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Bureau of Animal Industry:

An Evaluation of the State Veterinarian's Office

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The program evaluation described in this report was undertaken by the Legislative Program Evaluation Unit (unit) at the behest of the Legislative Program Evaluation Committee (committee). The purpose of the evaluation was to describe the activities of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Animal Industry (bureau) and evaluate programmatic changes it is planning.

The bureau is responsible for protecting the health of livestock in Nebraska. Over the past 80 years, the bureau has successfully met its statutory obligations: controlling the importation of animals into the state, inspecting and licensing various businesses within the livestock industry, and managing livestock disease through disease-eradication programs. The disease-eradication programs have targeted a specific group of statutorily identified diseases (the "regulated diseases"¹) and have generally been undertaken in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service—Veterinary Services (APHIS—VS) division.

The disease-eradication programs have been successful, and Nebraska is free of the regulated diseases.² The resulting decrease in the bureau's disease-eradication workload has allowed it to broaden the scope of its disease-management activities to include poultry regulation, domesticated deer and elk regulation, and exotic animal surveillance. However, the bureau believes that even more must be done to ensure that livestock diseases are properly managed well into the future.

With decreased emphasis on disease-eradication programs, the bureau is concerned that the state will become complacent about livestock diseases, both foreign and domestic, that could pose a future threat to the economic well-being of the livestock industry. To avoid this, the bureau is proposing several statutory changes that would affect its responsibilities. Contained in LB 1280 (2000), the proposed changes would not dramatically affect the bureau's day-to-day activities (import control, inspection, and licensure would continue normally). However, they would enable the bureau to move towards a more comprehensive approach to protecting the health of livestock.

The goals of the proposed new approach are twofold. First, the bureau wants to develop an emergency-management system. While the bureau is responsible for containing disease outbreaks, it currently lacks clear authority to act in the event of an emergency. Second, the bureau wants to become more proactive in its management of livestock disease, in part, by establishing a "herd-certification" program. Such a program would enable producers to obtain certification of their livestock by actively monitoring disease in their herds. The benefit of certification from the standpoint of the producer would be the enhanced market value of certified herds.

In addition to authorizing a herd-certification program, the legislation proposed by the bureau embodies a more proactive approach in that it would enable the bureau to develop a better disease-reporting system, as well as the ability to conduct surveillance studies to monitor the prevalence of disease throughout the state. All of this would, in turn, enhance the bureau's ability to respond to outbreaks of

¹ The regulated diseases are tuberculosis, anthrax, scabies, hog cholera, brucellosis, and pseudorabies.

² In the case of anthrax, which cannot be eradicated entirely, the disease is controlled.

disease, utilizing the emergency-management system mentioned previously.

Conclusion

The unit found that the factors precipitating the bureau's proposal are part of a national trend and that the changes suggested by the bureau are consistent with those being made by the federal government and other states as a means of making governmental veterinary services more proactive. In addition, the unit found the livestock producer associations to be generally favorable to the bureau's ideas. As a result, the unit recommends that the Legislature give the legislation proposed by the bureau serious consideration.

The findings and recommendations made by the committee relative to this evaluation are found in Part III of this report.