Animal Health and Diagnostic Commission
Funding for FY 2007-2008

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The "eyes and ears" of animal health, human health and food safety

As we read international reports about diseases such as Avian Influenza (H_5N_1), Foot and Mouth Disease, Classical Swine Fever and Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE/Mad cow disease) that are prevalent in countries around the world and read national reports about diseases such as Rabies, Tularemia, Vesicular Stomatitis, *E. coli* 0157:H7 and Salmonella, we may wonder how we protect Pennsylvania animal health, human health and food safety.

The answer is: the Pennsylvania Animal Diagnostic Laboratory System (PADLS)

The Animal Health and Diagnostic Commission (AHDC) was created by Act 1998-148 and wisely created PADLS to be the "eyes and ears" of animal agriculture by providing funding to develop a "core" state-of-the-art, accredited diagnostic laboratory system that is the foundation for protecting animal agriculture. PADLS is a tripartite system that joins together the Department of Agriculture, The Pennsylvania State University and the University of Pennsylvania diagnostic laboratories and is dedicated to the health, safety and welfare of families in Pennsylvania. PADLS works in conjunction with the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI and local emergency management officials to improve emergency preparedness and response capability to safeguard our Commonwealth's largest segment of its economy. This excerpt from Laura Kahn recognizes our "core" laboratory system as the current and best biosensor available.

Animals: The World's Best (and Cheapest) Biosensors
By Laura H. Kahn | 14 March 2007

"While policy makers fret over the obstacles in developing biosensor technology, the best and cheapest biosensors are already distributed globally but generally ignored: They're called animals. The United States has spent millions of dollars to develop biosensors that would detect bioterrorism or other deadly agents. But so far, the technology has not met expectations and questions have arisen as to whether additional spending is warranted for civilian applications."

According to the AVMA, an increasing number of the diseases that threaten public health are zoonotic, as are 80% of potential bioterror disease agents. Over the past two years, PADLS has seen an escalation in the number of samples submitted for surveillance for some of these disease agents including an increase of approximately 20% for avian influenza surveillance and of 40% for molecular and viral assays for other agents. There has also been a 200% increase in field visits by PADLS field investigators to actively search for the presence of infectious diseases and to evaluate and institute measures to reduce the potential for the accidental or the intentional introduction of a major foreign animal disease to Pennsylvania farms. Vital programs such as these are not sustainable without ample funding for basic laboratory functions which are the "core" of PADLS.

The Governor's proposed budget for the AHDC of $6,625,000 is adequate for the university PADLS laboratories. Therefore, these funds must be protected from diversion to other initiatives so that the essential diagnostic functions ("eyes" and "ears") of the university laboratories can be maintained and faster, more accurate testing capabilities can be offered to Pennsylvania agriculture which creates in excess of $4 billion in cash receipts each year.