or veterinarians can call any of our regional offices or ask questions through vastatevet@vdacs.virginia.gov. OVS staff interview the resident or veterinarian to gather clinical history and epidemiological data to determine if an on-site disease investigation is warranted. For example, a vesicular lesion on the gums of a horse housed on a farm with three other horses, who never leave the premises and have no fence line contact with any other animals, might merit the farm veterinarian to collect a blood sample for testing. Vesicular lesions on the gums of a horse in a boarding stable that recently arrived from an equine event out west might merit a site visit, quarantine, and expedited testing.

2. Contain the spread of animal diseases

If a foreign or economically important animal disease is suspected or diagnosed, VDACS must move swiftly to minimize morbidity and mortality and protect the livestock and poultry industries. Quarantines and stop movement orders can be placed immediately. If depopulation is needed to control the spread of the disease, OVS is prepared to assist. During the recent HPAI outbreak in 2022-2023, VDACS staff were



able to depopulate infected flocks within 24 hours of diagnosis. In certain diseases, such as HPAI, control zones are drawn around the infected premises and enhanced disease testing is done on farms within the zones. Movement of animals is also restricted from the zones.

3. Preparedness

Staying prepared for disease events that occur on short notice takes careful and deliberate planning. Training exercises simulating a disease outbreak are done on a regular basis. They range from simple exercises which can be utilized by OVS staff and the local poultry companies simulating a HPAI incident to complex multi-state, multi-agency exercises simulating a FMD or ASF outbreak.

OVS also maintains generators, power washers, foam depopulation equipment, captive bolts and decontamination units. Staff must be trained, and equipment maintained so regular hands-on training is held. Plentiful supplies of PPE (personal protective equipment) such as Tyvek disposable coveralls, gloves, masks, boots, and respirators are inventoried for VDACS personnel to respond quickly in the event of a disease outbreak.

OVS strives to support and maintain good relationships with the veterinary practitioners in the commonwealth. Private practitioners are the “eyes and ears” that OVS depends on for information of disease trends and potential emerging diseases in the field.

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EQUINE HERPESVIRUS MYELOENCEPHALOPATHY AT THE VIRGINIA HORSE CENTER

Our office received that dreaded call in June when two neurologic horses showing at the Virginia Horse Center (VHC) had been diagnosed with Equine Herpesvirus Myeloencephalopathy (EHM). There were about 800 horses on the grounds for the show. The index cases arrived on Saturday, June 17 and the first horse started showing signs on Sunday night/Monday morning, and was transported to an equine hospital. The second horse began showing signs about 24 hours after the initial case and was transported to the same hospital and was euthanized. EHM is reportable and requires quarantine in Virginia. OVS placed a verbal quarantine immediately and staff veterinarians arrived at the site within 12 hours of notification. VDACS veterinarians assessed which horses were considered exposed and developed a plan for the quarantine.

With this case, certain factors were considered to determine which horses should be labeled exposed and whether the show should continue. Based on the 6-7 day incubation period, the horses were infected prior to arrival at the horse center and had not left their stalls before being shipped to the hospital. Due to the design of the barns, all horses within Barn 3, where the index cases were stabled, were placed under quarantine. This determination was made as they were considered exposed due to air movement, ventilation, and people and horse movement within the barn. All trainers and caretakers were instructed to monitor horses' temperatures twice daily and monitor health closely. Foot baths and personal protective equipment were made available at the entrances to the barn.

Horses from 4 different states were considered exposed. VDACS veterinarians contacted the state veterinarians of these four states to get permission for these horses to return to their home farms to continue their 21-day quarantine. This permission was granted by those states involved. Those home states had varying degrees of monitoring quarantines from visiting



the farms and testing horses to staying in close contact by phone during the remainder of the quarantine.

After discussions with VHC management, show management and trainers of non-exposed horses, the show was allowed to continue for those horses. Although not officially quarantined, the owners of these non-exposed horses were encouraged to refrain from commingling with any other horses for 14 days. No other horses on the premises developed a fever or showed any neurological signs throughout the show. Three horses developed fevers after being shipped home from the show but tested negative for Equine Herpesvirus (EHV-1).

Horses are exposed to EHV-1 early in life, and the respiratory form of the disease is common. The virus spreads by aerosolized particles from nasal discharge or contaminated surfaces such as people, buckets, lead ropes and feed. Biosecurity measures are the best way to prevent spread.

EHM occurs when viremia leads to vasculitis, thrombosis, and focal infarction within central nervous system vasculature, resulting in focal spinal cord malacia and neurologic disease. Occurrences may or may not be preceded by a febrile episode or signs of respiratory disease. Analysis of samples from multiple EHM outbreaks has demonstrated that both the "neuropathic" (G2254/D752) and "non-neuropathic" (A2254/N752) EHV-1 strains can cause EHM. EHM is reportable to the State Veterinarian's office as soon as suspected and or positively diagnosed.

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VIRGINIA PRODUCERS SELECTED TO TAKE PART IN 2024 NAHMS STUDY

Approximately every 10 years, the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) completes a study on the U.S. sheep industry, in collaboration with the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). The last sheep study was completed in 2011 and focused on sheep health and management practices. These studies are designed to provide the sheep industry and veterinarians with relevant management information and helps the USDA determine the best areas to concentrate their resources and efforts.

Only those states ranking among the top sheep-producing states have been asked to participate in the 2024 NAHMS study. Virginia producers, ranking 17th in U.S. sheep production, have been selected to participate in the upcoming study. Not only will the selected producers be representing their farm, but Virginia's sheep industry as a whole. Results from this study will help veterinarians and producers with new treatments, controls, and preventive actions for the future.

Participation is voluntary and confidential, and the USDA will randomly select approximately 5,000 producers across the U.S. to participate. Participants will be asked to complete questionnaires and then samples will be collected including interdigital swabs, blood, and fecal samples. These results will provide information on gastrointestinal parasites, (composite fecal egg count and DrenchRite Assay), enteric microbes (Salmonella, E. coli, and Campylobacter) and lameness pathogens (Treponema spp, Dichelobacter nodosus, and Fusobacterium necrophorum) that are prevalent in the U.S.

OVS works alongside USDA veterinary medical officers to collect information and samples across Virginia. This data will be used

to impact future industry decisions.

Scan the QR code for more information or feel free to contact your regional Office of Veterinary Services.



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THE FRAMEWORK FOR ANIMAL WELFARE LAWS IN VIRGINIA

Animal welfare is an increasingly important component of veterinary medicine. Federally, the USDA Animal Care Division is responsible for upholding and enforcing the Animal Welfare Act and the Horse Protection Act. The Animal Welfare Act and its associated regulations require that federally established standards of care and treatment be provided for certain warm-blooded animals that are bred for commercial sale, used in research, transported commercially or exhibited to the public. The Horse Protection Act and its associated regulations seek to put an end to soring by preventing sore horses from participating in exhibitions, shows, sales and auctions. Inspection and oversight of zoos and animal exhibits is the responsibility of federal inspectors in the USDA Animal Care Division.

At the state level, OVS, provides subject matter expertise on Virginia's Comprehensive Animal Care Laws. These laws, which can be found on the VDACS website, outline the minimum standards of care for companion and agricultural animals, define criminal acts of animal cruelty, provide guidelines for animal seizure and mandate the existence and training of animal control officers. Veterinarians should be aware that Virginia law sets minimum standards for food, water, shelter, space, exercise, transportation and veterinary treatment for companion animals and food, water and veterinary care for agricultural animals, such as livestock and poultry.

Primary responsibility for enforcing Virginia's animal care laws rests with local animal control and law enforcement agencies and thus complaints against individual animal owners should be directed to local authorities. Animal control officers are one of only four animal care professionals in Virginia that are required to complete initial training and continuing education, with veterinarians, licensed veterinary technicians and certified wildlife rehabbers being the other three. OVS staff work closely with animal control officers

across the Commonwealth, and with the Virginia Animal Control Association, by providing veterinary expertise to such agencies as they enforce these laws to ensure the

humane treatment of Virginia's animal population.

OVS is responsible for enforcing sections of Virginia's Comprehensive Animal Care Laws and regulations related to animal shelters in Virginia. There are two types of animal shelters in Virginia: public and private. Every locality is mandated to operate, or contract to operate, a public animal shelter. Virginia law mandates that all unowned animals be housed in the public animal shelter for a minimum holding period to allow their owners to locate them. That minimum holding period is five days for animals with no signs of identification and ten days for animals with identification. **Individuals, veterinarians and private animal shelters who find unowned animals must notify the public animal shelter within 48 hours.** All animal shelters in Virginia are subject to unannounced inspections by OVS staff. In addition, OVS staff oversee the Humane Euthanasia in Animal Shelters Program and provide training to animal control officers and animal shelter workers throughout the state. OVS encourages Virginia veterinarians to engage with their local animal shelter. OVS is able to provide subject matter expertise on shelter medicine and oversight if needed.

Use this QR code to access Virginia's Comprehensive Animal Care Laws:



OFFICE OF LABORATORY SERVICES UPDATE

VDACS has signed a contract with Gauthier Alvarado Associates (GAA) to provide architectural and engineering services for expansion and renovations at the Warrenton, Harrisonburg, and Lynchburg Regional Animal Health Laboratories (RAHL). This capital project was approved by the General Assembly in 2022 and will encompass 8,800 square feet of new space across the three facilities. The expansions and renovations will allow for more efficient lab processes and accommodate new testing methodologies that promote the agency's core mission of supporting Virginia agriculture. The design process will occur over the next year, with an expectation of about one year construction time upon conclusion of the design process. James Madison University is providing procurement, project management, and inspection services to VDACS for this capital project.

The Virginia RAHLs have moved to a Level 1 National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) designation, with Harrisonburg as the main lab and Lynchburg and Wytheville as official branch labs. Warrenton will be brought on as a branch lab in 2024. Level 1 is the highest designation as a member of the NAHLN and recognizes the laboratory system's potential sample caseload and ability to respond to foreign animal disease outbreaks and perform needed surveillance throughout the commonwealth. This designation also accompanies increased funding for training, equipment and supplies for outbreak preparedness. The Harrisonburg RAHL also received two additional grants specific for HPAI preparedness in 2023. For quality purposes, the laboratory system remains a branch lab system accredited by the American Association of Laboratory Accreditation (A2LA). This means that the lab system is considered a complete system for external audit body purposes. These two accomplishments in tandem will allow VDACS to continue to develop and improve the entire laboratory system.

The Office of Laboratory Services (OLS) has performed an in-depth data analysis for determin-



ing appropriate fees for services and remains dedicated to maintaining the most up to date fee schedule on our VDACS website. The fee schedule includes locations for testing, up to date pricing, and preferred specimen type. Fee increases for 2024 are not a standard percentage but instead factor in supply and testing costs, in addition to subsidy and goals to maintain affordable pricing for agricultural producers.

The Lynchburg RAHL is back to being a full-service facility including necropsies. Dr. Taylor Young started in September 2023 and is passionate in his new role of diagnostics. Additionally in Lynchburg, testing platforms are continuing to evolve. The Ruminant Abortion and Bovine Respiratory PCR panels are up and running, and now can include BVD PCR testing. Samples for these tests range from fluid to swabs to tissue. We are excited to offer these diagnostic platforms for antemortem testing. Please contact the Lynchburg RAHL with questions. Evaluations for other testing platforms are being completed in all laboratories to expand services to clients.

OLS is always open to feedback and ideas for testing to further assist the agricultural community. VDACS' partnership with the Virginia Tech Animal Laboratory Services Lab (ViTALS) continues to evaluate ways to collaborate and expand testing services. Whether by utilizing data for reports or enhancing testing capabilities, we look forward to continuing to work together and with all of you.





CONTACT INFORMATION

For general questions or communication, please e-mail vastatevet@vdacs.virginia.gov, or feel free to contact any of our staff members below:

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