STOCK QUOTES

Animal Health Newsletter

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Quarterly Newsletter from the Animal Health Bureau of the Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL)

STATE VETERINARIAN NOTES

Tahnee Szymanski, DVM

As we enter 2026, no-cost RFID tags continue to be a topic of interest. Montana primarily requests our no-cost allotment of tags for brucellosis vaccination. For the 2025-2026 calfhood vaccination cycle. Montana had 205,000 orange tags available for veterinarians. Tags are allocated based upon prior year's vaccination totals. Montana's tag allocation for 2026 will be directed towards the 2026-2027 vaccination cycle. We expect to have a similar number of tags available while continuing to advocate for a larger allocation for Montana based upon the volume of regulatory work that occurs due to the presence of brucellosis in the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA). Tag allocation will again be determined by vaccination records submitted to our office. Please ensure that vaccination certificates are accurate and submitted to our office in a timely manner.

In addition to no-cost RFID tags, we still have funding available to offset the cost of equipment to facilitate the use of RFID tags and electronic data capture systems. Funding can be used to offset the purchase of tag readers, computers, tablets, or printers. For additional information, please contact Sara Starkey at sstarkey@mt.gov. Funding expires March 31, 2026, and we do not expect to have future funding available.

Discussion around New World Screwworm (NWS) activity in Mexico is ongoing as United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and states work towards a response framework. USDA recently published their response playbook outlining the necessary components of a response to NWS. USDA and states are working closely to flesh out specific details associated with a response. One component that is a sticking point for industry groups is treatment prior to movement for animals direct to slaughter and swine from confinement systems. Ultimately, it looks like this requirement will be determined at the state level depending on the structure of state industry and the risk of establishment of NWS. Temperature and geography heavily influence the viability of NWS.

As animal health officials our role is to protect industry from the impacts of disease by limiting disease spread, while ensuring that the "cure" isn't worse than the impacts of the disease itself. It is important that we have conversations about disease response in peacetime so that industry, the veterinary community, and animal health officials are on the same page regarding needs and priorities. The article discussing Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) on page four previews some of the actions and impacts that a large-scale disease detection would bring.

As you are hopefully aware, the Department has been working on a state communication plan with federal funding. In January there will be a webinar to discuss communication during a disease response (Page 2). Please consider joining the discussion. The more voices that contribute, the better the final product will be.

Finally, the Texas Animal Health commission (TAHC) recently announced their transition to electronic certificates of veterinary inspection (CVIs) only. Unique to the Texas announcement is that the requirement applies to both export and import CVIs. Effective January 1, 2026, all CVIs for animals entering Texas will be required to be electronic. This change should be minimally impactful for Montana veterinarians due to our transition several years prior. I expect however that other states will follow now that the first domino has fallen. If you are a veterinarian who is still issuing paper CVIs and would like to explore electronic options, please contact our office (406-444-2976). We would be happy to help facilitate the transition. ¤

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Brenee Peterson, DVM

The Department of Livestock (DOL) continues work on a Montana Communication Plan for utilization during a Foreign Animal Disease (FAD) outbreak. Communication during an outbreak will be a critical component of a response. Effective, accurate, and timely communication will allow producers to make informed decisions and comply with emergency orders, including a stop movement order. DOL recently partnered with Dr. Danelle Bickett-Weddle to provide interactive webinars for stakeholders. Dr. Bickett-Weddle has a wide experience in veterinary medicine and is well known across the states and federal partners for successfully developing disaster preparedness plans. We encourage you to attend and share information with any producers or clients that may have an interest in participating in the webinars. If you have more questions, feel free to contact Dr. Brenee Peterson (406) 444-2939 or brenee.peterson@mt.gov.

Figure 1. Montana Livestock Emergency Communication Plan Meeting. Source: Dr. Danelle Bickett-Weddle.

BRUCELLOSIS WORKING GROUP

Brenee Peterson, DVM

Brucellosis is a familiar topic to veterinarians and cattle producers in Montana. Montana has had a designated surveillance area (DSA) and accompanying brucellosis regulations since 2009 with only minor changes to regulations during that time. As we shared in the September newsletter, the Department of Livestock (DOL) is excited to be participating in the Brucellosis Research and Ungulate Health (BRUH) group to discuss possible updates to brucellosis management strategies and policies given what weìve learned about brucellosis in the last 15 years and the potential for new research.

The group met for the second time in November. The meeting in Bozeman brought together wildlife and livestock officials from the three Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA) states, researchers, and laboratory officials. Over two days discussions related to current and past brucellosis research and brucellosis management strategies in both domestic livestock and wildlife populations across the GYA. Topics ranged from spatial-temporal separation between elk and cattle, prevention of intra-herd transmission in cattle, diagnostics and vaccination challenges, to epidemiological investigations.

Going forward, the group will focus on a thorough review of existing literature and creation of a best management practices document that will capture the current strategies employed by the various states and agencies involved. In addition, participants plan to evaluate grants and alternative funding sources to support brucellosis research. If you have suggestions for brucellosis management strategies that you would like to see discussed, please reach out to DOL. We know that veterinarians and producers experience significant fatigue with the brucellosis program, and we hope that BRUH will be an opportunity to push forward with meaningful updates to this important program. •

EXHIBITION ANIMALS & IMPORT REQUIREMENTS

Emily Kaleczyc, VMD, MPH

Figure 2. Show Sheep. Source: Penn State Extension

Despite the cold and dark, we are into the time of year when families are starting to plan livestock projects for next summer's fair season. At the recent United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) annual meeting we heard from multiple states about the challenges they have experienced with traceability of show animals. At their 2025 State Fair, North Dakota collected official identification (ID) from all sheep and goats and all electronically readable ID from cattle and swine. They found 187 animals exhibited by 80 different families that were imported into North Dakota illegally. This finding is a good reminder to be aware of animal import requirements so that you can help your clients ensure they acquire new show animals in compliance with Montana regulations.

Reasons that were cited for the import violations in North Dakota and other states sharing their show animal experience included an increase in online sales, animals being moved by commercial haulers who dropped off animals across multiple states, no veterinarians available to write a health certificate, or a lack of knowledge on the side of the receiving family. If you hear of animals being imported for show that may not have arrived with the correct paperwork, we can use those instances as an opportunity to provide education and help buyers come into compliance with Montana's import requirements.

As a reminder, our import requirements for all species can be found on the Department of Livestock (DOL) website (https://liv.mt.gov/Animal-Health/Import-Requirements/index). Some specifics to keep in mind for show/exhibition animals:

- All cattle, sheep, goats, and swine imported for show purposes must have official ID regardless of age or sex of the animal, and the official ID must be listed on a health certificate issued within 30 days prior to entry into Montana.
- 840-RFID tags are acceptable ID for cattle, sheep, goats, and swine.
- In addition to 840-RFID tags, sheep and goats may also be identified with a tattoo if that tattoo is a recognized breed registry tattoo or an official flock identification tattoo.
- Swine may be identified with an ear notching or tattoo if the notching or tattoo is recorded in the book of record for a purebred registry association.
- Poultry imported into Montana require a health certificate and test negative for Pullorum-Typhoid within 30 days prior to entry into Montana or a VS 9-3 form if originating from an NPIP certified flock.

If you have clients with show animals that might need assistance acquiring official ID, please let us know. ¤

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE (FMD) CASES IN EUROPE

Emily Kaleczyc, VMD, MPH

Foot and mouth disease (FMD) is often held up as the worst-case scenario for a foreign animal disease (FAD) that could occur in the United States – it is highly contagious, effects multiple livestock and wildlife species, and an outbreak would have major economic consequences. FMD is endemic in many parts of the world, so an ongoing risk of introduction exists. In 2025 the European Union had two separate outbreaks of FMD that can be useful learning opportunities for us here in the United States.

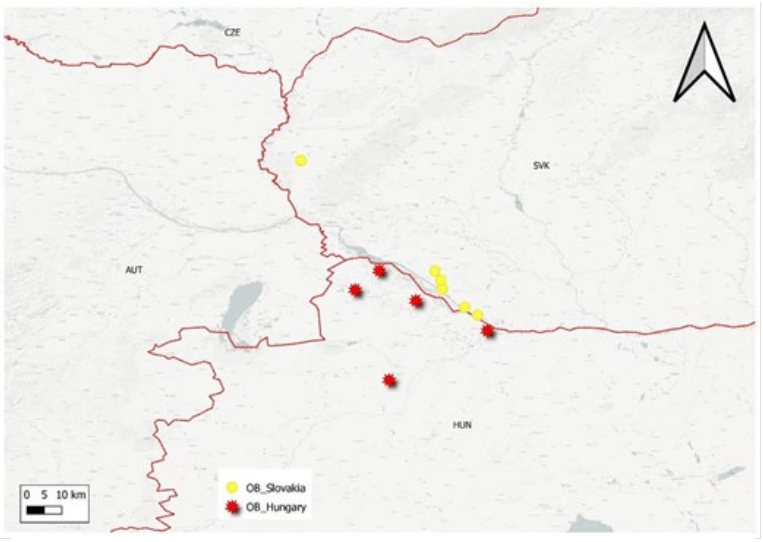

Figure 3. FMD outbreaks distribution in Hungary and Slovakia as of April 18, 2025. Source: WOAH FMD Situation Report 1.

The first outbreak occurred in January 2025 in Germany. The index case was three sick water buffalo on a small farm near Berlin. There were only 14 water buffalo on the premises and no other susceptible species. The farm was in a relatively urban area with very little agriculture nearby. There was no history of animal movement on or off the premises preceding the first cases. All 14 water buffalo on the index premises were euthanized, and a five-day movement standstill was put into place for the two German states that contained the control area. All cloven hooved livestock within the 3km zone (water buffalo, sheep, goats, and pigs) were euthanized (stamping out). All cloven hooved livestock within 3km and 10km zones were tested; in total more than 6,300 tests were conducted with all negative results. Additional wildlife sampling was conducted on deer and wild boar in the control area, also with all negative results.

Thanks to the aggressive surveillance and movement controls, Germany was able to regain their FMD free status on April 14, 2025. The outbreak was contained to the one original premises. The virus that caused the outbreak was most closely related to strains currently circulating in Asia, but no definitive route of introduction was identified. Even though the outbreak was small, contained quickly, and the response costs themselves were small, officials estimate that the outbreak cost the German economy more than 1 billion euros.

In March 2025 the second FMD outbreak began in Hungary on an approximately 1,000 head dairy. As opposed to the German outbreak, the area of Hungary where this outbreak occurred was a more rural and agricultural area with dairies that are large by European standards. All cattle on the index premises were euthanized, and control measures were put in place. The control area spanned the international border with Slovakia, and Slovakia reported their first cases of FMD later in the month. Initial control measures in both countries included a country wide standstill of animal movements, a ban on live animal movements out of or through the control areas, a ban on grazing requiring all animals to be housed indoors, and control of vehicle traffic within restricted areas. The European Union vaccine bank was deployed, and both countries used a vaccinate to kill strategy to suppress virus spread on premises that were awaiting depopulation. Carcass disposal was accomplished through a combination of rendering and burial, and both countries deployed a variety of extra personnel such as military and firefighters to help with movement controls, depopulation, and disinfection.

The virus that caused the Hungarian/Slovakian outbreak was unrelated to the virus that caused the German outbreak earlier in the year. The virus in Hungary and Slovakia was almost identical to virus last seen in Pakistan in 2018 which suggests that the virus was not continuously circulating in animals but was preserved somewhere where it did not have an opportunity to mutate. The route for initial introduction has not been identified. During the outbreak virus was spread between facilities by human traffic and by wind. There was an unusually strong wind event during the outbreak, and several premises downwind of early cases were affected with no other epidemiologic links identified.

In total Slovakia had six affected premises and one contact premises that were depopulated for a total of 8,344 cattle euthanized. Hungary had five affected premises and depopulated 8,422 animals. With aggressive control measures Slovakia and Hungary were able to get the outbreak under control with the last case being reported on April 17, 2025, and their FMD free status being restored in the fall of 2025.

These two European Union outbreaks are examples of effective responses that allowed countries to contain the virus and restore their disease-free status quickly. Despite significant differences in agriculture and management between the European Union and the United States, there are important lessons we can learn about the importance of preparedness, rapid and aggressive initial responses, and daily biosecurity in mitigating the risk of foreign animal diseases. ¤

BLUETONGUE AND EPIZOOTIC HEMORRHAGIC DISEASE

Brenee Peterson, DVM

This fall brought many calls to the department inquiring about bluetongue (BTV) and epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) due to high death rates in deer around the state and several reports of cattle presenting with clinical signs compatible with BTV. Although multiple herds were tested throughout the state, all tests on cattle were negative for both BTV and EHD.

BTV and EHD are viral diseases that can be transmitted via biting midges. BTV tends to affect ruminants and can cause swelling in the face and tongue along with lameness and ulcerative lesions. EHD has similar clinical signs to BTV but primarily affects white-tailed deer. Fish, Wildlife and Parks have reported increased mortality in deer and pronghorn across the state. EHD and BTV have been confirmed in both species and are suspected to be primary contributors to the increased mortality. According to FWP, Montana sees outbreaks every few years with some years worse than others, and this year is considered one of the largest outbreaks in recent history.

Since both viruses are transmitted by insects, a decline in cases is typically observed after the first hard frost. If you have suspected cases, please contact the Department as BTV and EHD are both reportable diseases in the state. Testing can be performed at the veterinary diagnostic lab in Bozeman. Bluetongue testing is an ELISA test while EHD is an AGID. Both are antibody tests and both have a sensitivity of 100% and a specificity of 99%. Since the tests are antibody tests, this can pose challenges as the antibody remains elevated for a while post infection and may not be elevated yet during an acute outbreak. PCR is another option for testing using whole blood but just like with the antibody test the viral nucleic acid can persist for six months after infection. ¤

VESICULAR STOMATITIS (VS) UPDATES

Tahnee Szymanski, DVM

On October 31, 2025, United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (USDA APHIS) announced the 2025 United States index case of vesicular stomatitis (VS). The detection included horses on two separate premises in Cochise County, Arizona. Both horses had oral lesions, and the presence of vesicular stomatitis New Jersey virus (VSNJV) was confirmed at the National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL). Since the initial detection, two additional affected premises have been identified, one each in Gila and Santa Cruz Counties.

Fortunately, we do not expect this current outbreak to have much impact on Montana equines over the winter. Known vectors for transmission of VSV include black flies, sand flies, and biting midges (Culicoides spp.), none of which remain active during Montana winters. One item of note however, Canada will not accept animals for importation if they have been in Arizona or any other affected state for 21 days prior to movement. Montana has set our equine import requirements for shipments from non-VSV affected states to include a statement that animals have not been in Arizona for the previous 21 days. This statement should facilitate the issuance of an international CVI by Montana accredited veterinarians.

VS last occurred in the United States from May 2023 through January 2024 with a total of 319 premises affected in 3 states (California, Nevada, and Texas). The last VS cases in Montana occurred in 2005.

The index case for a VSV outbreak each year is characterized as either an incursion (new introduction of the virus from regions to the south) or an expansion (overwintering of the virus). With the detection in Arizona this late in the year, it is unknown how the disease will progress through the winter and whether the virus will overwinter resulting in an expansion year in 2026.

While we are a few months off from having VS on our differential list for Montana resident horses, we should always remain vigilant for oral lesions in livestock species, regardless of the time of year.

- If you suspect lesions consistent with VS in an equine, you should notify the Department (406-444-2976) or USDA Montana (406-437-9450) to report lesions. A complete history, including travel, and photos of the lesions if you have them, will help our office prioritize next steps. In most instances, we will have you collect samples from the animal and submit them to NVSL for testing. We may also deploy a state or federal veterinarian to collect samples for submission.
- If you suspect lesions consistent with VS in a ruminant or pig, you should notify the state or federal office immediately. As you are aware, VS is clinically indistinguishable from several high consequence vesicular diseases. We will deploy a foreign animal disease diagnostician (FADD) to investigate the lesions and work with you directly on next steps for the premises and how you can safely complete your day if you have other appointments on the books.

As a gentle reminder, we see a lot of oral lesion photos with bare hands! VS is zoonotic, causing fever, headache, fatigue, and myalgia of several days' duration. Don't forget to glove up when conducting oral exams on horses with lesions. ¤

MDOL STAFF CORNER: DR. KELSEY MARTIN

Kelsey Martin, DVM, MS

Dr. Kelsey Martin grew up ranching on the eastern plains of Colorado. Like many that hail from agriculture backgrounds, her youth was shaped by the rewards and challenges of life in a rural area and the efforts required to manage land and livestock. From a small, but tight knit community, Kelsey was active in sports, 4H, FFA, and in the classroom, where she graduated valedictorian from a grand class size of seven. In college, she continued to be drawn back to the ideas of animal health science, agriculture, and supporting rural communities, which ultimately led to her pursuing a career in veterinary medicine. Kelsey received her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree in 2019 from Colorado State University (CSU), where she specialized in large animal medicine and participated in multiple rural health initiatives both at home and abroad. Shortly thereafter, she completed an intensive, one-year clinical internship in large animal medicine and surgery, followed by additional training in reproduction. Finding joy in mentoring students and communicating health concepts, Kelsey then served as a locum, large animal clinical instructor at St. George's University in the Caribbean, before settling into private practice in Montana in early 2022.

Figure 4: Dr. Kelsey Martin. Source: Personal Photo.

Kelsey has worked in Southwest Montana as a private practice livestock veterinarian for multiple years, working closely with producers in the Designated Surveillance Area (DSA) and helping to manage the Headwaters Livestock Auction. While in practice, Kelsey continued to advance her expertise in animal health and epidemiology by investigating bacterial disease, Mycoplasma bovis, a pathogen found in cattle, bison, and other wildlife species, which eventually earned her a Master's of Clinical Sciences degree from CSU in 2024. Kelsey is excited to be joining the Department of Livestock where she hopes to apply her skill set and experience to provide a dynamic approach in tackling issues relevant to livestock health and industry and provide support to animal owners and other professionals. Outside of the office, Kelsey is a stained-glass artist, avid outdoorswoman, and collector of numerous other hobbies. ¤

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