



United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Sheep and Goat Sector
4th Quarterly Stakeholder Conference Call
Meeting Notes

Monday, March 1, 2021

Attendees: *Diane Sutton, Paul Hauer, Natalie Urie, Katherine Marshall, Stephen White, Alex Turner, Tom Boyer, Anita Dahnke, Randy Dusek, Erica Sanko, Amy Hendrickson, Jim Logan, Lisa Shepard, Norma Tillman, Joan Dean Rowe, Cindy Wolf, Paul Plummer, Beth Johnson, Chuck Gaiser, Stephanie Brault*

Welcome/Veterinary Services Update

Diane Sutton

- Welcome to 4th quarterly stakeholder call. The next quarterly stakeholder conference call is scheduled for June 7.
- Summarized tags provided so far in FY 2021 under contracts to new producers and markets and dealers
 - So far in FY 2021 Shearwell has fulfilled 2517 contract orders from producers new to the program, shipping 213,610 plastic tags.
 - So far in FY 2021, National Band & Tag has fulfilled 106 contract orders for metal tags, shipping a total of 252,600 metal tags.
 - APHIS has provided industry with a summary of official tag ordering by sheep and goat producers over time to assess the effect of tag policy changes. It is available on the APHIS website in the National Scrapie Eradication Program section under Educational Materials (https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/sa_animal_disease_information/sheep-goat/educational-materials).
- A new call tree was implemented earlier this month for 1-866-USDA-TAG. Sheep and goat stakeholders can call 1-866-USDA-TAG to get information about identification requirements, request flock and premises IDs, and request tags free of charge if eligible. Previously, callers were routed to the appropriate VS or State office using the prefix of the phone number from which they were calling. In cases where the caller had moved and had a cell phone prefix from a different region, this resulted in misrouting of their call.

Now, callers either key in or say the numbers on their telephone keypad corresponding to the two letter postal abbreviation of the State or territory where the flock or herd about which they are calling is located. For example, if they are calling about a flock in Texas, they key in or say "8, 9" to indicate "T, X." There is a default voicemail box that is monitored by our sheep and goat health team to assist with callers who don't know the state code or are having difficulties with the tree. We hope this change will help stakeholders get connected more expediently to the correct VS or State office to get their questions about sheep and goat ID answered.

- Updates on cooperative agreements
 - American Goat Federation cooperative agreements
 - Secure Goat Supply Plan
 - Have begun writing overview of plan and marketing approach
 - Have identified teams for developing specific parts of the plan and these teams will be meeting in the near future
 - Have identified a domain and website host, estimate "going live" late summer 2021
 - Scrapie Eradication/Q Fever Outreach and Education
 - Subject of scholarship program for youth will be recordkeeping for the National Scrapie Eradication Program
 - Exhibited virtually and in person at 2 events
 - Mailed out scrapie and Q fever information to numerous contacts and posted information and corrected misinformation on social media about the scrapie program
 - Safe Handling of Goats
 - Have reviewed equipment choices and solicited bids and selected livestock markets to approach for piloting
 - RFID Retention and Readability
 - 28 producers in 16 states participating in the tag trials
 - Over 5000 RFID tags distributed from 3 different manufacturers
 - Goats used for diverse purposes including dairy, meat, and fiber production, breeding, brush control, pack, show, and hobby.
 - Still have tags available that could be distributed to new participants
 - In evaluation phase with producers already enrolled
 - Likely that there will be a third year of funding available to continue evaluations
 - American Sheep Industry Association cooperative agreements
 - Secure Sheep and Wool Supply Plan
 - Continue to develop materials to increase awareness of the SSWS Plan by producers, industry stakeholders and animal health officials.

- Recent deliverables include:
 - Created Biosecurity signage and website section.
 - USDA/APHIS Training and Exercise Program (TEP) Webinar on March 2, 2021 at 11:00 am eastern.
 - Created FAQs for website and/or summary handout with USDA input about Scrapie and PINs (under final review)
 - Finalizing Outreach articles for associations, lay press (under final review)
 - Continue to develop materials on biosecurity and outreach/training materials which will be posted to the SSWS Plan website over the course of the spring/summer months.
 - Education and Sheep Producer Education & Outreach: Scrapie, Traceability, and Electronic ID Transition
 - Have gathered and continue to gather information on aspects of EID traceability programs in other countries, technology, current usage and issues related to adoption and use of electronic ID by the sheep/goat industries
 - Developed a producer survey on EID regarding adoption and implementation for an animal identification and traceability system. Survey to close on March 5 and will provide a report in coming months.
 - Continue to work on finalizing a pilot project on EID at a sheep auction market.
- *Brucella ovis* serum bank development
 - Banking both false and true positive sera that can be used to evaluate antigens for use in assays
 - Personnel from NVSL who will be working on this initiative currently deployed in support of COVID vaccine administration and will be able to attend our next quarterly meeting.
- Industry has expressed interest in export of sheep and goat meat to China
 - FAS is aware of the American Sheep Industry Association's request and FSIS would be technical lead for this.
 - Industry should let Sheep and Goat team know if they need points of contacts in FAS or FSIS provided.
- It is important to continue to encourage Field Operations personnel to target the collection of samples and testing of animals most likely to be positive for scrapie. A Statement of Work has been shared with Veterinary Services Field Ops encouraging field staff to establish agreements with markets or other concentration points to collect samples from mature down, dead, sick, or disabled sheep and goats. VS welcomes industry assistance in identifying markets and dealers that may be amenable to developing such agreements.

- The U.S. administration change has delayed the finalization of policy documents including “Research Involving Free-living Wild Species in Their Natural Habitat” from Animal Care and revision of VS indemnity policy to allow time for them to be reviewed. Further updates on these will be provided at the next quarterly meeting.

Wildlife Services Update

Diane Sutton (for Elizabeth Miller)

- WS continues to provide livestock protection activities, including aerial gunning operations, nationwide with minimal to no impact from COVID. Some program highlights include:
 - High-Level Personnel Change
 - Wiley Gustafson, former National Aviation Coordinator at WS’ Aviation Training and Operations Center (ATOC), retired from WS in January 2021. WS is currently recruiting and evaluation candidates for his replacement.
 - Nonlethal Livestock Protection Initiative
 - The Annual Accomplishments Report was sent out with the agenda for this meeting for review
 - In FY20, WS received \$1.38M from Congress for nonlethal livestock protection from large carnivore predators distributed to 12 WS state programs: AR, CA, CO, ID, MI, MN, MT, NM, OR, WA, WI, and WY. The primary purpose of the funds was for WS to provide technical assistance and operational activities for landowners via 18 positions (15 full-time) across the 12 states. These funds supported time of several more existing employees on nonlethal projects in addition to the new hires. These new WS employees provided nonlethal livestock protection services to more than 200 cooperators and reached several hundred additional landowners via free-of-charge technical assistance. WS collaborated with state wildlife agencies, NGOs, and FWS to complete projects protecting agriculture and property and developing outreach materials to assist landowners in conflict with wildlife. NWRC is analyzing data from research conducted alongside the operational work to determine the efficacy of various nonlethal methods. Results will inform management decisions and best applications for the tools.
 - WS will continue to implement the Nonlethal Initiative from FY20 in FY21. We received the same increase to our budget; therefore, we will distribute the funding similarly to FY20. The same 12 WS state programs and 2 WS research units will receive funding to continue and/or expand the efforts started in FY20. Initial plans for each state for FY21, subject to change or evolution throughout the year, can be found in the FY20 annual report shared with the sector.
 - Livestock Protection Dog (LPD) Webinar
 - WS began conversations with ASI about the best venue and time to deliver a Livestock Protection Dog (LPD) webinar generated by a request from the sector. Given COVID, regularly scheduled meetings were being replaced with virtual

options or canceled and WS wanted to capitalize on when stakeholders were already gathering to present this information. Since updates were provided during past meetings/conferences it was mutually determined that it might be best to postpone until a later time. Therefore, an appropriate opportunity to host the webinar was not determined. WS is happy to move forward with planning and delivering this event and would like to ask for clarity as to when to hold such an event. If anyone on the call is interested in attending or has more information about the original request, please contact Elizabeth Miller (elizabeth.a.miller@usda.gov). We will include this contact information in the call summary, to be shared following the meeting.

- Amy Hendrickson responded that industry is interested in hearing this webinar but did not have specific input on timing.

Center for Veterinary Biologics Update

Paul Hauer

- Autogenous vaccine memo policy has been rewritten
 - Has been through public policy comment review
 - Now in line for approval by the new administration
 - Hopefully will be able to provide update on next call
- The import permit has been renewed for the Merck footrot vaccine through California Wool Growers Association.
 - This is a safe vaccine that used to be licensed for sale in the U.S.
 - People in other states wanting the vaccine have been referred to California Wool Growers Association

National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) Update

Natalie Urie/Katherine Marshall

- Goat 2019
 - Currently analyzing data, including biologic data
 - First descriptive report has been externally reviewed and undergoing second revisions
 - Working on manuscripts and info briefs
- Sheep 2023
 - Needs assessment is open through the end of March
 - Please share it with anyone who is interested in the sheep industry
 - Currently we have about 600 responses
- Death loss reports
 - Sheep death loss reports will be shared through a Tableau dashboard to be released in spring (currently under review)
 - Erica Sanko said she would work with Katherine Marshall to provide user feedback on the dashboard

- Goat death loss data collection were completed by NASS in January. The next step is data validation which NAHMS will be working on this spring/summer.

Agricultural Research Service Update

Stephen White

- Malignant catarrhal fever
 - Investing in vaccine research
 - First paper published last month
 - <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-393X/9/2/90>
- Coxiellosis
 - Working on vaccine candidate using epitope prediction
Preprint (not peer-reviewed yet): <https://www.researchsquare.com/article/rs-152036/latest.pdf>
- *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* and ovine respiratory disease
 - In process of hiring new VMO-researcher at USDA-ARS Animal Disease Research Unit
- Scrapie and TSEs
 - Dave Schneider is currently on COVID deployment, will get scrapie and TSEs update when he returns

Animal Disease Traceability Update

Alex Turner

- With administration change there has been a regulatory freeze
- ADT had a Federal Register Notice seeking comment on proposed requirement of RFID for cattle and bison but it has gotten hung up in this freeze. Currently awaiting guidance, in holding pattern on moving forward
- Also awaiting guidance on whether USDA will continue to provide RFID buttons free of charge for use in cattle and bison as an alternative to NUES tags.
- There was additional discussion later in the meeting about the intent of providing RFID tags free of charge for use in cattle and bison when we don't know the timeline of if and when RFID will be required for use in cattle and bison.
 - The timeline for these potential requirements is unknown at this point; there is some resistance in the industry to potential requirements for RFID. From USDA's perspective, it is recognized that NUES tags are challenging to read for disease traces (many errors made in recording numbers by hand and transcription errors occur). USDA has recognized that when doing a disease response and animal tracing information is faster to retrieve and more accurate when using RFID. That is why USDA-APHIS has interest in moving toward RFID.
 - RFID tags can be used as a visual ID, therefore readers are not required for producers and markets. Using a reader is faster and more accurate and animal handling is easier because you don't need to restrain the animal to read the tag. However, RFID tags with a visual number can be used as a visual tag. There are

certainly ancillary advantages to RFID such as easier handling and speed of commerce from which producers and markets could benefit but the reason that USDA-APHIS has interest in the technology is that it makes disease traceability more efficient.

- Anecdotally Alex Turner hears from markets that have tried it that RFID works better for them than visual tags and that they recognize its advantages. The expense and investment required for getting readers in place is recognized. States have used different strategies for getting RFID readers in place in concentration points, by providing readers to markets, veterinarians, and/or veterinarians that work at markets. USDA has historically provided supplemental funding for RFID readers in states that receive traceability cooperative agreements.

Industry Concerns and Questions

- Tom Boyer voiced concerns that agriculture is not going to be heard in the conversation about climate change policy. Diane Sutton shared that the new Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack has indicated that USDA will take an active role in these discussions.
- Cindy Wolf reported that she has heard concerns that polymerase chain reaction testing used in diagnostic laboratories has not been working to detect Johne's disease in sheep and goats. This disease is not a regulatory disease but does have a large economic impact on the industry. She is hopeful that greater interest will develop in creating better tests. The sheep and goat team will forward this question to NVSL.
- Beth Johnson, Director of Region 2 of the American Association of Small Ruminant Practitioners, reported that the AASRP continues to provide educational webinars for members and establish policy and guidelines for members. One area of focus is compounding and extralabel use of drugs in small ruminant production medicine. The association also offers scholarships for students for externships if any participants in this call know of students seeking assistance.

Meeting Wrap Up

Diane Sutton

- Meeting adjourned 11:54 AM ET.