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Office of the Secretary-Treasurer  
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May 18, 2009

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**TO:** Mr. Kevin Shea, Acting APHIS Administrator  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Mr. Seth Swafford, APHIS Wildlife services

**RE:** Surveillance for Influenza Viruses

Recently, the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) laboratories were informed that funding levels for avian influenza surveillance in wild birds have been significantly reduced. This has been a very successful NAHLN Program/Partnership between USDA, APHIS, Wildlife Services, USDA/APHIS/Veterinary Services and the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians (AAVLD). Since inception of the program in 2006, we have tested over 200,000 samples, and have found influenza viruses in almost 10% of the samples. Together, we have implemented a surveillance program that not only provided detection capabilities but also provided a practical mechanism to test diagnostic testing capacity and implement communication and response plans. Despite this success, we have learned the surveillance will be discontinued in 14 states (Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, West Virginia and Wyoming) and reduced in 36 other states.

As part of the Pandemic Influenza Plan, we have partnered with APHIS/VS to increase testing capacity using high throughput equipment. Our NAHLN laboratories use that equipment to conduct AI surveillance testing on wild bird samples.

Avian influenza surveillance in wild birds must be strategically designed and conducted. While we understand the realities of budget reductions, we respectfully request that USDA provide their rationale for the restructuring of the AIV surveillance plan, which as proposed includes the involvement of far fewer states. In considering this restructuring we urge you to consider the following points.

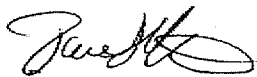
- No state is at zero risk. Positive samples of low pathogenic influenza viruses have been detected nationwide. This theoretically risks not detecting highly pathogenic strains if testing is to be discontinued in some states.

- Readiness of the entire NAHLN to respond to an outbreak of influenza as well as other diseases/agents has been significantly enhanced through participation in surveillance testing for avian influenza. Without consistent involvement in the surveillance testing, proficiency in performing the test decreases and negatively impacts our Nation's response capability.
- The surveillance testing efforts have brought together all parties responsible for various aspects of animal health. Together, we have implemented response plans and tested them each time we have a presumptive positive sample. We have improved response plans as we've worked through issues and learned the importance of integrating field and laboratory processes.
- The current H1N1 influenza virus contains sequences from avian influenza viruses, and, highlights the need for continued wild bird surveillance for influenza virus. Only with continued nationwide surveillance of our animal populations will we be able to detect new influenza viruses or prove that our animal populations are free of these viruses.

We have learned that having an on-going, coordinated system of collecting and testing samples for surveillance, not only aids in early detection but also prepares us to respond during an emergency.

We want to reiterate our appreciation for the outstanding relationship we have had with USDA, APHIS, Wildlife Services and Veterinary Services in the wild bird influenza surveillance program. Our partnership has improved our Nation's preparedness to address adverse animal health events and serves as a model for future surveillance programs.

Thank you in advance for providing information on the basis for the restructuring of the wild bird surveillance plan. On behalf of AAVLD & the USAHA/AAVLD Joint NAHLN Committee, we look forward to our continued partnership.




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David Steffen, DVM, PhD  
President, AAVLD



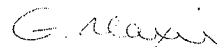

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Gary Anderson, DVM, MS, PhD  
Vice President, AAVLD



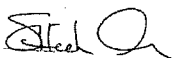

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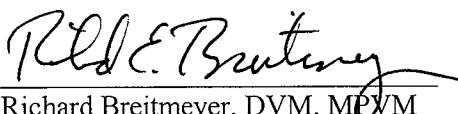

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Sharon Hietala, PhD  
Secretary-Treasurer, AAVLD




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AAVLD/USAHA Joint Committee on NAHLN, Chair




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