

Moderator: Hello, and thank you for joining today's Animal Handling Welfare Review Panel public meeting. I would now like to introduce Michele Esch, executive director of Research, Education, and Economics Advisory Board office. Michele, please go ahead.

Michele: Thank you very much. Good afternoon and good morning to those of you not on the east coast. Welcome to the public meeting of the Animal Handling and Welfare Review Panel. The purpose of this meeting is to present the findings and recommendations on the phase two review of the animal care and well-being at the Agricultural Research Service. The report being reviewed will be found on the Research, Education, Economics website at ree.usda.gov.

In addition, the report being presented today is the pre-public hearing draft. It will be finalized after consideration of the public comments received on the call today and the written comments received. Written comments should be sent to the Animal Handling and Welfare Review Panel email box at ahwrpanel@usda.gov by close of business today. All verbal and written comments will be entered into the public record and will be kept on file in the REE Advisory Board office. Please refer to the Federal Register notice for information.

Briefly I wanted to go over the loose agenda for the call today. We'll do some brief introductions of the panel members. We will review the charge to the panel. We will have a presentation of the report by the chair of the panel, Doctor Aaron Olsen and then we will spend the remainder of the call receiving public comment. Again, I'm Michele Esch. I'm the executive director of the Research, Education, Economics Advisory Board office. Our chair, Doctor Aaron Olsen is on the phone. He is the director of the Laboratory Animal Research Center at Utah State University. Aaron, are you there?

Aaron: I am here, yes.

Michele: Great. We also have Doctor Lonny Dixon, the director and attending veterinarian of the Office of Animal Resources at the University of Missouri.

Lonny: Present.

Michele: We have Doctor Mo Salmon, the professor and director of the Animal Population Health Institute at Colorado State University.

Mo: I'm here.

Michele: Great. Thanks Mo. Not able to join us today is Doctor Stephen Ford, endowed professor at University of Wyoming and our ex-officio member Doctor John

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Clifford the chief veterinary officer for the USDA Animal Plant Health Inspection Service. A big thank you to the panel members for their common service on this panel. We greatly appreciate that. Through all of our site visits and our review, and the drafting of this report.

A quick overview of the charge, just to remind everybody of why we're here and what the purpose of this panel was. The panel was established by the Secretary of Agriculture back in January to review the Agricultural Research Services, research animal care and well-being policies, procedures, and standards for agricultural livestock in the ARS research. The phase one of this charge required an immediate review of the US Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center, Nebraska. Which was completed in March of this year. The phase one report can be found on the REE website.

The phase two portion of the review, which is what we're focusing on today, charged the panel with reviewing three to five additional ALS locations where animal research is conducted, which included the site visits to each of those locations and then section of the facilities, pens, and fields where animals are housed or involved in experimentation. A review of the composition of each location's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, otherwise known as an IACUC including the evidence of meetings and compliance with agencies, policies, and procedures.

Review of processes used to select and evaluate the experimental designs and protocols under the IACUC at each location and assessing the care and well-being training needs for the staff having responsibility for handling animals. The panel was charged with preparing a draft report for the Undersecretary of US of the Research, Education, Economics missionary at USDA. It summarized the findings for each site visited as well as generalized findings for ARS agency-wide. The report was to reach conclusions as to what are the care and handling of animals and the capacity of facilities and staff at each location are in compliance with the institutional P&Ps and industry standards.

Taking into account the fact that ARS has a research mission and not a production mission, the panel also is making location-specific and agency-wide recommendations to improve compliance with institutional P&Ps and industry standards and then making recommendations for changes to institutional P&Ps, providing the oversight of livestock animal care in ARS's research settings. The panel is charged with holding this public meeting to discuss the back report and take input and then once they've considered all of the verbal and written public input, the final report will be submitted to the Undersecretary and posted on the REE website.

Then finally, that report will be provided to the National Agricultural Research Extension Education and Economics Advisory Board for further public deliberation and for additional advice and guidance to the USDA. That meeting will be announced in the Federal Register shortly. That's a brief overview of the charge that was given to the panel in their review of the ARS agency-wide animal research locations and with that, I will now turn it over to Doctor Aaron Olsen, who will present the report and provide an overview of the findings and recommendations.

Aaron: Thank you Michele. This is Doctor Aaron Olsen as indicated, it was my opportunity to serve as the chair of this oversight review committee. In regards to this phase two of our panel's responsibilities, it was our opportunity to visit a total of five ARS research sites across the nation. Specifically, we visited the Livestock and Range Research Laboratory in Fort Keel, Montana. We visited the Livestock Behavior Research Unit, which is located in West Lafayette, Indiana and is co-located with Purdue University. There were visits to the Southeast Poultry Research Laboratory and also the Richard B. Russell Agricultural Research Center, which are both located in Athens, Georgia. Then the fifth location was the National Animal Disease Center which is located in Ames, Iowa.

On each of these visits, not all panel members were present at all visits, however there were at least two panel members present at each site location during the visit. The information and the subsequent findings of those visits were available to all panel members for discussion and review. I will review anybody with interest about the specifics of each site to the report, but I do want to emphasize as animal welfare should be the paramount focus of this panel, we want to emphasize that in no instance did the panel members observe or note any issues or instances of misuse of animals. In every location we observed animals that have appeared to be healthy and well cared for.

Having said that, we did, as indicated in the report, we did make some site-specific recommendations to help them to improve where possible their specific locations and the operation of their IACUC or other oversight activities. We would like to focus this discussion in our review primarily on the ARS-wide findings and recommendations. In particular, we would like to emphasize that ... the different sites that we visited had different arrangements in regards to the function and the interaction of their IACUC with [inaudible 08:52] of the institutions. For example, the facility in West Lafayette, Indiana, the Livestock Behavior Research Unit was completely integrated with Purdue University's Animal Care and Use Committee and used university animals to meet their needs under a clearly-written, specific agreement.

In contrast to that, the National Animal Disease Center in Iowa was a complete stand-alone unit that did not interact with a local institution of higher education or other facility. We want to emphasize that all of the places that we visited and all of their interactions of varying degrees with local research institutions, any of them can be viable and can meet both the intent and the letter of the policies and practices of the ARS as well as other oversight regulations. We want to emphasize through that that we have a finding that the role and the expectations of the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee and particularly the attending veterinarian in all these places that although any of the these models may work, the roles of those two key oversight positions, the IACUC and the attending veterinarian. We're not as fully understood at all institutions as they could be, and with that we would like to present a recommendation that there should be work done across ARS to help harmonize and standardize as appropriate the expectations for IACUC and the attending veterinarians.

We gave some specific points of recommendation under that overall recommendation. In particular to explicitly state the roles and responsibilities of the IACUC as well as the authority of the IACUC and attending veterinarian. To insure that there is adequate administrative and financial support for an IACUC to fulfill its duties. To provide expanded training opportunities both within and without ARS on the role and the function of the IACUC. The development for greater communication between ARS units as a means to share best practices and to help harmonize those expectations and understandings. Where ARS sites are cooperating or collaborating with academic researcher institutions, they should do so under very clearly written agreements in regards to issues of animal welfare and animal use. Again, we want to emphasize that we saw many different models of interaction with academic research institutions of varying degrees of integration and we believe that all of them can work, but they should be done under very clear documentation that highlights both the responsibilities and authority of the various parties involved.

A second finding that we found as a committee is that there were times when service on oversight committees such as an IACUC may have been viewed by some ARS employees as a diversion from their overall job responsibilities. This is an issue that is not necessarily unique to ARS, but we have individuals whose primary job responsibility is to conduct research and to meet the research goals of their institution and sometimes because of the time commitment that can be associated with serving on an IACUC and providing oversight, that it can be viewed as a diversion or a distraction from completing their primary job responsibilities. With that we would like to make the recommendation that participation in research oversight activities such as the IACUC as we have been discussing here, should be an important part of an individual's career

development path and such service should be appropriately considered and recognized during personnel evaluations and also as part of considerations for advancement or promotion.

We want to emphasize that a welcome from IACUC is a vital component of a research institution and would like to find ways to recognize and emphasize the role that IACUC can play and should play in providing adequate oversight. Additional recommendations with that are that we should ensure that adequate funding is provided to maintain and provide the oversight needed. Some additional things in regards to our findings, we talked a little bit about the facilities and there were concerns in some of the facilities that were observed. We did not find ... just to be clear, we did not make a finding that facilities that we observed were inadequate. However, we did note that some facilities were aging and that as facilities continue to age and continue to go through their life cycle, that there will continue to be challenges associated with those facilities. To emphasize, in no case did we find facilities or housing that in any way endangered animal welfare, but there is long-range concerns about the ability of these facilities and buildings to provide both safety and animal welfare housing for the animals as well as the personnel involved. In particular, in those facilities that are involved in infectious disease research.

In regards to animal handling and veterinary care, one of our findings was that individuals within ARS display appropriate and oftentimes exceptionally good animal handling and care. We want to commend all those individuals that we saw and were associated with animal care. We routinely found individuals who were committed to providing excellent animal care and in many ways were committed to not just providing care to the standards that we are aware of but in finding ways to improve and refine animal care. However, our finding is that oftentimes there were limited opportunities for those individuals to disseminate the best practices that they had developed whether within ARS or to the broader research community.

Therefore, we had a recommendation that ARS should provide means for animal care staff and by this we mean all levels of animal care staff to share innovations and best practices both within and without the ARS organization. Concurrent with sharing these best practices, we would encourage ARS to develop means to identify and appropriately recognize those individuals who provide exceptionally good care and develop unique and innovative techniques that lead to improved animal welfare. For example, I would like to site just one example that we observed at the National Animal Disease Center in Ames, Iowa. There were a group of individuals there associated with animal care that were working on what we would consider non-traditional or uncommon species, particularly some wildlife species. They have gone to great efforts to develop ways to improve the

husbandry and care of those animals, to provide those animals enrichment, and to identify those things that were best and most species-appropriate.

We believe that these types of activities should be recognized and commended and opportunists should be provided for those individuals that identify these unique and innovative and improved method of animal care to have ways to share and highlight that work and be recognized for that. In conclusion, we want to emphasize again, we did in no instance find any instances of misuse, abuse, or inappropriate working with animals. We found animals in all locations to be healthy and well cared for and we uniformly found individuals associated with animal care to be committed to their jobs, committed to the well-being and the welfare of their animals, and desirous to do the right thing in regards to the animals that they were responsible for. However, with that we have identified some areas in regards to the IACUC and the oversight, which we believe will help improve and refine animal welfare oversight activities within ARS. We've also identified that while the current facilities are adequate, long-range concerns do arise in regards to the ongoing adequacy of aging facilities within ARS. We hope that this will provide recommendations and refinements to the ARS activities and that this in turn will be viewed by ARS as well as the USDA and the general public as a way to ensure and demonstrate the commitment of ARS and its personnel to animal well-being and welfare. With that I will conclude my report. Thank you.

Michele: Thanks so much, Aaron. Really appreciate it. We are now going to enter the public comment period. The panel does wish to hear the public participants' thoughts and concerns. Please be reminded that the panel will not respond directly to any comments or questions made during the public comment period. Any specific questions should be sent in writing to USDA for a response. They can be sent directly to the Animal Handling and Welfare Review Panel email box which is ahwrpanel@usda.gov. I will now turn the call over to the moderator to give some instructions on the public comment period.

Moderator: Thank you Michele. If you would like to make a comment, please press #1 on your phone to be placed in the queue. You will hear a notification when your line is un-muted. Please then state your name, organization, and comments. We do have one comment. Your line is un-muted, please go ahead.

Nancy: Hi, my name is Nancy Blaney and I am with the Animal Welfare Institute and I just wanted to make a few comments with regard to some findings in the report. Just some random observations. One in particular, especially with the emphasis on the training needed and the dissemination of best practices, we certainly would encourage greater usage by all of the facilities of the Animal Welfare Information Center. This seems to be somewhat ignored and missed in all of the talk about training in particular.

This entity within the USDA was established for this very purpose. For providing a forum for discussing best practices for looking at other research alternatives and having to do with that as well. It is a place for looking better at refining certain research protocols and that takes me to my second comment, which is one of the things that the panel was to look at was the use of IACUCs in reviewing research protocols. Very little was discussed about that. Only once was it mentioned about the questions about the use of the numbers of animals in certain research protocols and only twice was it mentioned with regard to humane end-points being part of the research protocols.

There certainly needed to be more discussion about how the IACUC's reviewed research protocols and looked at other issues such as reducing the numbers of animals used. The question was also raised about IACUC membership and we would certainly encourage more of them for their outside members to look at using a bio-emphasis on their panel. One of the questions that just occurred to me over and over again was why the emphasis on meeting industry standards? It seems to me that the operations at these facilities should exceed industry standards, that part of the purpose of them is to be looking at improving welfare for livestock and it seems to me that it is a bit of a contradiction in terms to be worried about meeting industry standards when they should be exceeding them. Thank you.

Moderator: We do have two more comments. Your line is un-muted, please go ahead.

Deborah : Hi there this is Deborah Press from the ASPCA. Thank you for the opportunity to comment and thank you for your attention to animal welfare at ARS facilities. We endorse your recommendations. Since you were taking input on the report itself, I was hoping that you in your final revision of this report, could provide us a little bit more information on certain aspects of your review.

First of all, how were the facilities chosen? How were these five facilities chosen? Second, how was each inspection structured and conducted? A typical ACES animal care inspection of our research facilities typically consists of an unannounced inspection of the facilities, of the physical site, and a multi-day review of IACUC records and research protocol, and the IACUC review of those research protocols. It was unclear from the report to me how extensive the records review was and that's normally such an enormous part of IACUC inspection, it would have been helpful to see what records you looked at? What records you found and didn't find at particular facilities?

Then third, I was hoping that the panel might be able to provide a description of the understanding that they had of the ARS policies and procedures. Reading the report it seemed that the panel was pretty insistent that research facilities were

complying with ARS policies and procedures but, they set it to different standards. They started to be add drive decided to the guide, decided to the Animal Welfare Office in certain places. It would be helpful for the panel to describe the understanding of the policies and procedures that they were operating under. From the ASPA's perspective, ARS still hasn't clarified its guidance and policies on IACUC compliance or on animal welfare at its research facilities and we think this is probably one of the main reasons that the panel is seeing so much inconsistency. It would be very helpful to know the understanding that the panel is coming from on that point. Thank you.

Moderator: We do have one more comment. Your line is un-muted, please go ahead.

Kathleen: Hi, this is Kathleen Conlee from the Humane Society of the United States. I appreciate the opportunity to provide public comment today. I am going to echo some of the points that have been brought up so far. We fully support the agency's decision to investigate these five facilities and in addition to US MARC, but we do have concerns about the process that was undertaken and the lack of public information about how that was undertaken and hope to including how far back in the historical records the panel members went on these inspections. We are mindful that the ARS facilities anticipated these inspections following the US MARC inspection which gave them opportunity to address their problems, but we are hopeful that the US MARC inspections prompted agency-wide changes to help correct animal welfare issues and we do appreciate the actions to date.

That said, without proper oversight of ARS facilities in their research, we're concerned the animal welfare improvements will be temporary and inconsistent. The report did show that while the institutional animal care needs committees were stronger than that one found at MARC, there was still problems that were identified which were pointed out in the opening remarks. We agree that changes need to be made in these areas and express our support of the panel with recommendations laid out.

We are also pleased with the Animal Welfare Action Plan that ARS updated on June seventeenth. We have been encouraging ARS to follow the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act and to seek ACES inspections of its facilities. We're pleased to see that in the action plan and that the ARS is following the Animal Welfare and Public Health service requirements. We also are encourage the ARS's registering its research facilities with [inaudible 25:26] and seeking out inspections. We believe it should carry out rigorous unannounced inspections and that these results should be made public. We also require strongly urge USDA to require each facility to submit annual reports of their animal research activities. Transparency is absolutely vital.

We continue to get concerns from members of the public and from Congress and want to be able to address and show that this information is transparently available. Finally I want to echo the comments about the Animal Welfare Information Center that the ARS formerly utilized AWIC and to help with training and improved animal care. For example, improved understanding of how to search for information on available alternatives to reassert anything that causes pain and distress. Thank you again for the opportunity to comment and we hope you will take further action as we've requested.

Moderator: There are no more comments in the queue at this time, Michele.

Michele: Thank you very much. We greatly appreciate your comments and we'll take them into consideration as the panel produces their final report which will be posted next Thursday, July twenty-third. Again, thanks to the panel members for your service and your time and any site visits in producing this report. We thank you very much and with that we will conclude our public meeting of the Animal Handling Review and Welfare Panel. Thank you.