UNITED STATES ANIMAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

2024 Resolution
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RESOLUTION NUMBER: 10 Combined with 13 and 15 APPROVED

SOURCE: COMMITTEE ON FARMED CERVIDAE
COMMITTEE ON POULTRY AND OTHER AVIAN SPECIES
COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

SUBJECT MATTER: Increased Funding for Research and Operations at the United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Services National Animal Disease Center

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Research Service (ARS) National Animal Disease Center (NADC), established in 1959, is the nation's primary national research center for livestock health and supports the $259 billion United States (US) livestock and poultry industries. Scientists at USDA-ARS-NADC conduct cutting-edge research including the development of vaccines, diagnostic tools, and management strategies to control and prevent infectious diseases affecting livestock, poultry, and other animals. This work safeguards the nation's food supply, protects the agricultural economy, enhances animal welfare, and mitigates the economic impact of disease outbreaks.

However, funding for research, staff and facility operations at USDA-ARS-NADC has dramatically eroded and is now at a critically low level. Long-standing research programs including those focused on mastitis, brucellosis, bovine tuberculosis, swine bacterial pneumonia, digital dermatitis and leptospirosis are simply not sustainable at current funding levels and will be eliminated if increased investments are not made. USDA-ARS-NADC currently employs just 43 scientists, down from 80 scientists in the original USDA-ARS-NADC facility that opened in 1961 and from 54 scientists when the National Centers for Animal Health (NCAH) opened just 15 years ago. More personnel losses are pending.

The outbreak of H5N1 avian influenza in dairy cattle demonstrates why a robust and continuous investment in agricultural research is needed. This novel avian influenza virus in cattle is a Biosafety Level 3 pathogen. Most universities and vaccine companies do not have facilities that can safely conduct research on H5N1 in lactating dairy cattle; however, the USDA-ARS-NADC is uniquely designed for this type of research. Unfortunately, USDA-ARS-NADC is so short on funding and scientists that this emerging problem takes these scientists away from their regular long-term research projects that are also important for animal health and production.

Funding for facility operation and staffing at USDA-ARS-NADC has dramatically eroded and is now at a critically low level due to:

- Reduced investment in agricultural research in the US.
- Recent changes in national and international standards for biocontainment, physical security, environmental regulations, animal care, select agents, and quality assurance have dramatically increased the cost of conducting research. These expenses are currently funded out of the annual research and personnel budget.

- Inflation: a $100,000 project in 2011 now requires more than $140,000 to complete and USDA-ARS-NADC does not receive inflationary adjustments
- Substantial increases in utility costs.
- Need for sophisticated and expensive equipment for state-of-the-art research.
- Mandatory increases for salary and benefits, taken from research budgets.
- Inability to hire graduate students, post-docs and technicians to conduct research due to lack of funding.

In summary, after years of underfunding, it is no longer possible to divert resources to meet emergencies such as avian influenza in cattle without affecting other programs. Effective research programs require long-term investment and commitment; they cannot be quickly ramped up in an emergency. While the $460 million investment in state-of-the-art facilities for animal research at the NCAH (of which NADC is one component) 15-20 years ago was a tremendous step forward, there has been a failure to fund the research programs and facility operations to adequately carry out its vital mission to protect animal health, food security, and the agricultural economy.

The USDA-ARS-NADC needs an additional annual allocation of $25 million with subsequent inflationary increases to reassemble the scientific staff and to adequately fund research to enable the scientists to accomplish their increasingly complex research mission to protect animal health, food security, and the agricultural economy. In addition, a second annual allocation of $15 million with annual inflationary increases is critically needed to support facility operational costs (utilities, security, information technology, and to begin to address an estimated $100 million in deferred maintenance). It is essential for the US to continue to invest in the animal health infrastructure to ensure the strength of our $259 billion animal agriculture industries and to protect the public from food borne and zoonotic diseases.

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association strongly urges Congress to appropriate an additional annual allocation of $25 million to support the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Research Services (ARS) National Animal Disease Center (NADC) with subsequent increases for research to protect food security, animal health and the agricultural economy and also an annual allocation of $15 million for USDA-ARS-NADC facility operation costs and deferred maintenance as well as annual inflationary increases at USDA-ARS-NADC.