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May 16, 2008

The mission of the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) is to provide comprehensive national laboratory support for early detection (surveillance), response, and recovery from foreign animal and emerging disease. A critical aspect of the NAHLN mission is the capability of the laboratories within the network to have sufficient equipment and training to be able to rapidly respond in the face of an animal disease outbreak. Since creation of the NAHLN in 2002, the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians (AAVLD), with more than 1400 members and 43 accredited laboratories, has supported wholeheartedly this federal-state partnership to safeguard animal health. The NAHLN began with 12 laboratories receiving federal support, and has since expanded to 54 member laboratories. **However, despite this expansion, only the original 12 laboratories receive infrastructure support.** An additional 16 laboratories receive nominal support for Information Technology and other technical systems, and the remaining laboratories function only on a fee-for-service basis in surveillance programs.

Using the NAHLN operational structure as a foundation, the US has been able to implement significant nationwide surveillance programs for exotic Newcastle disease (END), avian influenza (AI), classical swine fever (CSF), bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), scrapie, chronic wasting disease (CWD) and vesicular stomatitis (a disease that mimics foot-and-mouth disease). Over 142,757 tests for AI in wild birds have been performed since 2006, over 23,200 tests for CSF since January 2006, and over 900,000 tests for BSE since June 2003. Scrapie and commercial cervid CWD testing programs result in over 250,000 tests per year. Overall, NAHLN laboratories have supported, and continue to support, animal health surveillance with hundreds of thousands of high-quality, standardized laboratory tests.

Despite the demonstrable success of the NAHLN in surveillance, the NAHLN remains woefully under-funded, particularly for response and recovery from a significant foreign animal disease outbreak. The cost to the US agriculture industry of a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak is estimated at \$100 billion. A one-half week delay in response due to insufficient diagnostic support is estimated to cost \$135M. National preparedness plans for influenza transmission from birds to humans predicted up to 147M citizens affected and health care costs exceeding \$165 billion should AI in birds result in an US influenza pandemic in the USA.

A recent survey conducted by AAVLD member laboratories indicates that the annual cost of operating a state diagnostic laboratory averages \$5.2M per state (ranging from \$0.35M to \$19.3M). The total annual state expenditures for the 30 representative laboratories in the US responding to the survey are \$150M per year. These 30 laboratories - comprising a total laboratory floor space of 1.2M sq ft (ranging 2500 to 160,000 sq ft per state) and a total of 1792 personnel devoted to disease diagnostics, are the frontline sentinel laboratories in the US for early recognition of emerging animal diseases. In addition, they are the laboratories which will be responsible for providing important laboratory information to governmental decision makers during a foreign animal disease outbreak in the US, and will be responsible for the vast amount of testing after an outbreak to establish the US as free of the disease in question. Yet, the 12 core laboratories receive only \$300,000 of federal support each per year (less than 6% of the average cost to operate a diagnostic laboratory). Sixteen other member laboratories receive only \$50,000 each per year (1% of the average cost to operate a laboratory). The remaining laboratories only receive fees-for-services provided as needed. **Thus, federal funding of the NAHLN is grossly insufficient and inappropriate in light of the enormous losses associated with response to and recovery from a serious animal disease event.**

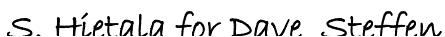
Current funding for the NAHLN is through the Food and Agriculture Defense Initiative, Animal Health Monitoring and Surveillance Programs and Veterinary Diagnostic Programs in USDA budgets. **The AAVLD strongly urges USDA and Congress to address this funding shortfall for the NAHLN. Investment of funds in the US animal health laboratory infrastructure will protect our agriculture industry, food supply and public health.**



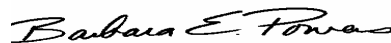
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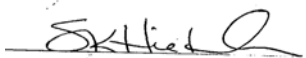
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