



## VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES

Updates from the State Veterinarian's Office Spring 2025

### WHAT'S INSIDE

*Dairy Cattle and Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1 Virus*

*Important Changes to Animal Disease Traceability Rule*

*Importance of CVIs*

*Swine Health Improvement Plan*

*Biosecurity and Horse Owners*

*Office of Laboratory Services Update*



2024 was another interesting year, which I am grateful for. Although of course I am not grateful for the reason for some of that interest, including the continuation of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in wild waterfowl and domestic poultry in the US (with the most recent detection in Virginia being on in Accomack County in January 2025), or the finding of H5N1 Avian Influenza virus in dairy cattle. But I am glad to be part of a team that prioritizes minimizing the losses and impacts associated with those diseases, as well as many others.

We did not expect to find H5N1 in dairy cattle in Texas in March of 2024, but the nationwide response has been science-based for the most part, and I am confident that we have a system in place to detect and respond to the disease should it become present in Virginia dairy cattle. Based on extensive testing throughout Virginia, we do not currently have the disease in Virginia dairy cows. While we are concerned about the potential for HPAI in both Virginia poultry and dairy cattle, we are ready to respond to either disease in the interest of minimizing associated losses and promoting the continued success of the poultry and dairy industries. You can read more about H5N1 in dairy cattle in this newsletter.

Another subject that has been a “hot topic” for a number of years is the large animal veterinary shortage. For more than a decade, USDA has administered the “Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program,” but large animal owners in Virginia have continued to report difficulties in finding a large animal veterinarian to provide the desired services. So, as authorized by legislation passed in 2024, a work group has met several times to discuss the issue, and to consider potential solutions. One such potential solution has been proposed for consideration in this year’s General Assembly, for Virginia to implement a state-funded grant program to support large animal veterinarians. We appreciate the input and viewpoints of a number of Virginia veterinarians on this topic.

As always, my team and I appreciate the opportunity to be of service – please let us know what we can do to help.



# DAIRY CATTLE AND HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN INFLUENZA H5N1 VIRUS



## Highly Pathogenic

Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1 was first detected in US wild waterfowl in January 2022 and quickly jumped into the US commercial poultry industry the following month. Since that time, the US has been diligently waging battle against this disease with over 143 million poultry affected. This has resulted in the most devastating and costly animal health emergency that the United States has ever experienced.

Since the start of the current outbreak, we have known that HPAI has the potential to sporadically infect mammals. On March 25, 2024, those fears became reality when the H5N1 virus was detected in a dairy herd in Texas; the 2.3.4.4b clade of the virus affecting dairy cows is the same as that affecting poultry, but the B3.13 genotype is unique. To date, over 860 dairies in 16 states have had virus detections in dairy cattle. HPAI has yet to be diagnosed in Virginia's dairy cattle. Thankfully, the near 100% mortality seen with poultry has not been observed in cattle. Cattle typically exhibit symptoms such as decreased feed intake, decreased rumination, decreased milk yield with changes to milk consistency (Colostrum-like appearance), respiratory symptoms, and fever. The most vulnerable dairy cattle appear to be in their second lactation or greater and are

usually more than 150 days in milk. Most infected animals recover from the effects of the virus within 10-12 days.

To help control HPAI in dairy cattle the USDA has announced several steps to slow the disease. In April, a federal order mandating testing prior to the interstate movement of lactating dairy cattle was issued and in December, an order requiring that samples representing a majority of the dairies be tested for HPAI. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has been instrumental working alongside USDA in processing these samples to ensure that Virginia's livestock and its producers are safeguarded from this disease. VDACS has tested over 400 milk samples throughout the state, and in the first few months of 2025 will have more than 80% of the dairies in the state tested. With all of these negative results, we are confident that Virginia is currently free from the strain of virus that affects dairy cattle.

Another key element to the control of HPAI is biosecurity. Unlike poultry, the main mode of transmission of HPAI in dairy cattle appears to be by fomite, which means that we as humans can make an impact in the spread of this disease. Veterinarians and producers are urged to practice strict biosecurity by disinfecting vehicles and equipment, limiting cattle movement as much as possible, quarantining all new or returning animals for at least 21 days, and not feeding unpasteurized colostrum or milk to calves or other mammals.

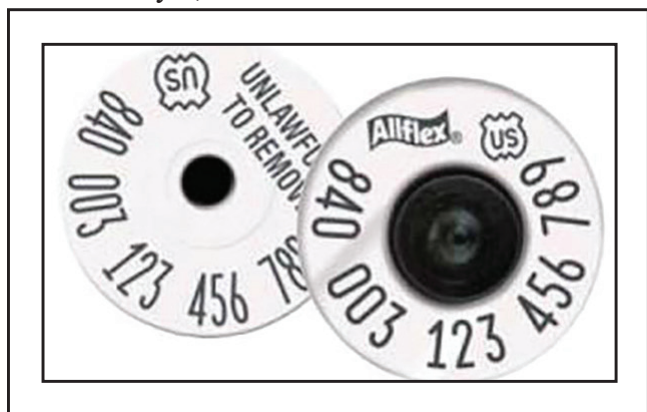
The United States has one of the strongest HPAI surveillance programs in the world, and the USDA and state agencies like VDACS work jointly to safeguard the health of our livestock industry and its consumers. Early detection is vital in preventing the spread of H5N1! Please contact VDACS for further information regarding testing, biosecurity recommendations, or further information about HPAI in dairy cattle.



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# IMPORTANT CHANGES TO ANIMAL DISEASE TRACEABILITY RULE

An amendment to the USDA Animal Disease Traceability (ADT) Rule went into effect on November 5, 2024, that requires the use of electronic identification for most cattle involved in interstate commerce. Cattle tagged with official USDA metal tags (silver bright or orange Bangs tags) prior to 11/5/24 do not need to be retagged. Beef feeder cattle under 18 months of age are not required to be individually identified under the ADT Rule. As a result of the new rule, the VDACS Office of Veterinary Services will no longer distribute USDA metal tags to practitioners as of January 1, 2025.



Beginning in 2020, 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. However, practitioners should be aware that some states require official identification on all imported cattle regardless of age or sexual status. Additionally, 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, ADT Program Coordinator, at 804.692.0600, e-mail [richard.odom@vdacs.virginia.gov](mailto:richard.odom@vdacs.virginia.gov), or contact regional offices in Harrisonburg (540.209.9120) and Wytheville (276.228.5501).

As a reminder, 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.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF CVIS

Certificates of Veterinary Inspection (CVIs) have long been required for interstate movement of livestock and other animals. CVIs still remain the standard document for certifying health, documentation of any required testing, and providing official identification for animal disease traceability (ADT). Most importantly, CVIs are still required by federal and state statutes.

In the past 5 years, use of electronic CVIs (eCVI) has greatly expanded. Vendors such as Global Vet Link, Vet Sentry, myVetTech, and USDA's VSPS now make up to 80% of CVIs entering Virginia. eCVIs increase efficiency and save time and money by decreasing transcription errors during processing, and ADT data is available in real time to both the issuing and receiving states. Several states are phasing out paper CVIs entirely, a trend that will continue.

VDACS recommends veterinarians use eCVIs. VDACS has redesigned the Virginia large animal (non-equine) paper CVI. The new CVI will provide space for email addresses, premises identification information and will be able to be reconsigned to a new destination/owner such as at an auction or sale without issuing a new CVI.

Practitioners have sometimes struggled with delivering the top two copies of the CVI to VDACS within the mandated 7 days. VDACS no longer requires two paper copies to be sent to Richmond or the Regional offices. Instead VDACS strongly suggests that practitioners email a copy of the CVI to [cvi@vdacs.virginia.gov](mailto:cvi@vdacs.virginia.gov). Practitioners are not to send a copy to the state of destination, as VDACS will do that electronically. Free apps such as GeniusScan, CamScanner, and Tiny Scanner are available for your phone and are useful as they can take a picture of the CVI and then email a pdf copy. Emails of the CVI can be sent to VDACS, the owner, the carrier, etc. and can be done immediately at the time of examination, saving time, postage and delays. Large lists of animals in the shipment

do not have to be copied onto official continuation forms. Any list or spreadsheet which contains required information including official ID, age, sex, breed, etc., can be scanned and attached to the CVI with the same scanner app. The CVI certificate



number should be written on all attached documents.

Interstate Livestock (<https://www.interstatelivestock.com/>) is recommended by VDACS as the go-to source for state animal entry requirements. eCVI vendors recommended by VDACS include: <https://www.globalvetlink.com/> <https://www.vet-sentry.com/> <https://www.myvettech.org/>

*If you have any questions about CVI's contact your regional VDACS office.*

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# SWINE HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN



The US Swine Health Improvement Plan (US SHIP) is a voluntary program available to all pig and pork producers, no matter their size. Any farm that has commercial, breeding and/or exhibition stock, and any facility that processes hogs is eligible to participate. The program is modeled after the National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) and certification requirements are based on the core tenants of biosecurity, traceability, and disease surveillance. The establishment of US SHIP was meant to offer a pathway in which the movement of swine and/or pork products might resume in the event of an African Swine Fever (ASF) or Classical Swine Fever (CSF) disease occurrence in the US. It would allow participating sites to market their product with the relevant certification status, which could limit disruption to interstate commerce during outbreaks. Additional efforts to incorporate optional program standards for endemic diseases such as Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea Virus (PEDv) Disease are also underway.

Program oversight is through the Office of Veterinary Services (804.786.2483 or [vastatevet@vdacs.virginia.gov](mailto:vastatevet@vdacs.virginia.gov)), and there is no fee to participate. To enroll, farms must first complete a biosecurity survey and enrollment form, and for certification, farms must demonstrate competency in providing 30 days of animal movement data electronically. We encourage and welcome all farms to participate, including farms that sell direct to the consumer, show pig exhibitors, and heritage pig breeders. In the event of a foreign animal disease outbreak in swine such as ASF or CSF, it will take the cooperation of all facets of the industry to limit the disruption of pig and pork movements, and the spread of these diseases. If you have clients with swine that may be interested in participating, please reach out to the Office of Veterinary Services.

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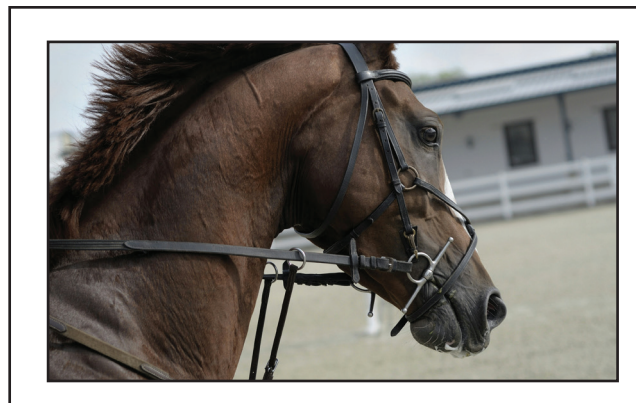
## BIOSECURITY AND HORSE OWNERS

Horses are transported more than any other type of livestock in the U.S. and co-mingle at shows, events and sales which poses a great risk for disease infection and transmission. Biosecurity practices mitigate this infectious disease spread and help in traceability in outbreaks. In 2023, a 24-question survey was emailed to horse owner organizations' member lists to assess owners' understanding of biosecurity and the procedures that reduce disease spread among horses.

In total, 2413 responses were received to the web-based survey. Differences in biosecurity use and understanding were identified across horse use categories and regions of the country, including differences in the availability of biosecurity plans, risk assessment for horse contact and the use of isolation to mitigate infectious disease. The response rate was determined to be representative of the horse population of each region. The results suggest that most owners are not highly concerned about the risk of disease or the use of biosecurity. Horse owners indicated that veterinarians are the most trusted resource for medical information and websites are the preferred way to receive educational information about diseases.

Based on the responses, the use of several biosecurity techniques could be increased and would benefit horses and the horse industry. These practices include reliance on temperature monitoring, isolation of new horses at facilities, education of risks of horse co-mingling, entry requirements such as vaccination and health certificates at events, and an emphasis on having biosecurity plans for facilities and events where horses co-mingle. Educating owners about assessing risk in different environments is needed to show why specific biosecurity actions can decrease infectious disease prevalence.

Veterinarians can further help horse owners to establish biosecurity plans for the management of their horses. Making biosecurity recommendations on industry websites and through the publication of information in horse industry media will be the best way to reach and educate horse owners.



The Equine Disease Communication Center website (<https://www.equinediseasecc.org/biosecurity>) provides exceptional resources including how-to videos and lists on what to do in an outbreak. Also, our veterinary staff at VDACS is available for site visits and developing and reviewing biosecurity plans.

### Reference:

*Cross-Sectional Survey of Horse Owners to Assess Their Knowledge and Use of Biosecurity Practices for Equine Infectious Diseases in the United States*

by Nathaniel White and Angela Pelzel-McCluskey  
*Animals* 2023, 13(22), 3550; <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani13223550>

# OFFICE OF LABORATORY SERVICES UPDATE

The Office of Laboratory Services is moving to a new Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) starting in February of 2025. This new system is called CoreOne for Labs, and will bring significantly enhanced services to our clients. The system provides real-time information on released results to clients, and the client portal can be used to create new accessions and allow access to billing and results, build client portals to save frequent client testing information, search historical data, and pay invoices online.

VDACS is working with both James Madison University (JMU) and Gauthier Alvarado Associates to provide architectural and engineering services for expansion and renovations at the Warrenton, Harrisonburg, and Lynchburg Regional Animal Health Laboratories. This capital project was approved by the General Assembly in 2022 and will encompass approximately 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 is in progress, with an expectation of a year construction time. JMU is providing procurement, project management, and inspection services to VDACS for this capital project.

All four Virginia Regional Animal Health Labs are now at a Level 1 National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) designation with Harrisonburg as the main lab and Warrenton, Lynchburg, and Wytheville as official branch labs. This level is the highest designation for a member of the NAHLN and recognizes the laboratory system's 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 laboratory is fully approved to test for Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) virus, Avian Influenza (AI), Newcastle Disease (NDV), African Swine Fever, and Classical Swine Fever through polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test-

ing. The Lynchburg laboratory staff have passed proficiency testing for AI/NDV and FMD. All tests have been approved to message through the USDA Laboratory Messaging System. Regarding Quality, the Lab System hosted the biennial audit and maintained accreditation of all four Regional Animal Health Laboratories (RAHL) from the American Association for Laboratory Accreditation (A2LA) through 2026 and brought all NAHLN testing onto the A2LA scope for accreditation. These two accomplishments in tandem will allow us to continue to develop and improve the entire laboratory system as a whole.

Disease issues continue to be on the rise and forefront of our testing changes. All areas of testing have seen increases over the past year. Recent national detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) have caused a significant rise in testing of milk samples for pre-movement. Avian metapneumovirus has presented a concerning situation for the commercial poultry industry in Virginia, and testing has increased for detection in flocks. Fish hatchery testing in the spring has remained steady to ensure healthy stock introduction into Virginia's waterways. Both Johne's and Contagious Equine Metritis testing have increased to serve both diagnostic and surveillance needs.





**CONTACT INFORMATION**

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

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