Western Canadian Animal Health Network

WECAHN SMALL RUMINANT NETWORK PRODUCER REPORT

JANUARY - MARCH 2026

The WeCAHN Small Ruminants Network held a quarterly virtual meeting on May 21st, 2026. Network members discussed animal health events from January to March, 2026. Veterinary practitioners, diagnosticians, veterinary college faculty, researchers, public veterinarians, and industry representatives attended the meeting.

1) Overview

Data sources in this report include:

1. Clinical Impressions Surveys completed by network practitioners.
2. Data shared by western veterinary diagnostic laboratories: Manitoba Veterinary Diagnostic Services (VDS) laboratory, Prairie Diagnostic Services (PDS) laboratory, and University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Diagnostic Services Unit (UCVM DSU).
3. Scan: small ruminant surveillance reported by other sources or networks.

2) Interesting Cases

i) Concurrent pregnancy toxemia and sepsis in a ewe

- A ewe in late pregnancy died after neurological signs and rapid decline, with necropsy showing severe chronic mastitis with an abscess, and metabolic disease changes in the liver and lungs.
- Bacterial culture identified *Arcanobacterium* spp. and *Morganella* spp. in udder samples, and other lambs in the flock showed poor milk intake.
- The case highlighted reduced milk production from chronic mastitis as a key driver of lamb losses alongside pregnancy toxemia and sepsis.
- Elevated but non-toxic liver copper levels suggested possible dietary imbalance rather than primary toxicity, with feeding practices, including feeding cattle feed, and udder health identified as key management concerns.

ii) Abortion storm associated with Caprine Herpesvirus

- A goat herd experienced a sudden abortion outbreak affecting multiple does within a short period.
- Post mortem fetal lesions were subtle, a standard bovine abortion panel was negative, but advanced testing (sequencing) detected Caprine Herpesvirus.
- The finding indicated that routine testing may miss important causes of abortion outbreaks and supports expanded use of sequencing tools for small ruminant reproductive disease investigations.

iii) *Mannheimia haemolytica*–associated abomasitis and septicemia in lambs

- Sudden deaths occurred in lambs with abdominal distension and severe gastrointestinal lesions at necropsy including an abomasal (stomach) ulcer.
- *Mannheimia haemolytica* was isolated from multiple organs, including the stomach, spleen and brain despite being typically a respiratory pathogen.
- The abomasal ulcer was considered the likely primary lesion, with secondary bacterial invasion through the damaged stomach leading to multi-organ infection.
- Nutritional stress, milk intake issues, rough feedstuffs, and management factors were identified as key areas to review for prevention of abomasal (stomach) ulcers.

iv) Bacterial abortions and neonatal loss investigations

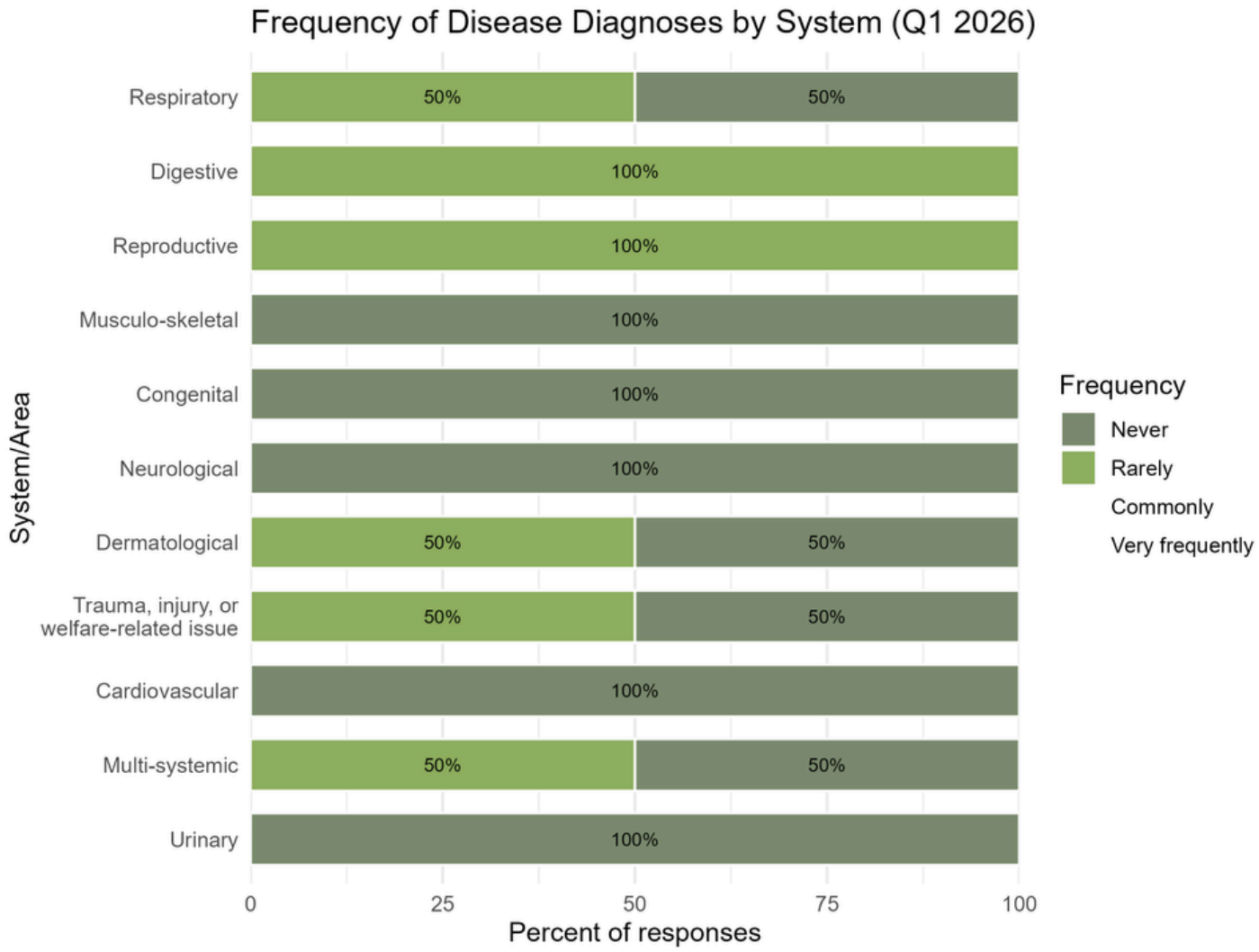
- A flock of ewes had near-term stillbirths with placental inflammation, where *M. haemolytica* was isolated despite broad negative abortion testing.
- A second flock showed weak and stillborn lambs linked mainly to ringwomb, mineral deficiencies, including copper and manganese, with some cases of pneumonia.
- Findings emphasized that nutritional imbalance can be as important as infectious causes in reproductive loss.
- Low fetal liver copper was highlighted as an indicator of wider herd mineral deficiency requiring flock-level nutritional assessment.

3) Syndromic Surveillance

Clinical impressions surveys

Never; Rarely = 1-2 times per 3 months; Commonly = 1-2 times per month; Very frequently = 3+ times per month.

Body system summary



Respiratory disease

Respiratory problems remained sporadic and were mainly linked to pneumonia in sheep and goats. Laboratory testing identified CAEV, OPP (Maedi-Visna), and bacteria including *M. haemolytica*, *Trueperella pyogenes*, and *Streptococcus ovis*. Findings remained within expected levels and reflected a mix of common respiratory infections.

Cardiovascular Disease

Heart disease was uncommon this quarter. One sheep was diagnosed with inflammation of the heart muscle (myocarditis). Findings remained within expected levels.

Digestive disease

Digestive disorders included intestinal inflammation, intestinal twisting, and fatty liver disease. Johne's disease (*Mycobacterium avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis* [MAP]) was identified in goats, along with *Enterococcus* infections in sheep and goats. Findings remained within expected levels and reflected sporadic disease activity.

Reproductive disease

Reproductive losses were linked to both infectious and non-infectious causes. Laboratory testing identified *Coxiella burnetii, Chlamydia abortus, Toxoplasma gondii*, and *Campylobacter* spp. in abortion investigations. Additional cases included placental infections and stillbirths. Findings remained within expected levels and reflected ongoing background reproductive disease.

Congenital disease

One case of weak newborn syndrome was reported. No infectious cause was identified. Findings remained within expected levels.

Neurological system disease

Nervous system disease was uncommon. Laboratory diagnoses included one case of polio in sheep and encephalitis in goats. Findings remained within expected levels.

Trauma, injury, or welfare-related issue

A small number of deaths were associated with starvation or physical injury. No unusual trends were identified.

Multisystemic Disease

Caseous lymphadenitis (CL) caused by *Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis* was diagnosed in both sheep and goats. Occasional cases of septicemia were also identified. Findings remained within expected levels and reflected sporadic bacterial disease.

Mastitis

Mastitis activity was low this quarter. One bacterial mastitis case was diagnosed in a sheep, while limited bacterial growth was detected in a goat milk sample. Findings remained within expected levels.

4) Research update

Q-GAPS: Q fever German Interdisciplinary Program for research.

Dr. Benjamin Bauer, University of Calgary, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine.

A long-term research program in Germany is helping improve awareness and preparedness for Q fever, a disease caused by *Coxiella burnetii* that can affect animals and people.

A study of sheep and goat flocks found that Q fever was common in some regions, especially where animals lambed year-round. Flocks with seasonal lambing had lower infection rates, suggesting that a break between lambing / kidding periods may help reduce disease spread.

Researchers also developed a vaccination approach that focuses on vaccinating replacement females before breeding. This strategy reduced costs and provided protection for at least 4 years.

The program produced a practical Q-fever Guide that outlines steps for monitoring, outbreak response, and communication. It emphasizes early coordination between producers, veterinarians, public health officials, and physicians when Q fever is detected.

5) Scan of emerging and important diseases

- **Epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD)** was linked to abortions and abnormal calves in beef cattle in Oregon. The disease had previously been detected in deer in the same grazing areas and has also been reported in British Columbia and several U.S. states (Beacon). EHD is spread by biting midges and can affect many hoofed animals.
- **New World screwworm** continues to spread in Mexico and has now been detected in Texas and New Mexico for the first time in decades. These detections have resulted in livestock import restrictions for affected areas.
- **Sheep and goat pox** continues to spread in parts of Europe, with new outbreaks reported in Greece and the first reported outbreak in Kosovo.
- **Foot-and-mouth disease (SAT-1)** continues to expand in South Africa and is reaching into new regions, with outbreaks reported in Greece and Cyprus, China, and Mongolia. International animal health organizations are encouraging countries to strengthen preparedness and response plans.
- **Highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1)** remains active in North America. No cases have been detected in Canadian dairy cattle, but outbreaks continue in poultry in Alberta and Saskatchewan with one infection reported in a SK farm cat.

Producer takeaways

Sheep and goat reproductive losses are often caused by a mix of infections, nutrition, and management issues rather than a single disease. This quarter included *Mannheimia haemolytica*, Caprine Herpesvirus, and other bacterial infections, along with mineral deficiencies such as copper and trace elements.

Testing showed mostly low-level, scattered disease rather than outbreaks. Respiratory cases involved multiple bacteria, while abortions were linked to a mix of infectious agents and cases with no clear cause. Overall, this reflects ongoing background disease in most flocks.

Several serious foreign and emerging diseases are also spreading globally, including New World screwworm in the southern United States, FMD SAT-1 in parts of Asia, capripox virus in Europe, and HPAI in North America. Stay alert and continue working with veterinarians on prevention and preparedness.

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