

Animal Health Branch Chief's Message – Past, Present and Future
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The origin of the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), Animal Health Branch (AHB) dates back to the creation of the Office of the State Veterinarian in 1899, “to protect the health of all domestic animals of the state from all contagious and infectious diseases...” Though AHB’s functions have increasingly diversified in response to changes in agriculture and public health events, its mission remains the same. In its infancy, the *Office* concentrated on inspection of shipments of animals, control and eradication of diseases, and assisted in the creation of livestock organizations. The *Office’s* time was occupied with control and eradication of tuberculosis, sheep scabies, and Texas cattle fever. Other diseases of importance were anthrax, contagious abortion in cows, hog cholera and glanders. By 1914, Texas cattle fever was eradicated.

The *Office* saw its first major expansion in 1917 with the passing of the Meat Inspection Act, and in 1918 when a new tuberculin testing provision of the State dairy law was enacted. Additionally, in 1918, a diagnostic laboratory was established in association with the Office. In 1919, when the California Department of Agriculture was created by an act of the legislature, several state agencies, including the Office of the State Veterinarian, were organized under the Division of Animal Industry with its Division Chief becoming the State Veterinarian.

Foot and mouth disease, a devastating animal disease, was diagnosed in livestock in the San Francisco area in 1924. The disease spread to several counties and to wild deer in the Stanislaus National Forest and before it was eradicated the following year, over 110,000 animals were lost at a cost of \$4,400,000. In 1929, a new outbreak occurred in the Los Angeles area. Evidence showed the disease most likely was introduced by a ship originating in South America. Fortunately, losses from this outbreak were considerably less because the disease was recognized early. Animal health officials, under the direction of the State Veterinarian, responded quickly and thus limited the loss to only 3,600 animals at a cost of \$110,000.

Fortunately, we have not seen another incursion of foot and mouth disease into the U.S. in the following 88 years. However, the AHB has continued to stay very busy with numerous other livestock disease control and eradication efforts including hog cholera (classical swine fever), brucellosis, tuberculosis, Venezuelan Equine encephalomyelitis, Exotic Newcastle Disease, vesicular exanthema, pseudorabies, bovine spongiform encephalopathy, contagious equine metritis, equine piroplasmiasis, equine infectious anemia, West Nile Virus, vesicular stomatitis, avian influenza (both high path and low path), and equine herpes myeloencephalopathy, among the many livestock regulatory diseases. On April 1, 2017, changes to animal disease traceability regulations, including requirements for movement of cattle, identification, documentation, and specific livestock disease, went into effect after months of hard work by staff. California’s Antibiotic Use and Stewardship (AUS) Program staff and AHB staff are leading the nation in efforts to reduce the pressure towards antibiotic resistance by ensuring responsible use of antibiotics while maintaining our ability to provide timely medical care to livestock and a quality product to consumers.

As the AHB looks into the future, our highest priority remains the continued and successful exclusion of foreign animal diseases from California. The AHB has begun a major initiative, the Secure Food Supply, to implement emergency disease preparedness efforts that focus on strategies to keep businesses operating in the face of a State quarantine that includes orders to stop the movement of animals and

their products. Staff have also been working diligently to bolster Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and refine Incident Management Teams to better manage an emergency disease incident. Our Emergency Program staff will continue to plan and conduct preparedness and response exercises to best prepare the AHB for the next disease incursion.

On May 16, 2018, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) detected virulent Newcastle (vND) disease in a small flock of backyard exhibition chickens in Los Angeles County. The detection was confirmed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL.) This initial case was diagnosed because of a backyard exhibition bird owner's presentation of sick birds to a California veterinary clinic for treatment. This is the first case of virulent Newcastle disease, previously referred to as exotic Newcastle disease, in the U.S. since 2003. The Incident Management Team (IMT) continues to respond to sick bird calls to identify disease, establish control areas around the infected and presumptive positive premises, and conduct surveillance, depopulation, and disposal. This response is likely to continue through 2018 in a Unified Command with CDFA and USDA personnel. The SFS initiative has played a critical role in keeping vND out of the commercial poultry population.

Outstanding professional and support staff have been the backbone of AHB disease surveillance and response for years. Our invaluable partnership with the California Animal Health and Food Safety (CAHFS) Services Laboratory System, the United States Department of Agriculture/Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services/Veterinary Services (USDA/APHIS/VS), industry organizations, academia, private practitioners and other state and federal agencies remain the solid foundation for essential collaborative working relationships. These relationships have been notably influential in protecting California's multi-billion dollar livestock industry from epidemic and foreign animal disease.

The continued dedication and commitment of personnel to the AHB mission is appreciated and will ensure that emerging issues related to animal health, animal care, emergency management, food and agriculture security, production food safety and public health and safety are appropriately met. I continue to be proud to serve with so many competent colleagues and staff. The AHB is committed to continue protecting California as one of the most successful and productive agricultural regions in the world.