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Commissioner

New York State Legislature  
Senate Standing Committee on Agriculture  
Senate Standing Committee on Health

Roundtable on Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) Testimony  
Oswego City School District  
120 E. 1st St.  
Oswego, NY 13126

October 13, 2011  
11:00 AM

Good morning Chairwoman Ritchie and Chairman Hannon. My name is Dr. David Smith, DVM, Director of Animal Industry for the Department of Agriculture and Markets. On behalf of Commissioner Aubertine, I am pleased to provide comments today.

The Department of Agriculture and Markets mission is to foster a competitive food and agriculture industry that benefits producers and consumers alike. In matters of agricultural animal health, the Department's Division of Animal Industry serves the people of New York, other states, and the world by striving to prevent new animal diseases from entering New York and controlling or eradicating those diseases which are already present in New York.

Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) is well established in pockets scattered throughout the eastern United States. The virus reproduces very well in wild birds and is frequently transmitted from birds to mammals and humans by mosquitoes which have previously fed upon infected birds. The mosquito species most likely to transmit EEE from birds to mammals are members of the genera *Aedes*, *Coquilletidia*, and *Culex*. These species thrive best in hardwood swamps which are abundant in the parts of New York State where EEE emerges annually in mammals. All mammalian species are believed to be "dead-end hosts" because the EEE virus seldom, if ever achieves concentrations in mammalian blood that render that blood infective when transferred by mosquito bite. Horses are the most commonly affected mammals.

Since routine vaccinations easily prevent EEE in horses, there is no federal or state program to control EEE in that species. In regard to EEE, the animal health role of the Division of Animal Industry to date has been to remind owners, veterinarians and others of the need to vaccinate against the disease. The Division also cooperates with local and state public health officials by promptly reporting cases of EEE in animals.

The Department's Division of Animal Industry issues a joint letter and news releases every spring to remind veterinarians, individuals, and horse owners of the presence of EEE. The Division of Animal Industry provides guidance to practicing veterinarians on how to collect and submit samples from potential EEE cases to the State's Public Health and Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratories. The Division of Animal Industry promptly reports possible EEE cases in horses to the NYS Department of Health since these cases serve very well as indicators of EEE's presence and that conditions are right for insect vectors to transmit the virus from birds to mammals.

The Department of Agriculture and Markets offers no programs for mosquito control to farmers in New York, other than the standard advisory to keep mosquito breeding habitat down to a minimum by eliminating standing water. In the affected parts of the state, vast areas of wetlands available for mosquito breeding probably overshadow efforts by individual farms to reduce mosquito habitat.

Recent history of EEE in New York animals:

To date, in 2011, the Department of Agriculture and Markets is aware of 12 cases of EEE in Horses; seven in Oswego County, 4 in Oneida County and 1 in Saint Lawrence County. There has been one very unusual finding this year involving 2 dogs in Oswego County which became ill with EEE and died. All equine cases detected in 2011 were either unvaccinated or of unknown vaccination status. All cases of EEE in equine and canine, except for 1 horse, were fatal. The lone surviving equine case has a questionable vaccination status and was recently purchased. It's unknown if this horse received any veterinary care in its 4 years of life.

In 2010, there were 10 horses affected by EEE; six in Oswego County, three in Onondaga County, and one in Oneida County. All 2010 cases were either unvaccinated and all cases were fatal except one. This lone surviving horse was unvaccinated but survived the infection.

In 2009, there were seven equine cases and one case in a wild deer. Five of the horses were in Oswego County, one in Lewis, and one in Saint Lawrence. The deer was in Oswego County. All cases detected in 2009 were fatal. Of the equine cases, all but one were unvaccinated. The one vaccinated case had only received one EEE vaccination approximately 4 months prior its death.

The Department of Agriculture and Markets is supported by the New York State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory in Ithaca, NY. The virologists, veterinary experts, and pathologists at the laboratory play an important role in early detection of many animal diseases that may cross over to infect humans. The finding of EEE in two dogs this year is directly attributable to an alert pathologist at the Veterinary Diagnostic laboratory who recognized microscopic lesions that were consistent with the tissue damage caused by EEE.

The Department of Agriculture and Markets will continue to work with the New York State Department of Health to reach out to the public and we will continue to promptly provide disease intelligence as we acquire it