

February 28, 2025

Farm Bill Primer: Animal Disease Management and Prevention

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that animal agriculture is expected to account for \$272 billion of production by U.S. farms and ranches in 2024, 53% of the total value of U.S. agricultural products. Congress is interested in the health of these animals for economic and public health reasons. Animal and livestock diseases, including foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), African swine fever (ASF), and highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), can cause productivity losses, are difficult and costly to control, and can disrupt domestic supply and international trade in animals and animal products. For example, H5N1 virus, a subtype of HPAI virus, is widespread in wild birds globally and has been responsible for outbreaks in poultry flocks and dairy herds in the United States since early 2022. As of November 2024, USDA has spent over \$1.4 billion on the current outbreak in poultry, including \$1.25 billion in indemnity and compensation payments.

USDA states that preventing an animal disease outbreak is more cost-effective than outbreak response and recovery. In the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (the 2018 farm bill; P.L. 115-334), Congress created two animal health programs and increased funding for existing animal disease prevention and management activities (§12101, Animal Disease Prevention and Management). This In Focus summarizes these programs and provides policy options of possible interest as Congress considers authorizing the next farm bill.

Background

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is responsible for protecting and improving animal health in the United States. The Animal Health Protection Act (AHPA; 7 U.S.C. §§8301 et seq.) provides APHIS authority to restrict animal movement, destroy animals, and take preventive controls to eradicate diseases that threaten animal and public health. APHIS administers several programs at a cost of nearly \$400 million annually to carry out these authorities, including species-specific programs for aquatic, avian, cattle, equine, and swine health, among others. The Section 12101 provisions of the 2018 farm bill amended the AHPA to establish and fund two new programs, the National Animal Disease Preparedness Response Program (NADPRP) and the National Animal Vaccine and Veterinary Countermeasures Bank (NAVVCB). In addition, the 2018 farm bill authorized mandatory funding for the existing National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN).

National Animal Health Laboratory Network

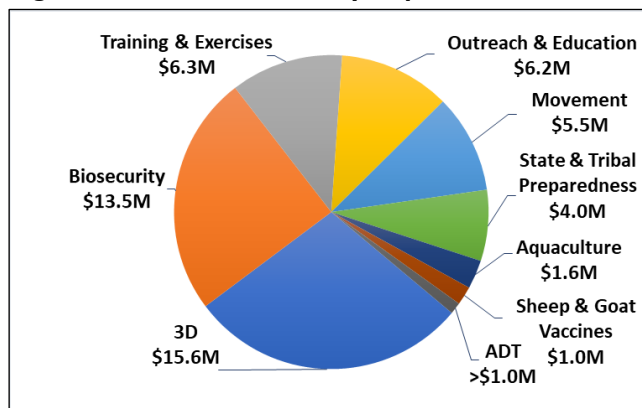
Established in 2002, NAHLN is a cooperative effort among APHIS, USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, and the American Association of Veterinary

Laboratory Diagnosticians. The current network comprises 64 federal, state, and university animal health laboratories located in 42 states. The laboratories provide animal health diagnostic testing to surveil and detect biological threats to protect U.S. animal health, public health, and the food supply. Each laboratory is approved for surveillance and testing of various animal diseases. For example, 48 laboratories are approved for FMD preparedness and surge testing, 60 are approved for avian influenza testing, 12 are approved for ASF and classical swine fever (CSF) active surveillance and disease investigation testing, 38 are approved for ASF/CSF disease investigation and response testing, and 31 are approved for chronic wasting disease (CWD) surveillance testing. In 2023, USDA estimated that network laboratories performed 430,500 diagnostic tests to support APHIS' animal health surveillance and response programs. From FY2020 to FY2024, NAHLN has invested \$22.1 million to support 104 projects to increase diagnostic testing capacity, improve biosecurity, and increase disease preparedness.

National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program

The National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program (NADPRP) is a collaborative effort between APHIS and state departments of agriculture, state health officials, land-grant universities, colleges of veterinary medicine, livestock associations, state emergency agencies, and Tribes. NADPRP implements projects that enhance prevention, preparedness, detection, and response to emerging foreign animal diseases and boosts efforts to keep them from entering and spreading in the United States. From FY2020 to FY2024, NADPRP awarded \$54.4 million in funding for 256 projects with 77 cooperators (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1. NADPRP Awards by Topic, FY2020-FY2024



Source: USDA, "NADPRP Dashboard," December 2024.

Notes: 3D = depopulation, decontamination, and disposal; ADT = animal disease traceability; Movement = animal disease movement

decisions in an outbreak. Amounts are nominal, listed in millions of dollars.

National Animal Vaccine and Veterinary Countermeasures Bank

The National Animal Vaccine and Veterinary Countermeasures Bank (NAVVCB) allows USDA to stockpile animal vaccine and related products to use in the event of an outbreak of a high-impact animal disease. Congress directed the NAVVCB to prioritize FMD. In the past, the U.S. livestock industry has expressed concern that the United States would not have enough FMD vaccine in case of an outbreak and strongly supported the creation of a vaccine bank through the 2018 farm bill. Before NAVVCB, the U.S. industry was reliant on the North American Foot-and-Mouth Disease Vaccine Bank, which is shared among the United States, Mexico, and Canada. In July 2020, USDA announced its initial purchase of \$27.1 million of FMD vaccine for NAVVCB. From FY2020 to FY2024, APHIS invested \$76 million in NAVVCB, which in addition to vaccine antigen also stockpiles diagnostic test kits, personal protection equipment, depopulation and decontamination supplies, and more to prepare for outbreaks.

Funding for Animal Health Programs

The 2018 farm bill, which expired September 30, 2023, and was extended twice through FY2025 (P.L. 118-22, Division B, §102, and P.L. 118-158, Division D) authorized total mandatory funding of \$120 million for FY2019-FY2022 for NAHLN, NADPRP, and NAVVCB, of which \$5 million was reserved for NADPRP. In FY2023 and for each fiscal year thereafter, the 2018 farm bill provided \$30 million in mandatory funding for all three of the animal health programs, with not less than \$18 million designated for NADPRP. Additionally, the 2018 farm bill authorized appropriations of \$30 million annually for NAHLN from FY2019 to FY2022, and authorized appropriations of “such sums as necessary” for NADPRP and NAVVCB through FY2023. The latest one-year extension of the farm bill (P.L. 118-158) authorized the continuation of all three programs through FY2025.

In the 118th Congress, farm bill reauthorization proposals varied in the treatment of the three animal health programs. The House Committee on Agriculture ordered to be reported the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024 (H.R. 8467) which would have provided mandatory funding of \$233 million for each of fiscal years FY2025-FY2029, of which \$10 million would have been reserved for NAHLN, \$70 million for NADPRP, and \$153 million for NAVVCB. Further, the bill would have increased the underlying permanent baseline of \$30 million per year to \$75 million beginning in FY2025, of which \$45 million was reserved for NADPRP. The *baseline* is a projection of future federal mandatory spending should current law continue. H.R. 8467 would have authorized \$45 million in appropriations for NAHLN, and such sums as necessary for NADPRP and NAVVCB, for each of fiscal years FY2025-FY2029. In addition to funding, the bill added “improving animal disease traceability” to the list of NADPRP activities. In

November 2024, the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry chair introduced the Rural Prosperity and Food Security Act of 2024 (S. 5335), which would have provided \$60 million in mandatory funding for all three programs for FY2025, and for each year thereafter, with \$18 million reserved for NADPRP. S. 5335 would have also extended the authorization of appropriations from the 2018 farm bill of \$30 million for NAHLN and “such sums as necessary” through FY2029. The Senate committee took no further action on this bill.

Considerations for Congress

The current HPAI outbreak in the United States has prompted increased public attention on animal disease management and prevention protocols because of the rising cost of some consumer goods, such as shell eggs. As Congress looks toward crafting future farm bill legislation, it may consider whether the current federal efforts efficiently, effectively, and appropriately prevent, manage, and/or mitigate the risk of high-consequence animal diseases, and the role of federal and nonfederal partnerships. In addition to considering new legislative proposals related to animal health, the 119th Congress may consider proposals similar to those raised during the 118th Congress; these include proposals for the three programs previously discussed and other animal-health management legislative proposals from the 118th Congress.

For example, the Safe American Food Exports (SAFE) Act of 2023 (S. 901, H.R. 3748) would have allowed USDA to preemptively negotiate regional export ban agreements for known animal disease threats that apply only to areas affected by animal disease outbreaks. This is known as *regionalization*, a process where countries mutually agree to recognize the disease-free status of regions or zones within a country to enable the continuation of exports from areas not affected by an outbreak. The bill would have also required prompt notice to stakeholders in the event of any change to the Import & Export Library administered by USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). Further, the Foreign Animal Disease Prevention, Surveillance, and Rapid Response Act of 2023 (S. 1666, H.R. 3419) would have increased funding for NAHLN, NADPRP, and NAVVCB to \$233 million for each of fiscal years FY2024-FY2028. The Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program Enhancement Act of 2023 (S. 1836, H.R. 2420) would have required USDA to contract an academic institution to evaluate the Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program. Portions of the bills described above were incorporated into H.R. 8467. Another topic of potential interest to Congress is the evaluation of indemnity payments for producers with losses due to disease-affected livestock, such as the Healthy Poultry Assistance and Indemnification Act of 2023 (S. 2235, H.R. 5096). A similar bill has been introduced in the 119th Congress as H.R. 1376.

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IFI2934

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