



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
Updates from the State Veterinarian's Office **Spring 2022**

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"I know of no pursuit in which more real and important services can be rendered to any country than by improving its agriculture, its breed of useful animals, and other branches of a husbandman's cares."

—George Washington, 1794

As I've gotten older, 228 years ago does not seem nearly as distant as it used to, and George Washington's quote is just as relevant today as it was then. Of course, most of our society does not realize that, but that's ok, farmers and the vets who serve them have never been in this line of work for the recognition.

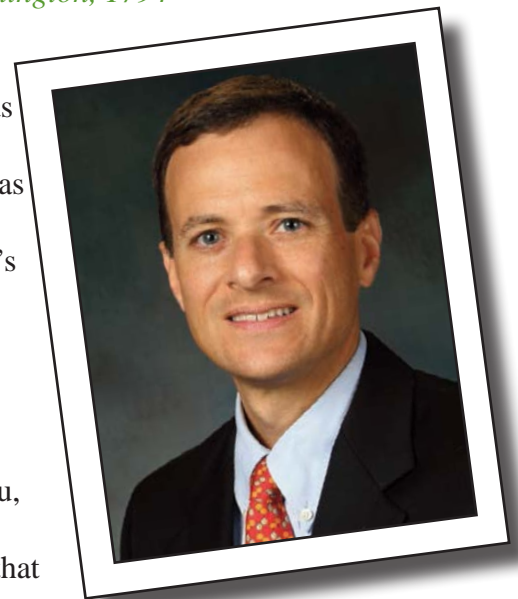
At the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), we are here to support you, Virginia's agriculture industry, and animal health in general in any way that we can. Please reach out to our staff any-time to let us know what we can do to provide better support.

On the cold, wet, miserable days, or the days we all have when things just aren't going well, I hope you will take solace in a few of George Washington's other quotes. As you remember the importance of the work that we all do:

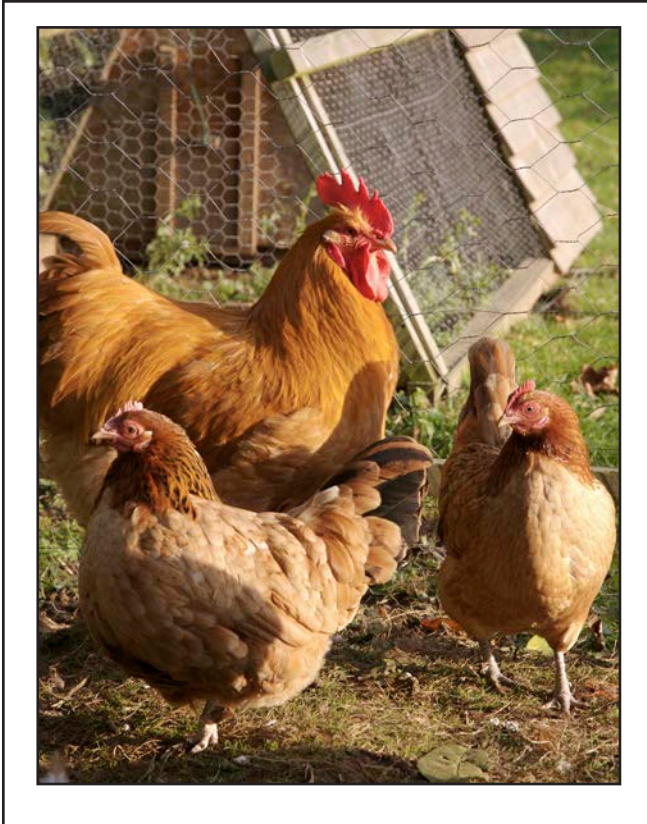
"Agriculture is the most healthful, most useful, and most noble employment of man."

"It will not be doubted that with reference either to individual or national welfare, agriculture is of primary importance."

"I would rather be on my farm than be emperor of the world."



AVIAN MYCOPLASMA

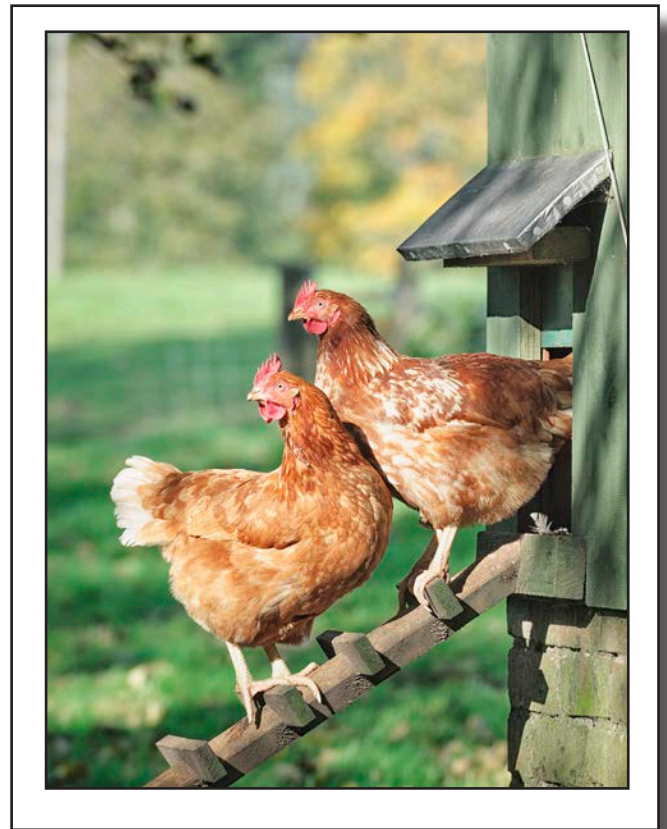


In recent years, the popularity of backyard non-commercial poultry has greatly increased. Poultry swap meets, auctions, shows, flea markets, Facebook and Craigslist sales have added to the increased movement of poultry. As a result of the pandemic, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) saw record numbers of chicks shipped into the state last year.

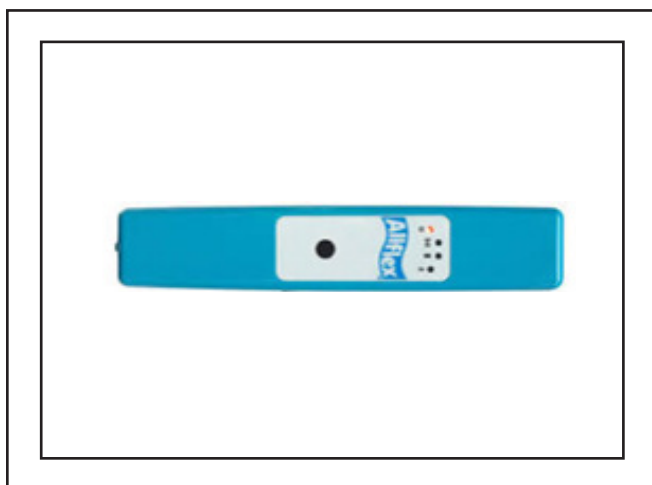
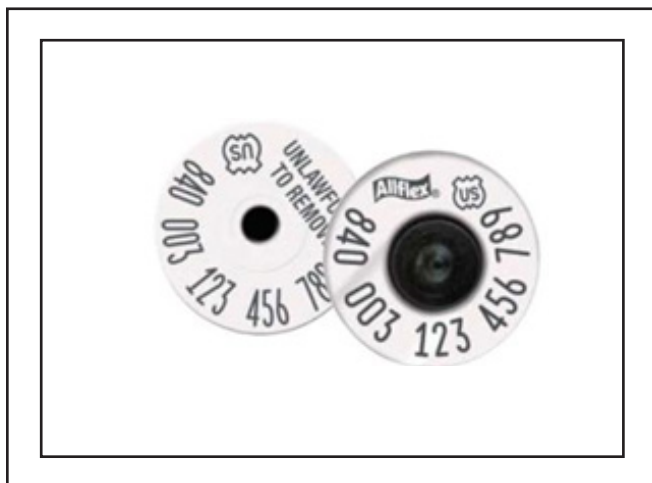
Mycoplasma gallisepticum (MG) and *Mycoplasma synoviae* (MS) are the most widespread diseases in backyard poultry today. MG and MS are similar to mycoplasmas that affect livestock, causing respiratory distress, joint infections, swollen face, puffy eyes, decreased egg production, weight loss, immunoincompetence, and death. Besides being present in the respiratory tract, the bacteria is present on dander, feces, bedding, dust, tools, cages, etc. The disease is easily spread by rodents, wild birds and often people. Transmission also occurs vertically through the eggs. MG and MS are so

contagious and widespread that most backyard flocks are infected, especially if poultry from different sources are comingled. A MG and MS free flock is extremely difficult to maintain unless managed under strict biosecurity. Antibiotics can control most clinical signs but rarely cure birds of infection. Most will remain carriers for life.

VDACS continually receives numerous calls and emails from backyard poultry raisers requesting veterinary services. VDACS can provide disease educational materials, BHI broth for sampling, as well as training in poultry venipuncture. VDACS is willing to sponsor live or remote training for practitioners. In addition, we keep a list of practitioners throughout the state that will see poultry.



FREE ELECTRONIC (RFID) TAGS AVAILABLE FROM VDACS



As many veterinary practitioners are aware, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has been distributing 840-series radio frequency identification devices (RFID) for use in cattle at no cost for over 10 years. To date, over 420,000 tags have been distributed to veterinarians and cattle producers in Virginia.

Beginning in 2020, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) began providing free 840-RFID tags nationwide for distribution to veterinarians and cattle producers. The VDACS Office of Veterinary Services has a large number of 840-RFID tags in stock and practitioners are encouraged to begin using electronic ID if they are

not already doing so. All tags are button-style, white in color, half-duplex (HDX) devices and can be used for all regulatory activities that require official ID (testing, vaccination and interstate movement). The primary focus remains on tagging breeding cattle and replacement heifers since individual official identification is currently not required for interstate transport of beef feeder calves to most states. In addition, RFID readers for scanning tags are also available to practitioners at no cost - contingent on continued availability of federal funding.

To order tags or readers, practitioners may contact the Office of Veterinary Services.

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NEW WEBSITE FOR EQUINE WELFARE RESOURCES

The Virginia Horse Council Foundation (VHCF) has created a comprehensive website (www.VaHCF.com) that is a source of content and education to assist animal control officers (ACOs), veterinarians, horse owners and equine rescues. The VHCF has worked for the past 4 years with ACOs, equine veterinarians and equine rescues to identify resource gaps needed by these groups.

New or uninformed horse owners, or those assisting them, can find downloadable information sheets on basic nutrition, dentistry, vaccination, deworming and husbandry. There are links to resources for hay banks, subsidies for veterinary care and financial assistance for owners and rescues.

The website contains many forms that veterinarians and ACOs can use when visiting a farm. The forms give step by step directions for gathering information during the visit. There are physical examination forms for the single horse and others that are streamlined for use when examining a large number of horses. Forms are available to document the amount of feed on the farm and the condition of the housing. For those that are not accustomed to performing an investigation, the forms prompt the gathering of evidence so that if a case is brought against the owner, the evidence will hold up in court. There is an action plan that can be left with the owner, describing the measures that need to be taken before a follow up visit.

A veterinarian working on a welfare case will find forensic necropsy information, articles on re-feeding the malnourished horse, and standard operating procedures for tackling an equine welfare case. Information about the Virginia Veterinary Equine Welfare Resource (VVEWR) is available on the website. VVEWR is a group of equine veterinarians disbursed throughout Virginia that have been trained in forensics and are available to assist ACOs and veterinarians with equine welfare cases.

Education for ACOs is also covered in the website's content. There are guides for body condition scoring and performing a welfare investigation specific to horses. There is a list of

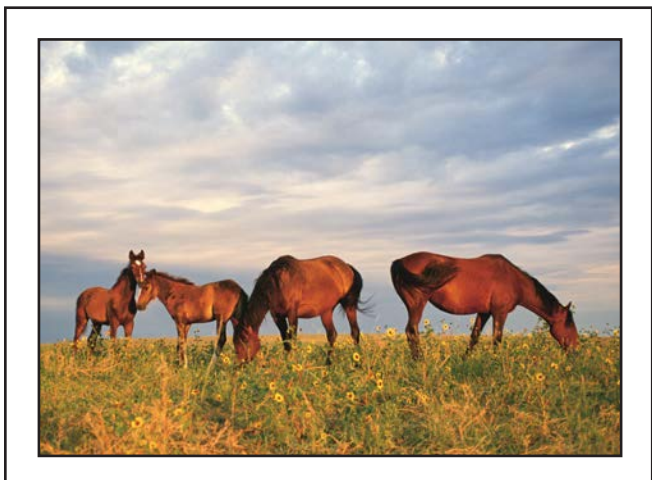


accredited equine rescues throughout the state. Information about VHCF sponsored on-farm classes for ACOs in horse handling will be posted as they become available.

Take a moment to browse the content offered. Contact the VHCF if you have materials to submit or have suggestions that would enhance the site.

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POSITIVE COGGINS TEST IN VIRGINIA



Recently VDACS and USDA were involved in an Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) investigation in Southwest Virginia. Last fall, a horse was presented at a horse sale in North Carolina. An ELISA (quick test) was performed at the market and came back positive. The horse was returned to its home stable in Virginia. The original blood sample was forwarded to National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) and was positive on AGID test. Regulatory personnel performed an epidemiological investigation and re-bled the horse for EIA confirmation. The horse, a mature quarterhorse stallion was the sole equid on the premise. He had been purchased from an acquaintance 3 months previously. The subsequent sample was confirmed positive and the horse was humanely euthanized. The epidemiological investigation led back to the previous owner of the horse. That farm housed three horses. Blood samples were taken and a second horse was confirmed positive. This horse was humanely euthanized, and the 2 herd mates placed under quarantine.

These two herdmates will be re-bled 60 days post removal of the positive for the quarantine to be released. The two positive horses had a history of being raced on the “Bush Track Circuit”. Bush Track racing is an under the radar activity that is neither sanctioned nor regulated. Sharing of needles is common in bush track racing and the infections were likely iatrogenic in nature.

EIA is an infectious disease of equids caused by a virus. Clinical symptoms range from subclinical to severe, and include fever, depression, muscle weakness, thrombocytopenia, anemia, jaundice, increased heart and respiratory rates, hemorrhage on mucous membranes, epistaxis, collapse and death in a small percentage of cases. Diagnosis of EIA is based on serologic testing and demonstration of antibodies to the virus in the blood. There are no treatments or vaccines.

EIA is typically transmitted by biting insects taking a blood meal. It is to be noted that iatrogenic transmission of the disease is becoming more widespread. Reuse of blood contaminated needles, IV sets, surgical and dental instruments and transfusion of blood products can all lead to transmission. Most positive horses are managed by euthanasia to eliminate the risk of any spread.

This incident shows that EIA is circulating in Virginia’s equine population. Annual Coggins testing is still the best tool for identifying and eliminating EIA positive horses. Virginia regulation requires that equids test negative on a Coggins test prior to comingling.



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NO SCRAPIE IN VIRGINIA SINCE 2014

The USDA Scrapie Eradication Program continues to work in eliminating Scrapie from the United States and meeting World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) criteria for disease freedom. Since 2002, the percent of sheep found positive at slaughter has decreased by 99%, largely due to national and state eradication efforts. VDACS veterinarians work alongside USDA veterinary medical officers every year to sample the required number of sheep and goats to insure Virginia's small ruminants are Scrapie-free.

Scrapie is a reportable disease that is highly contagious and fatal. It is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE). Public health concerns related to transmission to humans of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, a bovine TSE, has led to plans for eradicating all TSEs in food-producing animals.

You can help by knowing how to recognize Scrapie and submitting samples to your state veterinarian's office. Clinical signs result from neurodegeneration and include intense, frequent rubbing, ataxia, and poor-doing. Clinically affected animals are usually over two years old. Submission of samples from sheep and goats over 18-months old found dead or euthanized on the farm is very important to testing and surveillance in Virginia. Contact VDACS for sampling and submission information.

Official Scrapie tags are required for any sheep or goat leaving the farm in Virginia. The national tagging system allows trace back to flocks of origin when sheep and goats are found infected with Scrapie at slaughter. At this time, Scrapie tags are available from the USDA for producers that are new to the program.

Scrapie affects the industry economically through production losses, lost exports and disposal costs. These estimated costs are estimated at \$10-20 million annually in the U.S. We can all help to eradicate Scrapie from U.S. flocks and herds by encouraging producers to purchase animals from Scrapie-free breeding programs, to utilize

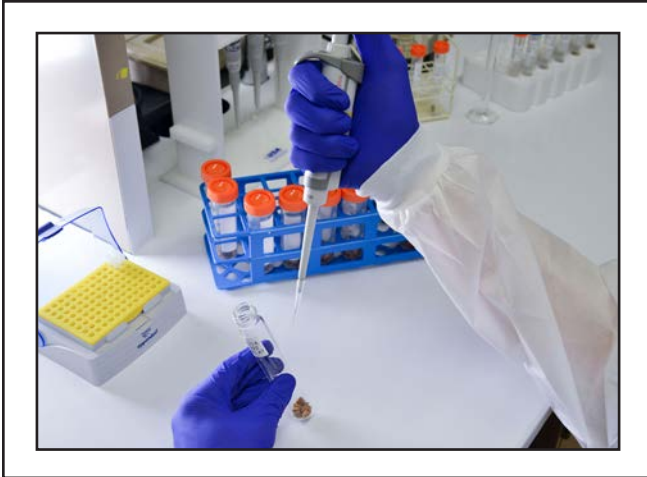


Scrapie resistant animals in their breeding plans, and to participate in a flock and herd certification plans. VDACS veterinarians can help with your efforts.

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OFFICE OF LABORATORY SERVICE UPDATE



The Office of Laboratory Services is continually analyzing our testing services and how we can be better utilized to serve our clients. Our fee schedule, located at www.vdacs.virginia.gov/animals-fees-for-testing-procedures.shtml, now provides cost, location, preferred specimen type, and approximate turnaround time for all of our system wide diagnostic tests. This fee schedule is analyzed regularly and kept up-to-date throughout the year as we move testing, adjust prices, and gather more information. We hope that by consolidating testing, we can keep costs low and expedite your results by running samples in bulk and decreasing shipment times. Our goal is to concentrate testing to laboratories that are most utilized by certain commodity groups. Certain testing will still be completed at all labs (i.e. Coggins, cultures and sensitivities, and fecal parasite examinations). As always, you are free to submit samples to whichever lab is easiest for you and we will make sure we get them where they need to go.

New additions to the laboratory system include: a MALDI-TOF (a bacterial identification system designed to utilize lasers and corresponding wavelengths to quickly identify bacterial species) in Harrisonburg, Bovine Respiratory Panel and Ruminant Abortion Panel PCR tests in Lynchburg, and Potomac Horse Fever PCR in Warrenton. Both a Caseous Lymphadenitis SHI test and a “KIS”

Antimicrobial Residue test (utilizing cattle urine and serum) are currently being verified in Harrisonburg. We are also now offering a necropsy kit designed by our Program Manager and Pathologist to assist and give guidance to veterinarians performing field necropsies. The kit includes specimen collection containers, formalin cups, ice packs, a cooler, and a specially designed necropsy “mat” to match specimen types to size needed in corresponding photos.

We are always open to feedback and ideas for testing to further assist Virginia agricultural community. It is our goal to make this lab system the best it can be to further serve our clients. Our partnership with the Virginia Tech Animal Laboratory Services Lab (ViTALS) continues to evaluate ways to collaborate and expand testing services. Whether by utilizing data for reports or enhancing testing capabilities, we look forward to continuing to work together and with all of you.

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