UNITED STATES ANIMAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

2026 Resolution

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RESOLUTION NUMBER: 1 APPROVED

SOURCE: JOINT COMMITTEE ON NAHLN

SUBJECT MATTER: Enhanced National Animal Health Laboratory Network Preparedness for Foot and Mouth Disease Testing of Cow's Bulk Milk as an Outbreak Response Tool

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association urges the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services, in coordination with the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN), to:

1. Conduct a pre-outbreak assessment of the resources and training necessary to ensure NAHLN readiness and surge capacity for foot and mouth disease, a multispecies disease involving multiple sample types, including milk, which may require a just-in-time Emergency Use Authorization. The assessment should address milk sample proficiency testing; reagent availability; laboratory staffing and capacity for milk sample handling and accessioning; acquisition and distribution of laboratory-compatible sample containers to the dairy industry; electronic sample submission and reporting systems; and interlaboratory transfer of samples and data.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Foot and mouth disease (FMD) is a highly contagious disease of cloven-hoofed livestock. Although it is not a food safety or public health risk, an outbreak would have severe animal health, economic, livestock movement, and trade consequences for United States (US) livestock industries.

FMD virus can be present in milk before clinical signs are observed. Real-time reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction testing of bulk milk can provide a practical, noninvasive, herd-level surveillance tool for early detection and outbreak management in dairy cattle. Bulk milk testing is intended to complement, not replace, clinical surveillance and other diagnostic testing.

The National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF) white paper, *Using Bulk Milk Testing as a Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak Response Tool*, funded through Cooperative Agreement AP24VSSP0000C119 from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program, identifies several National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) readiness and surge-capacity needs for implementing milk-based surveillance during an FMD outbreak. These include validation and regulatory approval of milk as a diagnostic sample type;

development and maintenance of milk-specific proficiency testing programs; sufficient inventories of reagents, consumables, and laboratory-compatible sample containers; modifications to laboratory information management systems to accommodate high-volume milk sample accessioning and reporting; standardized electronic submission and chain-of-custody procedures; and staffing, training, and exercise programs to ensure that laboratories can rapidly scale milk sample handling and testing during an emergency.

The white paper also identifies the need for coordinated protocols for sample routing, interlaboratory transfer, confirmatory testing at the USDA-APHIS, National Veterinary Services Laboratory, and timely communication of test results among animal health officials, dairy regulators, laboratories, veterinarians, and industry partners.

Experience from highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 milk testing demonstrated that large-scale milk surveillance creates unique logistical and laboratory challenges beyond those associated with traditional animal diagnostic samples. Challenges included obtaining access to milk samples collected through regulatory programs; maintaining accurate premises identification and sample attribution; transporting large volumes of samples to laboratories; accessioning and tracking samples within laboratory information systems; managing laboratory staffing and throughput during periods of surge demand; and efficiently reporting results to decision-makers. These experiences highlighted the need for advanced investment in NAHLN infrastructure, personnel, training, data systems, and exercise-based preparedness so that milk surveillance can be rapidly and effectively deployed as an FMD outbreak response tool.

The NMPF white paper proposes an Animal Health Surveillance Milk sample to represent saleable milk from lactating cows on a dairy premises and recommends advance planning for surveillance in FMD Control Areas and Surveillance Zones. It also recommends memoranda of understanding or equivalent agreements between state animal health and dairy regulatory agencies so that existing milk samples can be accessed rapidly for official testing without jurisdictional delays.

REFERENCE: National Milk Producers Federation. *Using Bulk Milk Testing as a Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak Response Tool.* 2026. Created, in part, through Cooperative Agreement AP24VSSP0000C119 from the USDA-APHIS National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program. The contents may not necessarily represent the views of USDA-APHIS.