



Cornell University
Animal Health Diagnostic Center

PO Box 5786
Ithaca, NY 14852-5786
t. 607 253-3900
f. 607 253-3943

**Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2021 Executive Budget Proposal:
Topic Environmental Conservation**

Albany, NY
Wednesday, January 27, 2021
9:30 A.M.
Virtual Public Hearing

TESTIMONY: The New York State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory
François Elvinger, Professor and Executive Director
Associate Dean for Diagnostic Operations and Government Relations
College of Veterinary Medicine

Committee Chairpersons, Committee Members,

The work done at the New York State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (NYSVDL) touches all facets of New York State animal agriculture and sustainable food production, wildlife health, and the health and welfare of all animals in the Empire State. The laboratory has been established by law and is working under contracts with the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets and the Department of Environmental Conservation, through annual appropriations that include funding proposed by the members of the committees on agriculture and food, and on environmental conservation.

I take the liberty to briefly lay out responsibilities and accomplishments of the 220 faculty and staff employees at the main laboratory in Ithaca, the regional Quality Milk Production Services laboratories in Canton, Cobleskill, and Warsaw, and the Duck Research Laboratory in Eastport on Long Island. These include:

- Comprehensive veterinary diagnostic services in anatomic and clinical pathology; microbiology and immunology (sections of bacteriology, virology, parasitology, molecular diagnostics, serology); toxicology; endocrinology; comparative coagulation
- Programs: Quality Milk Production Services (QMPS); Wildlife Health Laboratory; Wildlife Rabies Control; Avian Health
- Processing of 225,148 accessions* in 2020 from more than 6,700 veterinary client accounts
 - 85,371 accessions* from 981 NYS veterinary client accounts
 - 786,486 tests and panels (41% bovine; 32% equine; 18% canine and feline)

- Comprehensive consulting for veterinarians on diagnostic strategies and result interpretation by Veterinary Support Services faculty
- Regulatory testing of animals and animal products, including for Foreign Animal Disease investigations
- Early detection and diagnostic surge capacity for high impact diseases including foot and mouth disease, avian influenza, African swine fever; Level 1 laboratory in the National Animal Health Laboratory Network; Biosafety Level 3 necropsy and diagnostic laboratory space for highly contagious disease agents
- Antibiotic Usage Reduction Program developed in Quality Milk Production services that guides judicious use of antibiotics for mastitis treatment in dairy cows, reducing costs and combating development of antibiotic resistance
- Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance in cervids
 - Major role of Wildlife Health Laboratory faculty in developing the New York State Interagency CWD Risk Minimization Plan with Department of Environmental Conservation and Department of Agriculture and Markets, under Department of Environmental Conservation contract
- Animal testing for SARS-CoV-2 by PCR, virus isolation and for antibodies to the virus; first confirmed detection of infection of an animal in the US (tiger in Bronx Zoo) and reported to the OIE (Office International des Epizooties – World Organization for Animal Health); also provided expertise for confirmation of first cases in dogs and cats in the United States
- Genetic sequencing of coronaviruses (also influenza viruses and for antimicrobial resistance genes) to enhance surveillance and response [B-117 strain sequenced by the virology laboratory for Tompkins County Health Department]
- Expertise and staff to stand up the Cornell COVID-19 Testing Laboratory (CCTL) that since mid-August 2020 has tested more than 550,000 samples from Cornell student and employee populations as well as surrounding communities for SARS-CoV-2 (separate Cornell funding stream)

* one accession is a unique diagnostic service interaction between the veterinary client and the laboratory, that may involve one specimen (blood, milk, biopsy, swab, other) from one single animal, or one or more animals for necropsy, or multiple and varied specimens from one or multiple animals (herd, flock, other)

It is essential for the NYSVDL to maintain its readiness to confront high impact diseases like foot and mouth disease, avian influenza, and African swine fever, be able to address long time zoonotic disease threat like rabies, and newly emerging ones like SARS-CoV-2 in animals and people, as well as *Salmonella* Dublin in dairy cattle, which causes severe disease in infected humans. Decreasing funding levels already led to reducing contract service support and are further threatening the laboratory's readiness, in particular in face of the current pandemic.

Funding Priorities

Core Funding

\$1,000,000 restoration, for total \$5,424,000

The core funding line for animal health surveillance and control provides for General Laboratory Diagnostic Testing to establish the cause of disease from submissions from veterinary practitioners in particular of livestock and poultry for all diagnostic disciplines, including to provide first priority of testing to requests from the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets. The line also funds parts of operation and management support services, export and intra-state regulatory testing, expert testimony, accreditation, billing and other operational needs. The \$1,000,000 restoration is a minimum to prevent the NYS Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory to maintain its diagnostic readiness.

Wildlife Rabies Program

\$560,000 restoration, for total \$610,000

Raccoon rabies threatens animal and public health in urban and rural New York, with current outbreaks in The Bronx, southwest Brooklyn and Staten Island. Distribution of oral rabies vaccines, in cooperation with local and state agencies, USDA and Canadian provinces, reduces and eliminates the threat of rabies to domestic animals, farm labor, and the public in outdoor activities.

Salmonella Dublin Testing

\$200,000 restoration

The expansion of Salmonella Dublin infection in NYS dairy herds leads to significant economic losses, estimated at \$100,000 to \$250,000 per 1,000 cows per year. Strategic testing, education and intervention by herd veterinarians and dairy producers will prevent further expansion of the disease agent that also causes severe disease in humans and is resistant to multiple antibiotics.

Forensic Pathology Program

\$460,000 new

New York State increased penalties for aggravated animal abuse (Article 26 of Agriculture and Markets Law relating to Cruelty to Animals, §353) in response to citizen concerns; resulted in a dramatic increase in forensic necropsies with extensive case workup and expert testimony in court. Requesting new funding for forensic necropsies and diagnostic testing to support the investigation and prosecution of crimes.

Avian Disease Program

\$100,000 add-on, for total \$352,000

Testing, monitoring, and disease prevention, in particular for preparedness for avian influenza, for expanding industry in regional laboratories in Ithaca and Eastport, Long Island, reduce risk to bird health and welfare, and to public health.

The diagnosticians of the New York State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory are most committed to the highest level of quality diagnostic work to serve and inform veterinarians and regulators, food animal producers, stakeholders in wildlife health, companion animal owners, as well as the public about animal disease and threats to animal and public health. Please do not hesitate to reach out for expert and science based information on animal health and welfare that we may provide.

We very much appreciate your consideration and support.

Presented by:
François Elvinger
fe65@cornell.edu
c: 607-882-0057