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Before the House Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry
Title of Hearing: "Safeguarding U.S. Agriculture: The Role of the National Animal Health
Laboratory Network (NAHLN)"
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Key Points:

- The USDA National Animal Health Network (NAHLN) is a cornerstone of our nation's efforts for protecting US animal health, public health, and the security of a safe, abundant, and affordable food supply.
- The NAHLN delivers a national standard of best-in-class veterinary diagnostic technologies, testing capabilities, and coordination of information among the federal, state, and private sector (practicing) veterinarians from across the US who are responsible for surveilling and responding to animal health emergencies of high consequence to US animal agriculture.
- The efficiencies of the federal funds invested in the NAHLN are greatly amplified through the leveraging of the substantive veterinary diagnostic laboratory infrastructure, subject matter expertise, quality assured laboratory testing capabilities, research scientists, and the direct connectivity to the frontlines of US animal agriculture that exists at the university and state veterinary diagnostic labs across the country.
- NAHLN is an exemplary example of a highly functional and effective partnership among federal, state, university, and industry partners working together to meet critically important needs of our nation.
- The leadership and vision provided in establishing and continuing to advance the capabilities and reach of the NAHLN across our country has resulted in the development of a highly trusted and capable network of veterinary diagnostic laboratories that is uniquely American and truly world class.

USDA National Animal Health Lab Network (NAHLN):

The USDA National Animal Health Lab Network (NAHLN) is an essential component of a national strategy that provides the frontline support for detecting, responding to, and recovering from animal health emergencies of high consequence to US animal agriculture.

The NAHLN is a network of federal, university, and state laboratories distributed throughout the country that collectively serve as our nation's primary veterinary diagnostic laboratory infrastructure for protecting US animal health, public health, and the security of our food supply.

The NAHLN was established in 2002 and has evolved to include a total of 64 labs contributing at various levels and capacities towards advancing NAHLN's mission of safeguarding animal health, public health, and our nation's food supply. The NAHLN also works in partnership as part of the three-legged stool with the National Animal Vaccine and Veterinary Countermeasure Bank and National Animal Disease Preparedness Response Program to bolster the country's abilities to capably respond to animal health emergencies of high consequence.

The NAHLN provides a well-structured system for enabling diseases of high consequence testing to be conducted in a quality assured manner by university and state veterinary diagnostic laboratories that are geographically dispersed throughout the country. The NAHLN brings a national standard of best-in-class veterinary diagnostic technologies and system for integrating veterinary diagnostic information to be actively in service on frontlines of US animal agriculture on a day-to-day basis. This distributive model of service brought about by the NAHLN's partnering with university and state labs provides for a practical and efficient means for delivering emerging and foreign animal disease diagnostic support in a timely, cost effective, scalable, and quality assured manner across the country.

Iowa State University Veterinary Diagnostic Lab in the NAHLN:

The Iowa State University Veterinary Diagnostic Lab (ISU VDL) is the only full-service, fully accredited veterinary diagnostic laboratory in the state of Iowa, and serves the state as its official veterinary diagnostic laboratory.

The ISU VDL proudly serves as an active contributor to USDA's National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN).

As a Level 1 Laboratory in the NAHLN, ISU VDL collaborates on a daily basis with the USDA federal reference laboratories, peer university and state labs, practicing veterinarians, and state and federal veterinary medical officials from across the country.

As you know, agriculture is critically important to the state of Iowa and its people — past, present, and future. Iowa is perennially a national leader in animal agriculture, both in production and processing, and a substantive exporter of value-added food products.

This is why ISU VDL has a long history of being front and center in diagnosing, researching, and supporting responses to emerging diseases of high consequence to Iowa and US animal agriculture.

The ISU VDL is a major unit within the Department of Veterinary Diagnostic and Production Medicine in Iowa State University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

ISU VDL's team of 30 faculty and 155 technical staff play an active role on the frontlines of U.S. animal agriculture. The lab processes approximately 125,000 diagnostic case submissions and conducts more than 1.7 million diagnostic assays annually.

While the range of comprehensive veterinary diagnostic services the ISU VDL provides extends across the full-spectrum of the animal kingdom — including livestock, companion animals, and wildlife — and includes mitigating the risks of zoonotic diseases spilling over from animals to people; ISU VDL's core purpose centers on playing a critical role in safeguarding and bettering the health, well-being, and competitiveness of Iowa's and the nation's animal agriculture, and ultimately, the security and safety of our nation's food supply.

The ISU VDL carries among the largest food animal centered caseloads in the US, with submissions of livestock and poultry origin representing greater than 90% of the cases received and approximately 95% of the overall diagnostic services provided.

ISU VDL receives more than 2,500 case submissions each week. This abundant flow of real-world case material provides our veterinary diagnosticians and research scientists an immediate insight into the applied research questions of high relevance to stakeholders and industries we serve. This case material also serves as invaluable aid in the teaching and training of the next generation of veterinarians, diagnosticians, and veterinary scientists.

ISU VDL's principal clientele are the practicing veterinarians who are working directly to support the veterinary health care needs of U.S. farmers and ranchers on a daily basis. This direct connectivity to the boots on the ground of Iowa and U.S. animal agriculture positions our laboratory very well in its role and service as a Level 1 Lab in the NAHLN.

Our work as a Level 1 Laboratory in the NAHLN includes receiving and supporting endemic, emerging, and foreign animal disease investigations, surveillance, and response efforts in support of the NAHLN's mission to protect U.S. animal health, public health, and the nation's food supply.

The ISU VDL monitors its heavy case load of diagnostic submissions for diseases of high-consequence, maintains an adequate staff of proficiency-tested technicians, and a BSL-3 capable diagnostic facility. Examples of NAHLN scope disease surveillance and testing at the ISU VDL include diseases such as Avian Influenza, African Swine Fever, Chronic Wasting Disease, Classical Swine Fever, Exotic Newcastle Disease, Foot and Mouth Disease, Pseudorabies, and

Type A Influenza of Swine as well as monitoring for trends in antimicrobial resistance among US livestock and poultry. In just our local example, the ISU VDL conducted approximately 156,000 tests on US livestock and poultry on these NAHLN scope related animal health monitoring and disease control efforts over the course of the past year.

In my view, the NAHLN is an exemplary example of a highly functional, efficient, and effective partnership among federal, state, university, and industry partners.

Federal Support Provided to the NAHLN:

Federal support provided through the NAHLN is a cornerstone of enhancing our national preparedness to effectively monitor and respond to the ever-increasing risks and realities of emerging diseases of importance to both animal and human health.

The efficiencies of the federal funds invested in the NAHLN are greatly amplified through the leveraging of the substantive veterinary diagnostic laboratory infrastructure, subject matter expertise, quality assured laboratory testing capabilities, research scientists, and the direct connectivity to the frontlines of US animal agriculture that exists at the university and state veterinary diagnostic labs across the country.

The financial resources provided to the ISU VDL as a Level 1 Lab in the NAHLN are essential in enhancing animal disease monitoring capabilities and capacity, demonstrating competence and compliance of well-defined testing standards, supporting the development and implementation of quality assurance programs that drive the continuous improvement of the laboratory, increasing collaboration and connectivity between state and federal animal health officials and diagnostic laboratories, and improving foreign or emerging animal disease testing, surveillance, and containment capabilities.

These funds have enabled the ISU VDL the ability to maintain a BSL- 3 capable diagnostic laboratory space and an adequate staffing of proficiency-trained diagnostic technicians that are utilized on a regular basis for foreign, emerging, and domestic disease surveillance and provide surge capacity when a disease outbreak occurs. These funds also support laboratory information technology infrastructure, capabilities, and personnel to develop and use data systems necessary for secure management and transmission of sensitive laboratory data. Similarly, support through the NAHLN continues to be critical towards enhancing the ISU VDL's quality assurance programs that validate the accuracy and reliability of the test results to reassure decision-makers and foreign trading partners that they can have confidence in the results.

ISU VDL's role working in partnership with our USDA colleagues, practicing veterinarians, peer laboratories, and state and federal medical officials from across the country in support of the detection and response to the outbreak of High-Path Avian Influenza Virus (HP-AIV) impacting US poultry flocks and dairy herds over the course of the past few years is simply the most recent

example of the ISU VDL and USDA NAHLN partners stepping up in a time of need. Such capabilities are only made possible by federal investment in this vital network.

In short, funding received through the NAHLN is used as an extremely efficient and effective means of leveraging the capabilities existing at the ISU VDL to enhance the US diagnostic system serving to protect animal health, human health, and the greater than 250-billion-dollar US animal agricultural economy.

Closing:

In summary, I believe the federal investments in the NAHLN represent a true win-win-win — for U.S. animal health and public health; for U.S. agriculture more broadly; and for enhancing the security, safety, and affordability of our nation’s food supply.

I thank the members of this committee and leaders within USDA APHIS both present and past for your leadership, vision, and steadfast support for establishing and continuing to advance the capabilities and reach of the NAHLN across our country.

Your vision and support have resulted in the development of a highly trusted and highly capable network of veterinary diagnostic laboratories that is truly world class. In my opinion, the NAHLN is a crowned jewel within USDA APHIS Veterinary Services that is uniquely American, and unmatched the world around. It is something that each of us as Americans can — and should — take great pride in.