Connecting Scientists, Public Agencies and the Media – Identifying Communication Challenges

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Safeguarding Animal Health
Center for Veterinary Biologics (CVB), APHIS

National Animal Disease Center (NADC), ARS

National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL), APHIS

Together we meet the national needs for animal health research, diagnosis, and product evaluation.
Low containment animal facility--2009

Phase 1 laboratory facility--2004

High containment animal facility--2007
NVSL Mission

• To safeguard U.S. animal health and contribute to public health by ensuring that timely and accurate laboratory support* is provided by a nationwide animal health diagnostic system.
  – Reference and confirmatory laboratory for USDA

FY10 – > 62,000 submissions and 500,000 tests

* Includes both domestic and foreign animal diseases
NVSL Activities

- Conduct diagnostic testing
- Supply reference reagents to other laboratories
- Provide training in diagnostic techniques and conduct proficiency testing of other laboratories
- Coordinate the National Animal Health Laboratory Network
- Conduct developmental projects to improve diagnostic techniques
- Participate in World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) Collaborating Centre for the Diagnosis of Animal Diseases and Vaccine Evaluation in the Americas – CVB, ISU
- Serve as OIE reference laboratory
  - high pathogenicity avian influenza, anthrax, pseudorabies, bluetongue, contagious equine metritis, equine encephalomyelitis, equine infectious anemia, leptospirosis, Newcastle disease, vesicular stomatitis and West Nile encephalitis
- Serve as FAO reference center for vesicular diseases, classical swine fever, African swine fever
Overview

- Introduction
- Avian Influenza Communication Plans
- pH1N1 Communication Plans
- Diagnostic Communication Challenges
• ProMED
• 24-7 news cycle
• Social media twitter

Backyard bird biosecurity video, starring The Chicken Whisperer and an as of yet unnamed chicken: http://bit.ly/c9Cy9w
1,281,710,676,000.00 via web

The AZ Dept. of Agriculture has confirmed Vesicular Stomatitis Virus in horses on a premises in Cochise Co. (PDF)

USDA and Rabies Task Force to distribute oral rabies vaccine baits across Cape Cod, MA to eliminate rabies in raccoons
1,272,653,920,000.00 via web

How to Use Speed as a Competitive Tool in Business
Jason Jennings and Laurence Haughton

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Factors Associated with Increased Public Concern

- Catastrophic potential
- Unfamiliar
- Decision processes not understood
- Lack of personal control
- Involuntary exposure
- Delayed effects
- Children at risk
- Risk to future generations
- Lack of trust in institutions
- Much media attention
- Previous history
- Unclear benefits
- Potentially irreversible effects
- Origins caused by human actions (vs. acts of nature)

Covello, 1989

Safeguarding Animal Health
What Do We All Know About Communication

- Build relationships and partnerships with stakeholders before an issue breaks
- Prepare messages and strategies in advance – message maps
- Gain support and cooperation from all partners as cross-cutting strategies are developed
- Collaborate and coordinate with other agencies and credible sources
- Meet the needs of the media and other critical audiences (public, Congress, stakeholders, etc)
- Be open, transparent and honest
- Admit what we simply do not know – talk about what we are doing to address what we don’t know
- Speak with compassion, concern and empathy
- Provide regular updates
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Avian Influenza
USDA’s Primary Communications Focus

• USDA Office of Communications Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Incident Communications Plan
  – Educating the media and public
    ❖ complexities of avian influenza as a disease among birds, and
    ❖ planned methods of communication in the event of an outbreak.

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Media Campaign

- Briefed national TV networks and national radio about USDA’s communications strategy

- Held media tours of wild bird testing (AK & flyways)

- Media tour of USDA’s NVSL in Ames - world reference diagnostic laboratory for avian influenza

- Developed educational materials

Safeguarding Animal Health
Public Outreach Campaigns

- Avian Influenza: Protecting the United States. USDA Preparations and Response
- Keep Bird Flu Out of the United States – poster
- Television and radio public service announcements
  - Biosecurity for Birds
  - Smuggling
  - Food Safety

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International Campaign

➢ International Communications Strategy

➢ Multi-lateral work with United Nations’ Food & Agriculture Organization and the World Organization for Animal Health

➢ USDA work via bilateral forums

➢ Multi-lateral work with IICA (Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture)

➢ Multi-lateral work with Canada and Mexico through the North American Plan for Avian and Pandemic Influenza

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AI MEDIA EXPERIENCE
Wild Bird Surveillance

- National Interagency Wild Bird Plan
- August 2006: Michigan mute swans – apparently healthy (LPAI H5N1 North American)
  - Technical briefing
  - Press release with confirmatory test results 7-10 days later
- Initial media interest with 1st detection
AI MEDIA EXPERIENCE
Wild Bird Surveillance

- No media interest after initial confirmatory results
- Issued a total of 11 press releases announcing presumptive positive & confirmatory results in six states
- October 2006, changed announcement protocol for USDA and Department of Interior to posting apparently healthy bird sample results on the Internet

**NEWS RELEASE**

United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Communications, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-1700, USA; Press Office (202) 694-6910; Fax (202) 720-6516

**WORTHINGTON, Ohio, Oct. 26, 2006** – The U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Interior today announced final test results, which confirm that an avian influenza virus was found in samples collected earlier this month from wild Northern pintail ducks in Ohio.

Because these LPAI H5N1 detections are common and pose no threat to human health, USDA and DOI are transitioning to a new method of notifying the public. In an effort to maintain transparency, USDA and DOI will post all future suspected LPAI H5N1 detections on the Internet. DOI will maintain a list of all such routine detections as part of the National Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Early Detection Data System (HEDDS). The list of detections will be accessible at http://wildlife.dissection.nahi.gov/ai/LPAITable.pdf. A link also will be available on USDA’s avian influenza Web page at http://www.usda.gov/aphis/. In the event of a presumptive H5N1 test result involving a large number of sick or dead birds, or other circumstances that suggest the possibility of a highly pathogenic virus, USDA and DOI will issue a news release or conduct a technical briefing to notify the media and the public.

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Communications Tools

- B-roll footage
- Digital video discs (DVDs)
- Fact Sheets
- Questions and Answers
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pH1N1 Communications

- USDA included in conference calls with CDC same day U.S. reported 2 cases to WHO
- Multi-Agency Coordination Group formed as lead for USDA
- Adapted and developed new pandemic messaging to fit event
- Previous pandemic planning assumed that disease outbreak would be in animals…not people
- Messaging focus shifted to protecting the U.S. swine herd from sick humans
- Meeting series held with stakeholders: federal agencies including public health agencies, state animal health and public health officials, research institutes, public health organizations, veterinary groups, producer organizations
pH1N1 Communications

- Significant trade actions taken and economic effect on pork industry due to human illness before any finding in U.S. swine
pH1N1 Communications

• Similar process to avian influenza for notification

**USDA NEWS RELEASE**

United States Department of Agriculture • Office of Communications • 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-6009 • Voice: (202) 720-1950 • Email: usnews@usda.gov • Web: http://www.usda.gov

Release No. 0514.09

Contact:
Angela Harless (202) 720-4623

**USDA CONFIRMS 2009 PANDEMIC H1N1 INFLUENZA VIRUS PRESENT IN MINNESOTA FAIR PIG SAMPLE**

Agriculture Secretary Vilsack: "U.S. Pork Is Safe to Eat"

WASHINGTON, Oct. 19, 2009 - Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that USDA’s National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) has confirmed the presence of 2009 pandemic H1N1 influenza virus in a pig sample collected at the Minnesota State Fair submitted by the University of Minnesota. Additional samples are being tested.

**2009 PANDEMIC H1N1 INFLUENZA PRESUMPTIVE AND CONFIRMED RESULTS**

January 15, 2010

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Safeguarding Animal Health
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Diagnostic Communication Challenges

- Surveillance programs with screening tests have inconclusive and false positive results – what, when and how do you communicate?
- New diagnostic technologies can identify novel agents or new hosts with unknown significance
- Access to new technologies
  - Penside tests
  - Home diagnostic testing

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Discovery of Swine as A Host for the *Reston Ebolavirus*

- In 2008, domestic swine in the Philippines, experiencing unusually severe outbreaks of porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome (PRRS), were discovered to host *Reston Ebolavirus* (REBOV).
- Identified at FADDL and confirmed at CDC.
Responses to Discovery of Swine as A Host for *Reston Ebolavirus*

- Philippines BAI, immediately stopped international trade of pork products.
- The FAO, OIE, and WHO sent a team to the Philippines to advise and assist on public health recommendations and control of the infected swine. Dr. Bill White of NVSL/FADDL among team members.
- The CDC tested 141 individuals and found some seroconversion.
- Surveys of two affected farms revealed circulating virus on farm A.
- The CDC has since returned to the Philippines to investigate fruit bats as a possible reservoir.

**BBC NEWS**

**Concern over Ebola virus in pigs.**

A form of Ebola virus has been detected in pigs for the first time, raising concerns it could mutate and pose a new risk to humans.

The new discovery – in the Philippines – is featured in the journal Science.

Story from BBC NEWS:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/health/8143823.stm
Published: 2009/07/10 10:14:08 GMT
© BBC MMIX
Summary

• Words Matter - recognize importance of communication specialists as part of the team
• Develop a communication strategy to relay information/consistent messaging
• Establish direct lines of communication at all levels (local, state, national, international) of One Health partners
• Coordinate and collaborate with public health, other stakeholders and partners in communications yet stay in area of expertise
• Recognize One Health issues will bring new partners and media to the table – for example, financial and public health reporters in addition to agriculture reporters
• Appreciate and use new social media methodologies
“Precision of communication is important, more important than ever, in our era of hair trigger balances, when a false or misunderstood word may create as much disaster as a sudden thoughtless act.”

- James Thurber

"Communication works for those who work at it."

- John Powell
Acknowledgements

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