



The WeCAHN Smallholders Network held a quarterly videoconference meeting 20th September 2024 to discuss the animal health events occurring April to June 2024, with veterinary practitioners, diagnosticians, veterinary college faculty, researchers, and industry representatives in attendance.

Report Contents:

1. Dataset Overview
2. Interesting Cases
3. Meeting takeaways

1. Dataset Overview

Data sources in this report include:

- i. Clinical Impressions Surveys completed by network practitioners.
- ii. Data shared by western veterinary diagnostic laboratories: Manitoba Veterinary Services Diagnostic Laboratory (VSDL), Prairie Diagnostic Services (PDS), and University of Calgary College of Veterinary Medicine Diagnostic Services Unit (UCVM DSU).

2. Interesting Cases

i. *Salmonella* outbreaks in humans linked to contact with small flocks in the US in 2024

Background: Between May 23 and August 29, 409 illnesses, 102 hospitalizations and no deaths were identified in 45 states. ([LINK](#))



- Backyard poultry can carry *Salmonella* even if they look healthy and clean
- Severe symptoms of salmonellosis in people include
 - Diarrhea and a fever higher than 39°C
 - Diarrhea for 3 days or more that is not improving
 - Bloody diarrhea
 - Vomiting liquids
 - Signs of dehydration: not peeing as much, dry mouth and throat, feeling dizzy when standing up



ii. Avian metapneumovirus outbreaks have been detected in commercial flocks

Background:

- Also known as turkey rhinotracheitis and avian pneumovirus infection in turkeys, and swollen head syndrome in chickens
- Highly contagious acute upper respiratory tract infection in turkeys, chickens and ducks, sometimes leading to reproductive issues ([LINK](#) to CFIA website)
- 1st detected in turkey flocks in April 2024 in Ontario ([LINK](#) to report) and in May in Manitoba ([LINK](#) to CFIA website)
- Clinical signs: fluid from the eyes and nose, red and frothy eyes, swollen head, head tilt, drop in egg production and egg quality



iii. *Salmonella enteritidis* (SE) cases

- 4 cases of SE: 1 case in 7-day-old broiler chicks, 2 cases in 4-day-old Taiwanese chicken chicks and 1 case identified in the UCVM DSU laboratory dataset
- Smaller capacity hatcheries where there is a mixing of broiler and laying hens may be a hazard for the spread of *Salmonella enteritidis*.
- Reducing the risk of *Salmonella enteritidis* relies on the separation of broilers and laying hens, biosecurity measures during slaughter, and properly cooking meat as recommended by Health Canada ([LINK](#)).



- The regulation of butchering and practices for small flock broilers varies per province.
 - **BC:** There are mobile processing units that butcher 50-100 broilers. These units serve Vancouver Island and areas far from processing facilities. A challenge for the owners using the mobile processing units is the need to schedule the visit. It costs approximately 5\$ per bird to process.
 - **AB:** There are a few seasonal processing plants. Uninspected poultry meat cannot be sold, but uninspected eggs can be sold.
 - **SK:** Hutterite colonies with non-quota poultry butcher and process the poultry on the farm.
 - **MB:** A producer with up to 999 broilers can process at their farm. They can also use a provincial abattoir. Owners can sell

eggs and poultry (chicken and turkey) from their farm if it is labelled as uninspected.

- **ON:** There was a butchering how-to developed by the Ontario Poultry Industry Council ([LINK](#) to euthanasia resources and training materials).

Update on the BC Poultry Health Network ([LINK](#))

A 2-year small flock extension services project in BC, and currently in the 2nd year. The goal is to support “the development of a communications network of poultry owners.” The project has supported on-site poultry workshops, euthanasia training, video and infographics production, and webinars (e.g., “Ask a poultry vet”).

Update on the Manitoba smallholder webinar series

Their goal is to make a better connection with owners/farmers. The project generated presentations on health, nutrition, biosecurity, and euthanasia. They are working on more technical one-pagers as well as posting short versions of their presentations on their YouTube channel. There is a section on smallholder poultry ([LINK](#)) and information for pig production ([LINK](#)) on the Manitoba government website. The leads would like to create a more dedicated network similar to the BC Poultry Health Network.

Syndromic surveillance

Important information

Clinical impression surveys

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

Small flocks

Clinical impression surveys

The results below are a combination of the responses received to the WeCAHN Smallholders – Small flock clinical impression survey and the WeCAHN Poultry – Small flock clinical impression survey.

Coccidiosis was reported **Never** (5/8), **Rarely** (2/8) and **Commonly** (1/8) and as **stable** (7/7). And it is often misdiagnosed.

Marek's disease was reported **Never** (1/8), **Rarely** (2/8), and **Commonly** (5/8) and as **increasing** (1/7) and **stable** (6/7).

Red mites were reported by a practitioner. Environmental control is necessary in tandem with topical treatment.

Subsidized diagnostic tests and exams

BC: The [Disease Detection Program for Smallholders](#) provides subsidized post-mortem examinations for small flocks and small herds of poultry, pigs, sheep and goats in BC. Smallholders are defined as having fewer than 100 animals on the farm.

AB: The [Non-quota or non-commercial poultry investigations program](#) offers subsidized testing for *Salmonella*, Newcastle disease, avian influenza and ILT. There are inclusion criteria to be able to participate in the program:

- Less than 2,000 chickens per year ([Alberta Chicken Producers](#))
- Less than 300 laying hens ([Egg Farmers of Alberta](#))
- Less than 6,000 chickens per year for communal groups ([Alberta Chicken Producers Marketing Regulation AR 3/2000](#))
- Species or types of poultry not subject to quota controls (e.g., pheasant and quail) ([LINK](#))

SK: There are a few programs for smallholders in

SK. The [Small Holder Swine Health Surveillance Program](#) and the [Saskatchewan Small Flock Poultry Surveillance Program](#) provide subsidized post-mortem examination, histopathology and other testing deemed necessary by the pathologist. There is also the disease investigation program ([WCVM Disease Investigation Unit](#)).

- To be able to participate in the smallholder swine program, the swine must be from a non-commercial farm, where commercial swine facilities are defined as being registered with CQA/ACA or CPE programs.
- To be able to participate in the smallholder poultry program:
 - Domestic poultry flocks must have fewer than 299 laying hens, 999 broilers and 99 turkeys per year ([Saskatchewan.ca](#))

MB: The [Small Flock Avian Influenza Program](#) provides subsidized post-mortem examinations and free diagnostic testing for certain tests: avian influenza, infectious laryngotracheitis virus and other diagnostic tests deemed necessary by the pathologist. Small flocks are limited to less than 1,000 birds (chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, game birds and peafowl).

Sample submission: In the provinces of BC, AB, and SK, producers can submit animals/samples for testing to laboratories. In MB, the veterinarian must submit the animals/samples. The Provincial Premises Identification (PID) number ([WeCAHN smallholders webpage](#)) must be included in the submission in AB and should be included in the submissions in SK and MB.



Small ruminants

Laboratory diagnoses

The following information summarizes laboratory data; most of the data comes from commercial herds. Despite not being exactly representative of small herds, this data may be of interest for disease monitoring.

The number of positive cases of caprine arthritis encephalitis virus at PDS has been decreasing since 2021.

Provincial updates

BC: Over the past year, the pathologists at the Animal Health Center in BC had helped almost 100 clients across BC under this program. The program provides subsidized postmortem exams for any premises with under 100 livestock and poultry. The program also covers courier fees for sample shipping from outside the Fraser Valley. More information about the Disease Detection Program for Smallholders can be found [here](#).

AB: More information about the Non-quota or non-commercial poultry investigations program can be found [here](#).

SK: More information about the Small Holder Swine Health Surveillance Program and the Saskatchewan Small Flock Poultry Surveillance Program can be found [here](#) and [here](#), respectively.

MB: More information about the Small Flock Avian Influenza Program can be found [here](#).

Avian influenza A(H5N1)

Avian influenza A(H5N1) is reportable in Canada. If you are suspicious of avian influenza in your small herds and small flocks, please contact your veterinarian immediately.

In cattle, they may have the following clinical signs:

- Decreased feed intake with a simultaneous decrease in rumination and rumen motility
- Respiratory signs, including clear nasal discharge
- Sudden and significant decrease in milk production
- Colostrum-like consistency of milk in 1 or more quarters
- Dry manure or diarrhea
- Lethargy
- Dehydration
- Fever

Influenza in small flocks: steps to protect the small flock owner ([LINK](#)).

AVMA free guide “Small Farm Preparedness” ([LINK](#))

Meeting takeaways:

- 1) **Backyard poultry can carry Salmonella even if they look healthy and clean.**
- 2) **Avian metapneumovirus outbreaks have been detected in commercial broiler and turkey flocks. It is considered highly contagious.**
- 3) **There are multiple smallholder extension programs available for small flock and small herd owners: [BC Poultry Health Network](#) and MB Smallholder extension projects ([swine](#) and [poultry](#))**

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