



The Western Canadian Animal Health Network (WeCAHN) beef network: connecting farmers, specialists, and information systems to improve cattle health in western Canada

## ENHANCING BEEF CATTLE HEALTH SURVEILLANCE IN WESTERN CANADA

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**Background:** Disease surveillance plays an important role in early detection, both in terms of changes in prevalence or presentation for diseases we already know about, as well as for detecting new or emerging diseases. Early detection is key to prompt and effective responses that minimize risk to cattle, producers, the industry, and the economy. The Western Canadian Animal Health Network (WeCAHN) is modelled on existing networks in Quebec and Ontario. WeCAHN is a collaborative initiative where veterinarians and other experts can share and discuss animal disease data, emerging animal health events, disease treatment and management strategies, and other current surveillance issues.

**Objectives:** The objectives of this program are to:

1. Build a robust, sustainable western Canadian beef health surveillance network, using the knowledge and expertise of veterinarians, epidemiologists, producers, and animal health laboratories to collect, synthesize and share animal health information to reduce the impact of beef cattle disease
2. Improve the usefulness of veterinary diagnostic laboratory data for the beef industry.
3. Deliver timely, targeted information regarding trends in frequency of beef diseases and best treatment

practices to beef producers and veterinarians to improve the quality of animal health.

4. Create a rapid alert system within an early warning system for beef health events in western Canada, detecting and assessing early surveillance and intelligence signals, and rapidly communicating risks and appropriate mitigation strategies to beef veterinarians and producers, reducing losses, and improving competitiveness.
5. Assess the cost-effectiveness of the network and build a sustainable plan to continue the WeCAHN beef network's operations in the future.

**Implications of the Program:** Surveillance and diagnostic capacity in Alberta has been severely under resourced for two decades. Programs like WeCAHN, the Canadian Cow-Calf Surveillance Network, the Canadian Animal Health Surveillance System Beef Network and continuing efforts at the University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine to expand their diagnostic services are helping to address this shortfall, but this type of funding is notoriously difficult to obtain and maintain over the long term.

Thanks to COVID-19, the entire world now understands how important early detection, information sharing, and rapid response are to effectively manage human disease outbreaks. The same principles apply to livestock.

Check out the work that WeCAHN has been doing here.

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