



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

1400 Independence
Avenue, SW

Washington, DC
20250

AUG 25 2009

Dr. David Steffen
President
American Association of Veterinary
Laboratory Diagnosticians, Inc.
Post Office Box 1770
Davis, California 95617-1770

Dear Dr. Steffen:

Thank you for your letter on behalf of the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians, Inc. (AAVLD) and the United States Animal Health Association/AAVLD Joint National Animal Health Laboratory Network Committee regarding our Agency's recent reductions in funding for avian influenza (AI) surveillance in wild birds. We sincerely regret the delay in responding.

Our Agency has been pleased to partner with you in past years on AI surveillance of wild birds. I agree that our collaboration has been extremely productive, and we understand your concern for the changes recently made in this program. However, in examining future needs and priorities for our entire AI program recently, we determined that although our wild bird surveillance program is valuable, we needed to allocate proportionally more resources to perform surveillance of domestic poultry at appropriate levels. The latter is important to us, particularly given the potential for low pathogenic AI viruses in poultry to evolve into highly pathogenic forms and other variables. Additionally, funding for our entire AI program in fiscal year 2009 was reduced by about 10 percent over the previous year. We do not anticipate funding will be restored to previous levels in coming years.

With regard to the program for AI surveillance in wild birds, we decided to restructure it in a way that provided maximum benefits within our new budgetary limitations. Rather than dramatically reduce surveillance in all 50 States, a measure that would have severely compromised the integrity of the entire surveillance system, we had to reduce surveillance to some degree in 36 States and discontinue it entirely in the 14 remaining States. As you know, we had already been collecting fewer samples in these 14 States while continuing to support the previous surveillance plan, which placed all 50 States in 3 priority groups. Under the plan, the degree of surveillance was based on each State's amount of wetland habitat, waterfowl band recovery data, waterfowl population size, prior prevalence of low pathogenic AI viruses, waterfowl biology and migration, and



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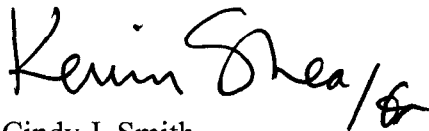
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Dr. David Steffen
Page 2

other factors. Maintaining a reasonable level of surveillance in the 36 higher priority States has helped to preserve the integrity and applicability of the data collected. We feel that this is the most prudent course we can take under the current circumstances.

Despite these changes in our approach to AI surveillance, I believe we have much valuable work ahead of us in this area. We appreciate and look forward to continuing our partnership on AI surveillance of wild birds. Please share this letter with the other officials who also signed the letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Shea" followed by a stylized flourish or initial.

Cindy J. Smith
Administrator