

RESOLUTION NUMBER: 14 APPROVED

SOURCE: COMMITTEE ON POULTRY AND OTHER AVIAN SPECIES

SUBJECT MATTER: Audit of the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services Import and Export Staffing

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Imports and exports of animals and animal products have increased significantly over the years. In addition, zoning, regionalization and compartmentalization have become extremely important to ensure continuity of business during outbreaks of transboundary and other significant diseases.

In 2015, highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) crossed the Bering Strait and caused the largest animal health outbreak in United States (U.S.) history. At that time the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services (VS) had a few zoning agreements with countries that would allow continued shipments of U.S. poultry. By the end of 2016, the United States had 20+ zoning agreements. Today the United States has 80 agreements with countries. The U.S. pork industry is developing an African swine fever (ASF) surveillance program to support zoning agreements with other countries in case of an ASF outbreak in the United States.

It is critical that USDA-APHIS-VS have personnel resources to handle the needs of all animal health industries to do this important work and to effectively handle all daily activities. There is currently inadequate staffing to handle these required activities to maintain trade across all agricultural commodities, including poultry and poultry products.

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) urges the Administrator of the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services to conduct an audit to determine the staffing needs for all import and export activities as well as needs for negotiating zoning, regionalization and compartments for all transboundary diseases. USAHA also requests that state animal health officials and industry representatives be included in the audit process and results are shared with USAHA in 2025.

FINAL RESPONSE:

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services (VS) recognizes the concerns of the United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) and appreciates the opportunity to respond.

APHIS-adjusted user fee rates are collected to cover the costs of providing certain goods and services, including veterinary diagnostic goods and services and veterinary services for imports and exports of live animals and animal products. APHIS' animal health import and export user fees cover significant activities across the country, including at border locations and quarantine facilities. These fees support personnel, facilities, and information technology systems. They also recover the costs of inspection and certification services for imports and exports of live animals, animal products, and animal byproducts and provide for veterinary diagnostic goods and services. In January 2025, APHIS updated its User Fee rates; the changes ensure the fees it charges align with the costs of providing these services. APHIS anticipates that these changes will allow the agency to improve customer service by hiring and training personnel and ensuring the availability of information technology needed to facilitate trade processes, such as issuing export health certificates.

The Live Animal Import/Export Unit underwent a Workforce Review from 2022-2023 and the review results are informing hiring decisions/priorities, onboarding approaches, training, and data management. APHIS appreciates USAHA's feedback and concerns surrounding staffing levels for the broader VS import and export activities and is supportive of the resolution pending resource availability