

Forum on Commerce in Aquatic Livestock held in Des Moines, Iowa

November 15 - 16, 2007

(Written by and for the Aquatic Livestock Alliance)

Executive Summary

The focus of a Forum hosted by the North Central Regional Aquaculture Center (NCRAC) on November 15-16, 2007 in Des Moines, Iowa, was to address the policy, laws, and regulations whereby cultured aquatic organisms can be moved within a regulatory framework similar to that of traditional livestock, e.g., swine and cattle. Invited participants included private and public aquatic producers, traditional livestock health representatives, and state agriculture and natural resource regulators from the North Central Region. The reason for this Forum was the effect of a federal order (October 2006) issued by USDA-APHIS on interstate transport due to outbreak of viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS). Issues that the 37 Forum participants were in consensus on in rank order were:

1. No uniformity in state regulations,
2. Limited availability of fish health officials, and
3. No uniformity of testing standards among states.

An outcome of the 2-day Forum was the agreement by all participants to establish the Aquatic Livestock Alliance (ALA) with the following mission statement: "The ALA exists for the purpose of promoting the interstate commerce of aquatic livestock". To formally create the ALA as a non-profit corporation, the participants approve the formation and membership of a five-person executive committee with a communications/web coordinator.

Forum Introduction and Invitation

In summer of 2007, a question was raised by regional producers, "Why can't we move our farm-raised fish like other livestock?" By early fall of 2007 many stakeholders from various backgrounds seemed ready for the possibility of meeting together to discuss the regulatory and administrative discrepancies among states when it comes to aquatic livestock, biosecurity, and commerce. The concept of a meeting/forum evolved into an action plan to try and accomplish this task. A forum was designed to explore federal and state regulations that are impacting the profitable and efficient interstate movement of aquatic livestock for both private and public purposes in hopes of finding consistent uniform methods for the North Central Region (NCR) and other states currently under the federal order for VHS.

The concept of this Forum was to discuss improvement and revision of state regulations and policies whereby aquatic livestock for both public and private purposes can be enhanced while also maintaining animal health in 2008. The five delegate groups are: private producers, public producers (such as hatchery personnel), animal health representative (veterinarians), state natural resources agencies and state department of agriculture representative were invited from fourteen states. Not all states or USDA-APHIS sent delegations. These states and stakeholders that were invited were methodically chosen.

The invitees to attend this Forum were stakeholders that have common interests and experiences in aquatic livestock and the regulations that permit livestock to move efficiently in interstate commerce. The purpose with this selection process by the three organizers was: 1.) to bring a relatively small, regional group together that shared industry issues, and 2.) conduct an effective dialogue about these common issues. The States in the NCR and all those affected by the federal order on VHS were blended into a hypothetical "region" (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Wisconsin) were chosen. Neutrality was the main concern with this Forum. National, state, or any type of "group" from the various backgrounds were not invited so that a common agenda would be formed by the invited stakeholders allowing everyone attending a voice/vote. To reach this goal of neutrality and try to make the Forum a success, Dr. Paul Lasley, Chair of the Sociology Department, Iowa State University, was hired as a moderator.

Background

To help open the dialogue to the meeting, a background document was assembled by several individuals and presented to the invited stakeholders. You can find this document at <http://www.aquaticlivestock.org>. This document was provided as one perspective of the history that put us where we are at today (at the time of the Forum).

The Forum

Thursday, November 15, 2007

The meeting started with a welcome and introduction by Paul Lasley, the moderator. The question "What are the barriers for growing the aquatic livestock industry?" was presented to the group. Many of the same issues have been faced by other stakeholders and industries, i.e., dairy industry. Some of the most controversial issues have been over the swine industry.

The following lists of concerns/issues were created:

Task # 1

- What are the barriers to growing the Aquatic Livestock Industry?
- Some issues common among various industries

After the list of concerns/issues was posted on the wall, each person was able to vote a total of 10 times. All ten votes could have gone on one topic if that stakeholder felt that strongly about that topic. After the votes were counted the following three topics came to the top of the list:

Top 3 issues resulting from vote —

- #1 — No uniformity in state regulations,
- #2 — Limited availability of fish health officials, and
- #3 — No uniformity of testing standards among states.

Questions to ask related to the preceding topics are: —

- What is the issue?
- Who is responsible?

Homework assignment: How do we go about fixing this problem? Is there a way to do it? Is there an equivalent to the various associations for aquaculture an aquatic livestock association perhaps?

There needs to be some sort of recommendation going back to the national organizations. A group of this size should have some impact to put together through this process some feed back to the USDA-APHIS saying here are some guidelines from industry from all the groups represented here.

Task #2

What is the issue? Who is responsible? What should be done?

- Fourteen states — all different regulations
- Lack of communication
- Lack of defined authority
- Stakeholders not always involved

Friday, November 16, 2007

Components of an Action Plan

1. Definition of the problem. (Specificity, clarity)
2. Who is the recipient, intended audience, of the recommendation?
3. What needs to be done? Recommendation(s)

QUESTIONS NEEDING ANSWERS:

- Who is responsible?
- How should it be accomplished?
- When should it be implemented?
- Source of funding?

Expected outcomes of these recommendations?

Where are we going today? What action are we going to take with this diverse group of stakeholders? Each group needs to take ownership in the process. Suggested topics from last night's vote and talk:

1. Uniformity issue across states
2. Access to fish health professionals and labs
3. Testing standards. What tests are appropriate and necessary for moving product across state lines

After much discussion within and between groups, the stakeholders came up with the following action plans for each issue:

Group 1 — The uniformity issues across states (statement needs clarification)

Action —

1. Recommendations should go to all stakeholders
2. Want single contact/state
3. Ask for input from states not attending meeting.
4. Feedback from all states to the question, will they implement?
5. Time frame to put into practice.
6. Timely responses to fish movement request needed.
7. Follow up meeting needed.

Group 2 — Who is the intended recipient of the recommendation? Producers need someone with knowledge of interstate procedures.

Action —

1. Aquaculture group in each state, commodity trade group, go to the legislature and get them to understand that there is a problem and maybe generate funding.
2. Training program for fish health individuals

Comments: Wisconsin has an online training program. It started March 2006 and vet accreditation specific to aquaculture coming to Iowa State University

Group 3 — Testing Standards — No one set of standards accepted by all states

Action —

1. Levels of risk
2. Appropriate level of testing
3. APHIS website showing current state standards

Recommendations: Communication and compliance with interstate movement of aquatic livestock.

Forum Conclusions

Common theme across all groups was the necessity for communication and how to bridge the communication gap. Paul asked, "How would you like to see things move forward and how do you build upon this forum?" ALL stakeholders at the Forum stated that they would like to see the momentum from this meeting carried forward.

- **Aquatic Livestock Alliance Formation**

Do we want to form an aquatic livestock alliance? If we leave here as individuals and we go back to our respective states as individuals that's how we will remain. If we leave here as an alliance group, that we can refer to APHIS or anybody else, we have a little more credibility. We'll never reach any of our goals if we don't bind together.

Motion made and seconded that we create a formal Aquatic Livestock Alliance (ALA).
Vote — all approved

- **The ALA will need a mission statement and officers.**
Proposed Mission Statement
The Aquatic Livestock Alliance (ALA) exists for the purpose of promoting the interstate commerce of aquaculture livestock.
Vote — all approved
- **ALA Executive Board**
Ron Johnson (Public producers), **Tony Forshey** (State vets & Dept of Ag), **Dan Longnecker** (Private producers), **Mike Mason** (State natural resources), **Myron Kebus** (Private vets), and Communications/Web Coordinator - **Robert Baldwin**

ALA Action Plan:

- Form a task force to write articles of incorporation and to write the mission statement
- Get officers in place
- Get a website — get the name out there.
- The group needs to get together before next spring, maybe January or February.
- Membership fees will need to be explored and determined to cover expense of the ALA.

LINKS:

A complete report of this summary is available at: <http://www.aquaticlivestock.org>