

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE (CDFA)
ANIMAL HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY SERVICES (AHFSS)
MEAT, POULTRY AND EGG SAFETY BRANCH (MPES)
RENDERING INDUSTRY ADVISORY BOARD (RIAB)
MEETING MINUTES
February 06, 2025**

California Department of Food and Agriculture
1220 N St, Room 333
Sacramento, CA 95814

Item

No. **CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Michael Koewler, Chair, called the RIAB meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

(1) **ROLL CALL**

Roll call was taken by Mr. Koewler. A quorum was established at 10:03 a.m.

Board Members Present:

Michael Koewler, Chair
Jimmy Andreoli II
Phil Ottone
Brad Fleeman

D.O. "Spike" Helmick Jr.
T. J. Koewler
David Belt

Interested Parties:

Tristan Daedalus, Baker Commodities

CDFA:

Dr. Annette Jones
Han Lai
Lisa Quiroz
Hilda Favela
Gabriel Godines
Sedona Quiroz-Lopez

Paula Batarseh
Dr. Chandrasekar Venkitasamy
Brittany Cardoza
Andrew Halbert
Penny Arana

(2) **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mr. Koewler asked the Board to review the meeting minutes from October 3rd, 2024. He noted that he virtually attended the previous meeting and requested the roll call be amended. With that amendment, he entertained a motion to accept the minutes.

Motion #1: Mr. D.O. "Spike" Helmick Jr. made a motion to accept the minutes and Mr. Brad Fleeman seconded the motion. All members agreed with no abstentions. The motion passed unanimously.

(3) BRANCH UPDATES

Ms. Paula Batarseh informed the Board that given the new Presidential administration, CDFA will be working closely with federal regulatory partners at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and others to stay informed about any new directions or guidance moving forward. They will pay particular attention to contracts, grants and other agreements, as well as waivers or authorizations needed from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA).

Ms. Batarseh shifted to the current avian influenza response. MPES is working with the Animal Health Branch (AHB) to assist on multiple fronts that include composting activities, environmental sampling, bird sampling and live bird market surveillance.

(4) H5N1 RESPONSE

Ms. Lisa Quiroz provided the status of the H5N1 outbreak, a subtype of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), since the last update in October 2024. As of February 6th, there were 32 new detections of disease in dairy cows in the last 30 days. This brings the total infected dairy premises to 736 with 233 released from quarantine. In poultry, Ms. Quiroz reported 5 counties with control areas: Madera, Merced, Riverside, San Joaquin and Stanislaus. The current outbreak is considered a continuation of the HPAI outbreak from 2022; since then, there have been a total of 141 infected flocks in California with 19 active quarantines and 122 quarantine releases.

Surveillance of dairy and poultry premises continues for this outbreak, as well as the government response to new detections. CDFA continues to work to fulfill the required actions to achieve control area releases and quarantine releases. Much of the labor involved with this response surrounds activities required in those control areas and surveillance zones.

Ms. Quiroz informed the Board of Governor Gavin Newsom's proclamation on December 18th, 2024, which declared a State of Emergency for the response to the H5N1 outbreak. This assists all state agencies to remain coordinated on the response and share resources, when required. In January 2025, the State Veterinarian banned all exhibitions of poultry and dairy at fairs and shows. While the rate of disease detections has slowed somewhat, the virus remains a threat to poultry. Ms. Quiroz emphasized that continued vigilance and biosecurity habits are crucial while researchers investigate the novel presentation of the virus. She stressed that the virus is not a cattle virus; it is an avian virus that is infecting cattle.

Ms. Quiroz shifted to disposal methods used in the disease response. Rendering continues to be the disposal method on all dairies; AHB is not currently composting at any dairies. There is composting at a single non-dairy cattle facility due to some specific risk concerns. For poultry mortality, both composting and landfill methods are being utilized. Incineration was used at one site.

This outbreak is one of the largest and most complex outbreaks to which CDFA has responded, particularly because it affects both avian and cattle species. Ms. Quiroz shared some lessons learned from the ongoing response. Moving forward, CDFA would like to encourage a representative from each industry to be designated as an Agency Representative

who will be assigned to work with CDFA on future responses. The Agency Representative would be trained for their role and receive critical information to improve coordination between industry and the State. The Agency Representative would be assigned to the Incident Management Team Liaison Officer, who would serve as a dedicated point of contact to work on critical issues and informational needs. The team would coordinate on receiving timely notification of disease detections that would enable industry to plan reroutes for biosecurity; currently, producers are the ones responsible for notifying their service providers and CDFA would like to streamline the notification process. Additionally, the Agency Representative would receive guidance from CDFA on how to effectively implement biosecurity measures for disease mitigation and be more integrated into the process for quarantine release; producers are currently responsible for these notifications as well.

Ms. Quiroz provided the Board with outreach resources. Those interested in receiving disease outbreak updates can visit the CDFA website: https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/AHFSS/Animal_Health/HPAI.html. For public inquiries regarding the H5N1 outbreak in California or to report observations in the field, please send an e-mail to cdfa.HPAIinfo@cdfa.ca.gov or call (916) 217-7517. Sick animals can be reported through the hotline: (866) 922-2473. Media inquiries should go to CDFA Public Affairs Office.

Ms. Quiroz closed by thanking the rendering industry for their continued vigilance, adjusting pick-up routes and maintaining biosecurity protocols.

Mr. Jimmy Andreoli II offered to serve as the Agency Representative for the rendering industry; he has 16 years of experience in disaster response and emergency management with the American Red Cross. He also asked if there is a projected timeline for relief from egg supply shortages. Dr. Annette Jones responded, stating that the current status is uncertain; a new introduction of H5N1 in cattle was detected in Nevada. This is the second crossover event suspected to derive from wild birds, like the initial crossover event in Texas, underscoring the precarious nature of the disease outbreak; wildlife migration cannot be controlled and thus the same disease can appear in a new region, complicating timelines for the end of disease response.

Dr. Jones reiterated that where infected cattle are present, poultry infections are likely to follow. Therefore, California is shifting to a recovery strategy of disease control in cattle. There is suspected herd immunity in the dairies of the Central Valley, which has the bulk of California's dairy cattle population. However, the duration of said immunity and degree of cross protection against new viral strains are unknown.

Dr. Jones elaborated on the introduction of HPAI from wild birds to poultry flocks. The migratory season and winter weather increase infections, which historically taper off in February. The number of cases from wild bird introduction improved this season when compared to last year, which Dr. Jones attributed to improved biosecurity in the industry and increased focus on wild bird risk. However, virus transmission from dairies has dramatically increased the current outbreak in poultry, leading to egg shortages. California flocks are slowly moving towards recovery, raising new stock to replace egg layers. Other

key egg-laying states such as Ohio are also responding to large outbreaks in their poultry flocks, adding to egg shortages.

Dr. Jones remains cautiously optimistic, as the epidemic curve is trending downward with new poultry cases dropping. There is ongoing research on immunity and vaccine. She noted that developing an effective vaccine for H5N1 is a complicated process because of the way the virus presents itself in cattle. It primarily involves the mammary glands, which have different immune mediators than the respiratory system (typically the affected system in infected poultry). The vaccine must trigger the correct immune response to be effective. As a result, development of a cattle vaccine will take time.

(5) COORDINATION WITH REGULATORY AGENCIES

Mr. Andreoli expressed appreciation for CDFA's coordination with CalRecycle and other agencies. He requested CDFA's continued assistance in working with local agencies to emphasize the significance of rendering as a disposal method. This will help expand rendering capacity in the State, allowing industry to better meet the disposal needs for California's agricultural and other businesses. Mr. Andreoli added that this is especially important given the ongoing H5N1 disease outbreak, in which rendering has been utilized as a disposal pathway.

(6) ENFORCEMENT AND OUTREACH

Ms. Brittany Cardoza began by informing the Board that the processing of all Inedible Kitchen Grease (IKG) Transporter applications did not begin until late December, due to a printing delay with the decals. The majority of applications have been received and processed. CDFA is working with a few companies that are missing information on their applications.

Ms. Cardoza advised that enforcement efforts for unlicensed activity will begin late February/early March. Rendering Enforcement will reach out to all companies with no renewal received or missing documents to encourage compliance before enforcement activity begins. Ms. Cardoza reminded the Board that the Rendering Enforcement website can be used to check the status of licenses, including collection centers and rendering plants where IKG can be picked up. If there are any questions, industry is encouraged to reach out to MPES staff at headquarters, herself, or the investigator in their area.

Ms. Cardoza requested that industry advise CDFA of any license plate changes throughout the year, or whether a vehicle has moved to a different facility or location. These changes must be entered manually and failure to report them can cause significant delays in renewal processing.

Ms. Cardoza shifted to civil penalty assessments and Notices of Violation (NOVs). Between October 2024 and January 2025, civil penalty assessments amounted to \$21,043. There have been seven NOVs issued for: theft, failure to provide manifests, failure to manifest, unlicensed IKG transporters and unlicensed collection centers. Rendering Enforcement is focusing on theft, including reports of theft by licensed operations. They are investigating several reports of unlicensed dead animal haulers in the Central Valley, which raises concerns about spreading H5N1. Investigators are also looking into unlicensed raw pet food operations in southern California.

Mr. Helmick asked if weigh stations have been notified of the delay in decal issuance. Ms. Cardoza said she will notify them and added that most decals should be delivered by the end of the week. Mr. Helmick also asked if RIAB could invite the new staff members at Highway Patrol to a meeting, to brief them on CDFA's rendering enforcement process. Mr. Koewler and Ms. Batarseh supported the suggestion.

(7) **EXPANDING RENDERING CAPACITY IN CA**

Mr. Andreoli introduced the topic of expanding rendering capacity by highlighting regulatory challenges. Baker Commodities has encountered issues when attempting to relocate existing transfer centers and collection center yards in Southern California. Baker is facing pushbacks from city municipalities that are barring the establishment of new yards in their areas. Mr. Andreoli suspects the reluctance may stem from Governor Newsom's directive encouraging State agencies to prioritize the development of affordable housing. He thanked CDFA for working to educate municipalities on the necessity of rendering. However, Baker continues to face resistance in getting approvals for relocation or expansion of collection centers, transfer centers, or even overnight truck parking for vehicles carrying IKG.

Mr. Helmick asked what region is most affected. Mr. Andreoli said they observed it in large areas of Southern California, even in counties that were historically friendly to the industry, such as the greater Inland Empire area (Riverside County, San Bernardino County) and Orange County.

Ms. Cardoza echoed Mr. Andreoli's concerns and explained how CDFA has been working directly with municipalities to facilitate rendering developments. She noted that newer city planning staff appear unsure how to classify certain types of rendering facilities. In their negotiations, CDFA argued that although a company's fleet may be rendering-related, the parking or transfer centers are primarily transportation companies and secondarily used for IKG storage. They will be meeting with the Los Angeles County Interpretations Committee on February 13th to discuss a collection center classification.

Mr. Andreoli mentioned there has been rezoning in the Inland Empire to focus on housing. Facilities currently operating under existing use permissions may not encounter difficulty until they attempt to move locations, at which time potential relocation sites would be vastly diminished. The Board anticipates this will become more of an issue in the coming years.

Mr. Koewler asked if CDFA has received feedback expressing renewed interest in rendering capacity to service the furthestmost Northern California processing facilities and dairies. Ms. Batarseh explained that facilities in the area struggle to find disposal alternatives, particularly the slaughterhouses that produce packinghouse waste. Some producers transport their waste to other States such as Oregon, but there remains a need. Mr. Koewler replied that the rendering industry is driven by economics and perceived need; it may not be feasible for a company to send a truck to collect a minimal amount of waste. He suggested that an interested party could survey the area and gather information on the disposal needs to evaluate if it is justifiable for both the rendering industry and producers. Mr. Helmick agreed that more information should be gathered about the area.

Ms. Batarseh clarified that the interest in rendering is also for material generated on farms. Mr. Koewler asked if the Agricultural Commissioner or other representative are investigating the matter and can provide data. Ms. Batarseh referred to some research being conducted with Siskiyou County and Chico State University on composting and other disposal options. Mr. Koewler and Mr. Helmick noted that industry does have capacity in Chico and questioned why they are researching alternatives in those regions. Ms. Batarseh stated that CDFA cannot advise on the industry's business decision to expand services and does not have clear numbers on the scope of the waste production in the Northern region. Mr. Koewler requested that if anyone has accurate projections of waste production in the region, that they be invited to the RIAB meeting to present their findings.

Mr. Andreoli asked, since researchers acquired grants for composting based on low environmental impact, if there are grants available for research on rendering and its environmental impact. Mr. Andreoli added that Baker Commodities was contacted by researchers with a request for materials to be used in composting research, which they denied. Mr. Helmick suggested that the Board submit petitions to legislature for a rendering research grant. Mr. Koewler concurred and asked if the grants could be pursued on climate change avenues, as the rendering process effectively captures carbon. Dr. Jones suggested that the legislative option would likely be the most successful route.

Mr. Helmick asked if the Board is able to fund a study on disposal methods to compare their effectiveness. Mr. Koewler offered that Mr. Tristan Daedalus of Baker Commodities and lobbyist Dennis Albani could explore legislative options. Mr. Daedalus confirmed he would assist and generate data on the Northern California rendering need. He noted that this is not an isolated issue, as he has communicated with other States that are facing similar capacity limitations.

Mr. David Belt shifted to city planners and their impact on agriculture. He explained his efforts to work within the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to allow Foster Farms to place chickens in an existing turkey house. At the county level, they are exempted from CEQA if they meet county ordinances and siting design, but the Water Board will not accept the county letter of exemption; this was also exacerbated by H5N1 outbreaks. Mr. Belt said that CDFA was able to facilitate a meeting with producers, CalEPA, CalRecycle and the State Water Board to discuss regulations. He noted that some regulations overlap in such a way that, given certain interpretations by city planners, there is no way to legally operate in the region. Mr. Belt proposed that CDFA could support rendering and agriculture by continuing to facilitate meetings with regulatory bodies and industry to navigate these issues.

Mr. Helmick expressed doubt that materials in Northern California are currently being composted or moved out of State, citing the transportation costs for distant companies. Mr. Belt suggested that the material may be disposed of in landfills or composted prior to being transported out of State. Ms. Cardoza clarified that some landfills in California no longer accept inedible material. As a result, some of the Northern processing facilities pool their material and transport it into Oregon to an accepting disposal site.

(8) PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments were made.

(9) **FUTURE RIAB MEETING AGENDA ITEMS**

- Regulations on IKG Container Theft

(10) **UPCOMING RIAB MEETING DATES**

The next board meeting will be scheduled for the second or third week of June 2025. CDFA staff will send a Doodle poll to confirm the date and will notify all concerned once it is finalized.

(11) **ADJOURN**

Motion #2: Mr. Fleeman made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Andreoli seconded the motion. All members agreed with no abstentions. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:04 a.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Sedona Quiroz-Lopez