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**RESOLUTION NUMBER: 22      APPROVED**

**SOURCE:                      COMMITTEE ON FARMED CERVIDAE**

**SUBJECT MATTER:          Use of Antemortem Testing as a Risk Assessment Tool in  
Cervid Chronic Wasting Disease Trace-Forward  
Investigations**

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**RESOLUTION:**

The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) urges state animal health officials and state wildlife officials to consider the appropriate, responsible use of antemortem sampling, such as rectoanal mucosa-associated lymphoid tissue biopsies, as a herd-level risk assessment tool for captive cervids in trace-forward or trace-back herds identified through chronic wasting disease epidemiological investigations. Such sampling should be used to support science-based decision making and may help avoid unnecessary herd depopulations and long-term business interruptions while maintaining animal health safeguards.

**Background Information:**

When a chronic wasting disease (CWD)-positive animal is identified in a farmed cervid operation, state officials conduct epidemiological investigations. These investigations often result in extended quarantines, depopulation of trace-out animals, or restrictions on herds implicated in these traces—despite having no confirmed positive animals. Such measures can last for multiple years or lead to the depopulation of animals that are ultimately found to be uninfected.

Antemortem testing offers a practical, science-based alternative to herd depopulation or indefinite movement restrictions. Current methods of antemortem sampling do have limitations, including variable sensitivity, a long incubation period for prion detection, and the risk of disease transmission via sampling equipment. However, when used alongside other herd- and animal-specific data—such as genotype, movement history, and herd status—antemortem sampling, including tissue biopsies, can support targeted, risk-based decision-making.

Recent field use by state animal health officials has demonstrated that biopsies of rectoanal mucosa-associated lymphoid tissue (RAMALT) can be an effective tool for identifying infected herds, assessing risk in trace-out herds without confirmed positives, and guiding depopulation and management decisions. Similarly, state wildlife officials have used RAMALT biopsies on elk to assess risk prior to interstate movement for relocation projects.

Importantly, the United States Department of Agriculture’s CWD Program Standard, Part B – *Guidance on Response to CWD-Affected Herds*, explicitly affirms the authority of state animal health officials to take action based on their own risk assessments. Page 44 states: “Time in quarantine may be lessened for: C. At the discretion of the State representative for a period of time as determined by a risk evaluation based on the findings of the epidemiological investigation.”

This language confirms that states have the discretion to apply, modify, or lift restrictions based on a variety of risk assessment tools, including antemortem diagnostic testing such as RAMALT biopsies. The appropriate and responsible use of these tools can enhance the precision of disease response, reduce unnecessary herd or animal depopulations, and minimize long-term business interruptions—while maintaining essential animal health safeguards.