

Meeting Minutes: April Quarterly Board Meeting

Date: April 1, 2026
Minutes prepared by: Daniel Callahan
Location: University of Minnesota St. Paul Campus

Attendance

Board Members

- Erica Sawatzke, President
- Peggy Anne Hawkins, DVM, Vice President
- Brandon Schafer
- Alex Stade
- Jessica Fox, DVM
- Steve Neil

Consultants to the Board

- Stacy Holzbauer, Minnesota Department of Health
- Stephan Schaefbauer, USDA-APHIS
- Hemant Naikare, University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory

Guests

- Lucia Hunt, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Staff

- Brian Hoefs
- Erik Jopp
- Shauna Voss
- Steve Kivisto
- Katie Cornille
- Melissa Smith
- Michelle Medina
- Krista Lautenschlager

Call to Order

Ms. Erica Sawatzke called the meeting to order. Following introductions, Ms. Sawatzke asked for a motion to approve the draft minutes from the February quarterly meeting. Mr. Alex Stade made a motion. Dr. Peggy Anne Hawkins seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Sawatzke asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Steve Neil made a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Brandon Schafer seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Board of Animal Health Update

Dr. Brian Hoefs, State Veterinarian and Executive Director of the Board of Animal Health, gave an update on actions of Board staff since the last meeting.

African Swine Fever (ASF) is suspected in an outbreak in Lithuania. Spain has found the disease in wild boar populations. The closest cases to the U.S. have appeared in the Dominican Republic. In Minnesota, the Board is working on outbreak plans should the disease make it to the United States. Dr. Hoefs is serving on a committee to work on outbreak response planning. ASF is very different from Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), and the response activities must be considered differently.

New World Screwworm (NWS) has not made it to the U.S. yet, but action is being taken along the southern border and in Mexico to slow and reverse the spread of the infestations. Sterile flies are being released along the border in Texas. Texas has declared a state of emergency regarding NWS. While the flies aren't there yet, it is assumed to be only a matter of time. Reports from Mexico are showing dogs, pigs, cattle and humans have been infested. All the cases in the last two months have been in resident animals, which indicates that the flies are residential, not being moved into the area through animal movements. Bat wounds on animals have been a common egg laying site for female NWS flies.

The Board has submitted proposals for the NWS Grand Challenge through the USDA. Companion animals are the focus of those proposals as the movement of companion animals has increased with people bringing pets on vacations and rescue groups bringing dogs across the border. Feral dogs are a large problem in many of the areas showing signs of NWS fly activity. The Board is working with the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to share information with migrant workers about signs of infestation.

The H5N1 Milk Surveillance Sampling Program continues. Minnesota has had no detections since summer of 2025. The program will be testing milk silos to watch for the disease. The outbreak of H5N1 in dairy cattle was a reminder that diseases can affect multiple species and animal health experts should be vigilant. It could be a precursor to what could happen with ASF. Viruses can change and mutate frequently.

Minnesota experienced a Canine Brucellosis outbreak in March of this year. The disease was detected in a rescued female dog with a litter of 10 puppies brought into the state from a South Dakota reservation. The adult female tested positive, as did four of the puppies. Four puppies tested negative. Test results are pending on the last two puppies. The dog began showing signs of neck and back pain a year after being brought to Minnesota. This leaves a tough question for the animal's owners, as Minnesota allows only two options Canine Brucellosis positive dogs: lifetime quarantine or euthanasia. A lot of misinformation is making the rounds about the disease and possible infections.

This is the third outbreak associated with the same source location in South Dakota. The same veterinarian was responsible for signing off on the Certificates of Veterinary Inspection that allowed the dogs to be brought to Minnesota. The Companion Animal Program team is working to inform rescue groups and raise awareness about the disease. The Board is exploring what options are available to stop the importation of affected dogs into Minnesota.

The Companion Animal Program is currently in the midst of a legislative audit conducted by the Office of the Legislative Auditor. Staff have been doing lots of interviews and answering questions about the program. The auditor's office representatives will be joining staff on companion animal inspections soon.

There are changes coming for the Board of Directors. Ms. Sawatzke is concluding her time as a board member and will leave a vacancy. Dr. Hoefs commended Ms. Sawatzke for her dedication to animal health and for serving the people of Minnesota. Mr. Alex Stade is up for reappointment by the governor's office.

Mr. Brandon Schafer asked what can be learned from the H5N1 disease responses of the last year that can be applied to future responses. Dr. Hoefs said that a key takeaway is the level of engagement with industry and all parties to make sure everyone understands their role in the predicament. We cannot operate in a silo. There are networks of stakeholders to keep engaged in a response.

Mr. Schafer asked if there is a difference in incubation periods for canine brucellosis in puppies versus adult dogs. How do we better educate ourselves on whether an animal is carrying it? Dr. Kivisto said some dogs are carriers, and the disease can't be detected by antibody tests. It could take a year or more before an animal tests positive. He acknowledged the lack of cooperation from rescue groups on testing has been a problem. He said we need to educate vets and those who might be adopting the animals to ask where the animal comes from. Dr. Hoefs said the situation also highlights the Board's limited oversight of rescue groups, which can operate under the radar. The mission of rescue groups is laudable, but they should be considering the risks that they are exposing to the rest of the pet population.

Dr. Hawkins asked how likely brucellosis is to infect a person from a dog. Dr. Stacy Holzbauer said she would be discussing this during her presentation later in the meeting. Generally, the risk of human infection is assessed as part of the partnership between the Board and MDH as they investigate each canine brucellosis case.

Dr. Fox asked if the adult female dog was tested for canine brucellosis before the Certificate of Veterinary Inspection was issued. Dr. Kivisto said there were three adult dogs on the CVI and it stated that all were tested and found negative. Dr. Fox asked if there is a standard test used for canine brucellosis. Dr. Kivisto said he had never heard of the test listed on the CVI and has unsuccessfully reached out to the manufacturer for more information. Dr. Hoefs said the Board is looking into how it can specify which tests are acceptable to rule out the disease before allowing importation.

Ms. Sawatzke asked what a lifetime quarantine means for Board staff. Dr. Kivisto said it involves a site visit to see how the owners are set up and how they plan to meet the quarantine requirements, followed by yearly check-ins. The only place the dog can travel is to the veterinarian, for which they need a movement permit from the Board.

Legislative Update

Ms. Michelle Medina, Director of Government Relations for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) and the Board, gave an update on legislative activity impacting the Board.

Around 4,790 bills have been introduced into the House and 4,730 introduced into the Senate. We're past the first and second deadlines for the House and Senate to act favorably on bills introduced in the house of origin and to act favorably on bills from the other house as well as pending bills. This means there should not be too many more bills, especially policy bills, coming up this session. However, even if a bill misses these deadlines, it could still be materially added to an omnibus bill or as a floor amendment.

Numerous bills have been introduced concerning white tail deer farming, Cervidae fencing, pet stores, the creation of an office of animal protection, and others. At this point, none of them are policy bills that would affect the Board. Additionally, no budget cuts are anticipated for MDA or the Board in this session, which concludes May 19. With a short session and elections this November, it's hard to say how much will or won't get done in the legislature this year.

Dr. Hawkins said it looks like the Board's budget is safe, but the price of gas is going to go up enough to make a difference in our budget. The Board will have to consider how to manage those costs and still get the job done. Ms. Medina said it will be important to look at how we can request a cost of business increase next year. Future budgets in the state will be in the red, but we need to consider what we need to combat disease. Luckily, MDA has emergency funds available, and the Board works closely with the MDA.

Dr. Hoefs said the Board has some plans in place to address these concerns and reminded the Board there will be a new administration in the Governor's Office after the November elections. Ms. Medina said there will be lots of turnover in the legislature as well.

College of Veterinary Medicine Update

Dr. Hemant Naikare, Director of the University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (VDL), gave an update on the University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM).

The curriculum revitalization project for the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine program was recently featured in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association spotlight article. The article highlighted the project's efforts to engage with the larger veterinary community. Plans for implementation are currently set for fall 2027, beginning with the Class of 2031.

Planning has begun for a new equine isolation and large animal medical facility to be housed on the St. Paul campus. This new facility will strengthen capacity to diagnose, treat and contain infectious diseases in horses and large animals while safeguarding the health of other patients, staff and the surrounding community.

The One Health Action Team has completed inventory assessments of university strengths around One Health topics with specific emphasis on agriculture and infectious diseases. The action team's plan will be submitted for consideration in early May.

The University has submitted a \$284 million request for capital funds to the legislature. This would include around \$84 million to help construct a new student center on the St. Paul campus. The CVM is developing plans

for a balanced budget that includes reallocations (cuts) of 1-5%. This is on top of the 7% reallocations that all colleges had to achieve last fiscal year.

Veterinary Diagnostic Lab

Dr. Naikare also gave an update on the University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (VDL)'s work.

The laboratory has moved forward with upgrading instrumentation and equipment to better serve client organizations throughout the state and beyond. In March 2026, a new Matrix-Assisted Laser Desorption/Ionization Time-of-Flight Mass Spectrometry (MALDI-TOF MS) machine was in use in bacteriology in the St. Paul lab. Funding was secured through the American Rescue Plan. The machines only have a 10-year lifespan. Replacing the ageing machine with a new unit will help make the lab's bacteriology work more robust.

The MPTL Molecular Lab will be adding a QuantStudio real-time PCR system (QS=5s) in Summer 2026. A PCR system is used to detect tiny amounts of viral or bacterial genetic material. The current PCR machines in the lab will shortly be out of date. Three to five of the current machines will be replaced as the testing equipment goes out of date.

The VDL has launched ELISA testing for ruminant pregnancy. ELISA testing can be done on milk or serum to determine pregnancy in cattle, sheep and goats by detecting hormones in the bodily fluids. The lab charges \$7 per sample test with a turnaround time of 1-3 days. This test will allow for testing within 25-28 days post-breeding in cattle and 30 days in sheep and goats.

The VDL has submitted proposals for grants in topics ranging from workforce development to New World Screwworm surveillance. These grants would allow the lab to expand its capacity and participate in new work.

USDA Update

Dr. Stephan Schaeferbauer gave an update on the work of APHIS in the past quarter.

The National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames, Iowa, have run out of Dual Path Platform (DPP) test kits, which are used for testing for tuberculosis in cervids. All incoming samples are being frozen, pending restock. The estimated delivery date for new tests is April 20, 2026. Significant delays in DPP testing results are expected. USDA recommends using the Single Cervical Tuberculin skin test for cervid tuberculosis when animal movements are time sensitive.

APHIS typically conducts a Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Cooperative Agreement meeting for groups operating with USDA CWD cooperative agreements. There will not be a 2026 meeting. APHIS has prepared alternative materials to keep partner groups informed.

The Minnesota office of APHIS has sent many staff on deployments to all kinds of places to build skills and help decrease disease in all areas. This has included port coverage, HPAI responses in other states, NWS, and vectorborne disease assignments in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Recent hiring throughout USDA has been leadership focused. The agency recently completed a targeted hiring round through merit promotion with an emphasis on leadership positions. The next round of hiring may be

focused on field positions. Minnesota has four vacant positions, two veterinary medical officer positions and two animal health technician positions.

Minnesota Department of Health

Dr. Stacy Holzbauer, State Public Health Veterinarian, gave an update on the work of Minnesota Department of Health related to zoonotic disease.

Brucellosis is one of the most common zoonotic diseases in the world. The bacteria that cause infection can persist in the environment for longer periods of time under the right conditions. There are five *Brucella* species, each associated with a different animal species. The *Brucella* bacteria can cross-contaminate and appear in a species other than its typical host.

In humans, brucellosis incubates somewhere between 5 days and 6 months and presents with non-specific symptoms such as fever, muscle aches, chills and sweats. The illness can be acute or chronic and lead to serious complications or be mild and asymptomatic. The infection typically is found in the heart, bone, liver, spleen, or testicles of humans. Brucellosis is difficult to test for and requires a blood culture. Diagnoses rely on astute clinicians including brucellosis in their differential.

Canine brucellosis can appear in humans, but the epidemiology is poorly understood. There is a 3.6 seroprevalence in people exposed to dogs. This is likely occupational exposure. A literature review identified 68 human cases from 1967-2012 and found that 80% of cases were linked to canine exposure. The remaining 20% were linked to laboratory exposures. Humans are recommended for testing if they have contact with bodily fluids from an infected dog and have symptoms compatible with brucellosis.

Minnesota averages between 2-4 cases per year. MDH works closely with the Board to educate dog owners on the disease risks associated with having animals that test positive or could test positive for canine brucellosis.

MDH recommends taking proactive biosecurity measures to protect both clinicians and other animals. Infected or suspect dogs should be isolated from all other dogs. Clinics should consider scheduling appointments during times when contact with people and other animals will be minimal. Avoid letting infected dogs urinate in the clinic if possible. Use personal protective equipment and limit contact with staff, especially at-risk staff. Provide resources and education to clients and rescue groups regarding zoonotic potential and risk mitigation.

MDH tracks reports of *Salmonella* in humans attributed to keeping backyard poultry. Each year there are outbreaks with cases predominantly in females, particularly children and older adults. Most live in rural counties and purchased chicks that season. Since 2023, MDH, in partnership with the Board, the MDH Public Health Laboratory and the University of Minnesota, has collected chick papers to help identify *Salmonella* serotypes associated with baby chicks. Chick papers are the bedding materials used for housing baby chicks. In 2026, the project will continue with eight retail feed stores enrolled to provide materials for testing.

Dr. Schaeffbauer asked if the *Salmonella* serotypes being found on the chick papers are Minnesota-specific. Dr. Holzbauer said they are part of a national outbreak of *Salmonella*.

Mr. Stade asked if the dogs imported from South Dakota are coming from a house or if they are strays. Also, if they are coming from a house, are the people living there being tested for *Brucella* as well? Dr. Kivisto said they are primarily stray dogs. It's a very large population with a large percentage estimated to be infected with *Brucella canis*. They know there's a problem, and they're trying to do something about it. However, the number of animals is staggering.

Budget Update

Ms. Melissa Smith, Business Manager of the Board, gave an update on the budget for the agency.

As of April 1, 2026, the current budget for FY26 is \$6,675,000. The bulk of the expenditure comes in the form of salary expenses, followed by MNIT services and testing costs. Space rental, travel in state and fleet expenses and other operating costs (hosted training, insurance, catering, and service and recognition awards) are the next largest costs.

Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB) has proposed the Board use additional dollars for employee development, but the agency has limited funds for using dollars on development. Dr. Katie Cornille asked if employee development included attending conferences. Ms. Smith said it means training offered by MMB for employee development.

The Board has 7 cooperative agreements with USDA currently:

- Umbrella
- Traceability
- US SHIP (Swine Health Improvement Plan)
- HPAI Emergency Response Poultry
- H5N1 in Livestock (ends 9/14/26)
- 2 Chronic Wasting Disease

Looking forward to FY27, the Board is planning for \$6,800,000 in general appropriations funding. This includes a grant operating adjustment of \$390,000. Salary expenses are expected to increase due to contractual increases and a 1.75% cost of living adjustment. MNIT services projects will increase by 5-6% for software, equipment and labor costs. A reduction will come in the rental costs for the St. Paul office space in the Freeman Building, saving over \$40,000 annually. The Board continues to make efforts to reduce expenses wherever possible while maintaining programming.

The state overall is still planning for a deficit in FY2028-2029 despite improved estimates. This will make it harder for the Board to request increased funding. More information will be available in Fall 2026.

Ms. Sawatzke said that it sounds like most Minnesota state agencies use MNIT for their IT needs and asked if there are other options available. Mr. Andrew Gladitsch, the Board's staff attorney, said that it is a statutory requirement for state agencies to utilize MNIT services. Dr. Hoefs added that MNIT does not receive any state appropriations and is funded completely through user agency fees.

The Board is hiring a number of new staff to fill positions left open due to retirements and attrition.

Dr. Melissa Knutzen is scheduled to start May 11 to replace Dr. Susan McClanahan. Ms. Carissa Allen resigned from data management in March 2026. The job posting will be finalized and posted soon. Ms. Nancy Reeck will be retiring in April 2026 from the Cattle and Livestock Concentration Points program. That job posting will also be finalized and posted soon.

Dr. Fox asked what checks and balances are in place to keep MNIT from increasing costs unreasonably. Ms. Smith said that policies are in place through the Office of State Procurement, which has oversight on increases in costs.

National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program Projects Overview

Ms. Lucia Hunt, director of the Food and Ag Security Team (FAST) at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, gave an overview of the projects conducted as part of the National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program (NADPRP).

NADPRP has its origins in the 2018 Farm Bill, partially as a response to the 2015 HPAI outbreak. Nearly \$70 million has been awarded to 324 projects with 87 cooperating agencies. Minnesota has 20 projects funded, seven at MDA and 13 at the University of Minnesota, accounting for nearly \$5.23 million.

Some of the projects:

- **Foreign Animal Disease (FAD) Workshops with County Emergency Managers:**
The project involves workshops held in each of the six Homeland Security Emergency Management (HSEM) regions in the state. FAD response is based at the state level, but responses can request the help of county-level emergency services. The project includes a 3-hour workshop covering agriculture in Minnesota, response basics, county interface, and a task card exercise to help emergency managers understand how the process works.
- **Foreign Animal Disease (FAD) Response in Livestock Markets:**
Planning for the possibility of a FAD response and how it would involve livestock markets. Specifically, the project aims to create plans for traceability of animals and identify gaps in planning when it comes to live animal markets. It also includes an outreach component to livestock markets to better understand risks for disease spread, restrictions needed in a control zone during an outbreak, what it means to call for a 72-hour standstill and the economic implications of a FAD outbreak.
- **Continuing Education for Compost SMEs:**
This project is working to build a continuing education program for composting subject matter experts. Specifically, it is building a 3-day classroom course that will help compost SMEs gain skills experience and operational confidence, so when the need arises for large scale composting efforts during an outbreak, the experts are prepared. Further, it aims to gather instructions, policies, resources and guidance into a central hub for continued education. Components include online modules, in-person compost directorial opportunities, and fostering growth as a community.

- **Using Certified Swine Sample Collectors in Foreign Animal Disease (FAD) Response:**
This project builds on a previous NADPRP program in Iowa that aimed to train personnel on farms to take samples so that emergency personnel would be free to do other work. There are more than 400 Certified Swine Sample Collectors (CSSC) trained in Minnesota. The project is designed to identify the interface between CSSCs and emergency responders to prepare for sampling needs during a FAD outbreak. MDA is partnering with the Swine EDMC Surveillance Subcommittee. A workshop in July will explore the IMT structure and decision-making and address concerns about lab capacity for testing during an outbreak. In Fall 2026 a drill is planned for CSSCs to take real samples from swine populations and submit them to the UMN Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory.
- **Intro to Nitrogen Whole House Gassing (NWHG) for Poultry:**
This project is nearing completion and aimed to optimize a nitrogen delivery system to rapidly create anoxic conditions throughout the poultry facility for poultry depopulation activities. The goal is to determine flow rates, pressure and time of nitrogen distribution within barns to optimize the depopulation efforts. It also seeks to validate the efficiency and efficacy of using NWHG in a range of environmental conditions. Finally, it seeks to analyze the applicability of NWHG for the depopulation of poultry throughout Minnesota. Nitrogen leads to unconsciousness and death by anoxia with minimal distress. Nitrogen is less aversive than CO₂. Nitrogen is an accepted method of stunning and euthanasia in many parts of the world, receiving the highest animal welfare scores compared to CO₂ and decompression. Nitrogen is cheaper, more economical to transport and readily available.

Poultry Program Updates

Dr. Shauna Voss, Assistant Director of the Board, gave an update on the state of poultry in Minnesota.

No new cases of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) have been reported in the state since the February board meeting. Unfortunately, this is not the case nationally. Indiana and Pennsylvania have been hit hard with cases. Indiana reported 35 cases in March alone, with 23 of those cases being in duck facilities. Waterfowl like ducks can be asymptomatic and act as silent carriers of H5N1, making detection harder and increasing the risk of further transmission. In the last 30 days, 68 flocks have been confirmed positive nationwide. As spring migrations pick up, more cases may appear in Minnesota.

In Minnesota, poultry dealers need a permit to buy, sell, trade, or distribute hatching eggs, poultry or ratites. Obtaining a permit involves keeping records of all poultry, hatching eggs, and ratites received in the past 12 months. Dealers also need to track out-of-state sales if sales are to a resident of a neighboring state. This also requires movement certificates. Inspections are conducted regularly to ensure compliance as well as check on things like sanitation and cleanliness of the premises. Permitting ensures only National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) certified birds are being sold as well as establishing points of contact and allowing for traceability of diseases like HPAI, *Salmonella* and others should there be an outbreak.

The NPIP 47th Biennial Conference is set for Aug. 11-14, 2026, in Salt Lake City, Utah. Official Minnesota delegates are still needed for several subparts. There will also be an opening for a member of the General Conference Committee. As part of the Biennial Conference, proposed changes will be examined for both NPIP Provision and Program Standards. A proposed change was submitted to that addresses differing auditing structures between NPIP and USDA's Biosecurity Compliance Audit Program.

RFID Update

Dr. Katie Cornille, senior veterinarian in charge of traceability, cattle and livestock concentration point programs, gave an update on RFID tags.

In November 2024, a new USDA rule requiring cattle tags to be electronically readable in addition to being visually readable went into effect. All animals tagged after the effective date had to be tagged with radio frequency identification (RFID) tags for them to be considered official identification. USDA created a program to distribute free tags to producers and veterinarians. The Board conducts the distribution after receiving the allocation from USDA.

In 2024, 150,000 RFID tags were distributed to Minnesota producers and veterinarians who requested them. In 2025, two rounds of distribution were conducted, issuing 121,000 and 146,000 tags in April and August respectively. Overall, the demand from producers dropped from FY24 to FY25, while the requests from veterinarians increased. In FY25 around 40% of Minnesota's allotment of tags were sent to livestock market veterinarians. When tags become available, they are gone in 1 to 2 days.

Looking forward to FY26, USDA has not yet issued allocations of free tags to Minnesota. When they are issued, Board staff will work to distribute the tags to veterinarians and producers.

Mr. Stade said he heard from producers and vets that they didn't have a chance to get tags from USDA before the free tags ran out. Can more be requested? Dr. Cornille said the Board is only given a certain number of tags from USDA and we can't ask for more than they allocate. The Board doesn't have funding to order and distribute tags for free.

Election of Board President and Vice President

Dr. Hawkins said Mr. Stade has applied to be the Board's tribal representative board member, but the governor has not yet reappointed him. Dr. Hawkins made a motion to invite Mr. Stade to sit on the board until an appointment is made. The motion was seconded by Mr. Schafer. Mr. Andrew Gladitsch, the staff attorney, said that it is permissible for Mr. Stade to participate in Board activities, but he cannot cast a vote until reappointed. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Sawatzke introduced the election of board officers. Dr. Hawkins nominated Mr. Schafer for Board president, Mr. Stade seconded the nomination. The vote in favor of Mr. Schafer was unanimous. Mr. Schafer nominated Dr. Fox for the position of vice president of the board. The vote in favor of Dr. Fox as vice president was unanimous.

Dr. Hawkins presented a card of thanks and appreciation for her service to Ms. Sawatzke.

Closed Session

The Board went into closed session to conduct a performance review and appointment of the executive director. After reopening the session, Ms. Sawatzke said the Board voted to reappoint Dr. Brian Hoefs as the Board's executive director.

Next Meeting and Adjourn

The third quarterly meeting of 2026 will take place Sept. 16, 2026, at a location yet to be determined. The fourth quarterly meeting of the board will be held Dec. 9, 2026, at a location to be determined.

Ms. Sawatzke asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Neil made the motion. Dr. Fox seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Hoefs
Executive Director
State Veterinarian