



MEDIA RELEASE – For immediate release

Veterinarians Take Lead in Improving Canadian On-Farm Biosecurity

November 23, 2007 (Milton, ON) – The Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA) announces a significant initiative to develop valuable new tools to assist veterinarians and food animal producers to enhance on-farm biosecurity across Canada. The tools are being developed with the assistance of generous financial support from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and Agri-Food Canada through the Agricultural Adaptation Council's CanAdvance Program.

The project has two main objectives:

1. ***To develop biosecurity protocols, and emergency management and response procedures that veterinarians can use on-farm and in the clinic.***

While veterinarians are considered to be leaders in the area of biosecurity, there are no standardized protocols. Growing awareness and concerns about biosecurity among industry members are making such protocols a necessity for anyone providing services on-farm. Procedures for preventing disease transmission in veterinary facilities are equally important, both in terms of animal diseases and zoonotic risks to staff and clients.

By providing veterinarians with standardized protocols for biosecurity and disease control, their clients will be assured that all precautions are being taken to protect their farm from infectious disease. In addition, the development of emergency management procedures will help ensure that veterinarians remain operational in times of emergency and are able to fulfill their role as community leaders in animal health.

2. ***To create a tool that veterinarians can use with their clients to evaluate on-farm biosecurity risks.***

While veterinarians already provide advice to producers about biosecurity and disease transmission, there is currently no standardized format for on-farm risk assessment.

This assessment tool will be comprehensive enough to cover all of the key risk factors, but it will also be quick and easy to use. The purpose is to guide the producer and the veterinarian towards any potential areas that may increase the risk of disease introduction and spread. Producers are encouraged to work with their veterinarian to develop a biosecurity plan for their operation that is feasible and effective.

The overall goal of the project is to create the tools required for a systematic, standardized and scientifically valid evaluation of the biosecurity risks in livestock operations in Ontario. It will complement other biosecurity initiatives currently under developed for other sectors, such as the service industries, and relevant areas of on-farm food safety programs. The project is being coordinated by eBiz Professionals Inc., and overseen by a Veterinary Advisory Forum (VAF) consisting of:

Ontario Veterinary Medical Association
Ontario Association of Swine Veterinarians
Ontario Association of Equine Practitioners
Ontario Association of Bovine Practitioners
Ontario Association of Poultry Practitioners
Ontario Livestock and Poultry Council
Ontario Veterinary College
Canadian Animal Health Coalition

OMAFRA and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency have ex-officio roles on the VAF.

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“Veterinarians in this country and in this province realize the importance of biosecurity and want to take a leadership role in dispensing information to producers,” said Dr. Reg Reed, OVMA President. “As frequent visitors to multiple producer facilities, veterinarians have first-hand contact with diseased animals, and play a critical role in the control of zoonotic infections and animal disease spread. This initiative will give veterinarians who are responsible for large numbers of farms and a wide variety of species a standardized format for on-farm risk assessment.”

Together, these new capabilities will allow veterinarians to contribute to the improvement of food safety programs, reduce the chance of zoonotic infection to humans, and limit the risk of animal disease transmission between farms. Large animal veterinary practices in Ontario and, through them, all livestock owners in the province will be better defended against animal disease and their attendant losses.

It is expected that this project will be completed in March 2008. Information and educational materials developed by this initiative will be available to interested stakeholders in industry, government and the veterinary profession across Canada.

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Background

Founded in 1980, the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association represents more than 3,300 Ontario veterinarians in private practice, government, academia, industry and public service. Its mandate is to advance and promote excellence in the veterinary profession in Ontario, and contribute to the betterment of animal health and the protection of human health.

eBiz Professionals Inc. is a Guelph-based consulting firm specializing in the agriculture and food industries, and focused on animal health, food safety, biosecurity and traceability. eBiz was instrumental in the formation of the Veterinarian Advisory Forum, and is a member of both the Ontario Livestock and Poultry Council and the Poultry Industry Council.

OMAFRA continues to work with agriculture industries and organizations to improve and strengthen biosecurity, animal health and emergency preparedness in the province. OMAFRA also works closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to develop and promote such initiatives nationally. Through the Office of the Chief Veterinarian, OMAFRA has developed a Farm Visit Biosecurity Protocol for government staff, which has been shared with many other governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The Agricultural Adaptation Council is a non-profit, grass roots coalition of 71 agricultural, agribusiness and rural organizations dedicated to providing financial resources, provided by the federal and provincial government, to help Ontario's agriculture and agri-food industry remain profitable, grow and maintain its economic strength.

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