Western Canadian Animal Health Network

WECAHN SMALL RUMINANTS NETWORK PRODUCER SUMMARY

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. Sources of information included Clinical Impressions Surveys completed by network practitioners, 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), and small ruminant surveillance reported by other sources or networks.

1) Interesting Cases

A ewe in late pregnancy died after developing nervous system signs and becoming unable to stand. Post mortem examination found severe mastitis (udder inflammation) with *Arcanobacterium* spp. and *Morganella* spp. bacteria, along with signs of liver and multi organ failure. Liver copper levels were high. Dead lambs from other ewes had signs of low milk intake. Producers were encouraged to review feeding practices, feed small ruminant ration (instead of cattle ration), and monitor udder hygiene and health.

A goat herd experienced a sudden abortion outbreak affecting many does over a short period. Routine testing did not identify a cause, but advanced testing detected Caprine Herpesvirus. The case showed that some causes of abortion may be missed by standard testing methods.

Several lambs died suddenly with bloating and severe stomach damage including an abomasal ulcer. *Mannheimia haemolytica* was found in the stomach (abomasum) and in multiple organs, suggesting a widespread infection that likely started after the stomach ulcer developed. Nutrition, milk intake, feed quality, and overall management were identified as important factors to prevent development of abomasal ulcers.

A separate flock experienced stillbirths where *M. haemolytica* was found in fetal tissues and in the inflamed placentas (even though *M. haemolytica* tends to cause respiratory infections). Another flock had weak and stillborn lambs associated with lambing difficulties, including ringwomb, and with low mineral levels, especially copper and manganese. These cases showed that both infections and nutritional problems can contribute to reproductive losses and highlight the importance of regular mineral assessments.

2) Syndromic Surveillance

Respiratory disease remained at expected levels and was mainly associated with pneumonia in sheep and goats. Testing identified CAEV, OPP (Maedi-Visna), *M. haemolytica*, and *Trueperella pyogenes*, consistent with ongoing low-level respiratory infections.

Heart disease remained uncommon and within expected levels. Only a single case of heart inflammation (myocarditis) was identified in a sheep.

Digestive disease remained stable and included intestinal inflammation, intestinal twisting, fatty liver disease, Johne's disease (MAP), and infections caused by *Enterococcus* species. Findings reflected sporadic cases rather than widespread herd problems.

Reproductive losses and mastitis remained within expected levels and were linked to a mix of infectious and non-infectious causes. Key pathogens included *Coxiella burnetii, Chlamydia abortus, Toxoplasma gondii*, and *Campylobacter* species, alongside occasional placental infections, stillbirths, and mastitis cases.

Congenital and neurological conditions remained uncommon and stable. A single weak newborn case was reported, while nervous system disease was limited to isolated cases of polio and encephalitis.

Deaths related to starvation and injury remained sporadic, with no unusual trends identified.

Multisystemic disease also remained stable, with occasional cases of CL and septicemia in sheep and goats.

3) 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 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.

4) 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 also in British Columbia and several U.S. states (Beacon).
- **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 (FMD) SAT-1** continues to expand in South Africa and is reaching into new regions, including Greece , 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.

Financial support was provided under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative.