

RESOLUTION NUMBER: 26 APPROVED

SOURCE: COMMITTEE ON SHEEP, GOAT AND CAMELIDS

SUBJECT MATTER: Continued Scrapie Surveillance

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

For more than 70 years, the United States (U.S.) has strived to eradicate scrapie from the national sheep flock. The finish line in this fight is in sight. The strong partnership between the industry, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the state animal health officials has been critical to this achievement, and a strong commitment is needed to finish the fight. The key factors to the success of the scrapie eradication program have been individual animal identification, development of genetically resistant flocks, and surveillance. These control measures were introduced after nearly 50 years of trying to control the disease through quarantine and depopulation. Sheep producers struggled mightily with scrapie, some losing their entire flocks to the effort to control the disease. It was the institution of those three tools - individual animal identification, genetic selection, and the National Scrapie Surveillance Plan - that the ability to truly identify and eliminate sources of scrapie in the U.S. that has made success possible.

Unfortunately, since 2019, federal support for the scrapie program has eroded, particularly regarding the individual animal identification and surveillance components of the program. Consistently, funding for scrapie has been siphoned off to support other programs. This was first seen when producer scrapie tag funding ended, with subsequent support only provided to those producers new to the program. More recently, following the impact of COVID 19 in 2020 and 2021 on the ability to collect samples, the number of scrapie samples collected annually has been reduced significantly as personnel have been pulled away to do other work, and funding has been diverted elsewhere. In the FY2024 appropriations, for example, Congress reduced funding for the Equine, Cervid, and Small Ruminant Health line item and directed USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to spend more on cervid health. This reduced the funding available to support the scrapie program.

As the United States nears the goal of scrapie eradication, it is essential that USDA provides enough funds and personnel to carry out an effective scrapie surveillance program. Without it, the ability to declare the nation free of scrapie is at risk, and nearly 80 years of sweat, blood and tears - and millions of taxpayer dollars - will be wasted. These final three years in the eradication fight are the most important, and it is vital that effective surveillance efforts remain ongoing.

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) urges the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to prioritize the scrapie surveillance program and provide sufficient funding and personnel to support collection of at least 30,000 samples per year to attain scrapie free status. Furthermore, USAHA urges Congress to return to the Fiscal Year 23 funding level for the National Scrapie Eradication Program and direct USDA-APHIS to support collection of scrapie samples.

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 collected and tested samples from 21,415 sheep and goats (20,216 collected at slaughter; 1,199 collected on-farm) through July 31, 2025 and anticipates the fiscal year 2025 total to be around 25,500 animals. Sampling was lower than planned because of resource constraints due to competing priority work.

At this time, it is unclear how resource availability will influence our work. APHIS will continue to work with industry, state, and federal partners to prioritize activities in alignment with Departmental guidance and resources.