

# Program Guidelines for the Voluntary Nebraska Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Herd Certification Program (HCP)

## Part 1 – Definitions

**Animal:** Animals in the genera *Odocoileus*, *Cervus*, and their hybrids.

**Approved State CWD Herd Certification Program:** A program operated by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) for certification of cervid herds with respect to CWD that meet the requirements of 9 CRF part 55.

**Certified CWD Sample Collector:** An individual who has completed appropriate training and is documented by NDA to perform collection, submission, and preservation of samples for CWD testing in farmed cervids.

**Certified Herd:** A Certified herd that has enrolled in the Voluntary Nebraska Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Herd Certification Program (HCP) and met the minimum requirements defined in 9 CFR part 55.

**Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD):** A non-febrile, transmissible, insidious, degenerative disease affecting the central nervous system of deer and elk. CWD, a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy may cause, but is not limited to, the following signs in affected animals:

- Weight loss, poor condition
- Salivating, drooling
- Behavioral abnormalities
- Abnormalities, such as incoordination
- Swaying of back end, weakness
- Recumbency

It is important to note that not all CWD-affected animals show all clinical signs.

**CWD Positive Animal:** An animal which has had a diagnosis of CWD confirmed by the National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Ames, Iowa.

**CWD Positive Herd:** Any herd in which an animal has been determined to be CWD positive.

**CWD Suspect:** An animal which displays clinical signs suggestive of CWD, or for which laboratory analysis is not conclusive.

**Commingling:** Animals are commingled if they have direct contact with each other, have less than 10 feet of physical separation, or share equipment, pasture, or water sources/watershed. Animals are considered to have commingled if they have had such contact with a positive animal or contaminated premises within the last 5 years.

**Department:** The Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA).

**Enrollment Date:** The date on which the Department approved the application, or the date the Department can verify that the requirements listed in Part 2 of these guidelines have been met.

**Enrolled Herd:** A herd participating in the Program which has met the requirements listed in Part 2 of these Guidelines.

**HCP:** Herd Certification Program.

**Herd:** Any group of animals maintained on common ground for any purpose, or two or more groups of animals under common ownership or supervision, geographically separated, but which have an interchange of animals without regard to whether the animals are infected or exposed (i.e. commingled).

**Herd Status:** Classification of a herd with regard to CWD in the Nebraska CWD HCP.

**Owner:** An individual, partnership, company, corporation, or other legal entity, which has legal or rightful title to an animal or animals, regardless of any liens held on the animal(s).

**Premises:** The ground, area, buildings, and equipment occupied by one or more herds of animals.

**Program:** The Nebraska CWD HCP.

**Trace-back Herd:** A herd in which a CWD-positive animal formerly resided.

**Trace-Forward Herd:** A herd that has received exposed animals from a CWD-positive herd within 60 months prior to the diagnosis of CWD in the positive herd or from the identified point of entry of CWD into the positive herd.

## **Part 2 – Requirements for entry into the Program**

- A. Applicant must have a Domesticated Cervine Animal Facility Permit, herd identification number, and be in compliance with the Domesticated Cervine Animal Act and Domesticated Cervine Animal Regulations.
- B. There must be no indication of CWD in the herd in the past 12 months, as attested to by the owner and his veterinarian or Veterinary Field Officer.
- C. Program application form must be completed, signed, and submitted to the Department.

### **Part 3 – Program Protocol**

#### A. General Provisions

The herd owner or manager who participates in the Program shall agree to do the following:

1. Identify all animals 12 months of age or over within the herd, as provided for in Title 23, Chapter 16, Nebraska Administrative Code, Domesticated Cervine Animal Regulations, Section 006. The Permanent Individual Identification must be a USDA-approved eartag and the visible Individual Identification complies with Title 23, Chapter 16, Section 006, as well as provide a unique identification for the individual animal within the herd. The identification requirements apply to all cervine species included in the national CWD HCP.
2. Report all death loss of animals over 12 months of age that die from any cause to NDA within twenty-four (24) hours of the discovery of the death of the animal and **ensure that proper tissue samples are collected and submitted for diagnostic purposes (outlined in Part 5 – Laboratory Submission of Samples).**
3. Maintain a current herd inventory report, which shall include the following records on animals present in the herd:
  - a. All official and visible identification numbers.
  - b. Sex, breed, and age.
  - c. Disposition of animals – date and reason for removal from the herd, including the destination of the animal, if sold.
  - d. Primary and secondary identification numbers, sex and birth dates of progeny.
  - e. Date of birth, date of entry, and source for acquired animals.
  - f. Copies of laboratory reports of CWD submissions.

These records will be kept on each animal for five (5) years after removal from the herd for any reason.

4. Prevent ingress and egress of cervidae by maintaining fencing, as provided in Title 23, Chapter 16, Nebraska Administrative Code, Domesticated Cervine Animal Regulations, Section 5. Report to the Department any domestic cervidae that escape from the herd enclosure or any wild cervidae found in the enclosure, as provided for in Title 23, Chapter 16, Domesticated Cervine Animal Regulations, Section 010.

- a. Make all animals and records available, as provided for in Title 23, Chapter 16, Nebraska Administrative Code, Domesticated Cervine Animal Regulations, Section 13.

B. Inspections

Inspections of CWD-Monitored Herds and their inventory records will be done once a year to reconcile inventories and verify that the Domesticated Cervine Animal (DCA) facility is meeting the DCA and Nebraska CWD HCP requirements.

A physical “hands on” inventory will be performed every three (3) years to verify that the animals listed on the inventory are present or have been accounted for with CWD tests. Physical inventories may be conducted on unrestrained animals if it is possible to visually inspect and verify at least one CWD HCP required identification number and device on each animal, and that information is matched to herd records.

C. Program Status

A herd will gain program status based on the herd’s enrollment date and the continuous number of years in the program. Once a herd is approved to participate in the program, the herd will be considered an enrolled herd with the date of approval being the enrollment date. The status will be dependent on the herd being in compliance with the Program Protocol and being approved annually for advancement in the program.

1. DCA herds that are enrolled in the NDA CWD-monitored program, as of April 1, 2013, shall roll over to the new Nebraska CWD HCP at the status level that was attained in the previous program.
2. Enrolled herd refers to any herd that has been approved to participate in the Program. Eligibility for advancement from one status to the next is based on compliance with program requirements, including the submission of surveillance samples.  
Program Classification will be as follows:

- a. Year 0 – herd is enrolled in the program, but has not completed one year of herd surveillance.
- b. Year 1 – one year of surveillance and successful completion of program requirements.
- c. Year 2 – two years of surveillance and successful completion of program requirements.
- d. Years 3, 4, 5, etc. – for each successive year of surveillance.

- e. At the end of the 5th continuous year of compliance with no findings of CWD in the herd, the status will be considered Certified.

3. Consequences of Poor Quality and Missing Samples

- a. Surveillance of all animal mortalities in a herd is the key to increasing confidence that HCP-certified herds are at low risk for CWD infection. Poor quality samples and missing samples undermine the ability to assess the CWD status of the herd.
- b. Poor quality samples include samples that are severely autolyzed, from the wrong portion of the brain, the wrong tissue, or not testable for other reasons.
- c. Missing samples occur when samples from any animal 12 months of age or older in an enrolled herd that dies, is slaughtered, escapes, or is lost are not submitted for diagnostic testing for CWD.
- d. Herds may lose national herd certification status if it is determined by NDA the herd owner failed to comply with any of the program requirements.
- e. If an animal dies and is not tested for CWD at an approved laboratory, status of the herd will be suspended until one of the following conditions is satisfied:
  - a. two (2) additional animals which are of the same species, and if possible, have resided in the herd for as long as the untested animal are sampled at an approved laboratory following the missed animal, or
  - b. Alternatively, status may be reinstated following two (2) years of no death loss in the herd.

D. Cancellation of Participation – Mandatory and Voluntary

- 1. NDA may cancel the enrollment of a herd by giving written notice to the herd owner after determining the herd owner failed to comply with any HCP requirements.
- 2. An owner may voluntarily cancel participation in the Nebraska CWD HCP at any time unless otherwise required by State regulations or a signed herd plan. Owners who elect to voluntarily cancel participation may re-enroll as a First-year status herd upon approval of the Department, and will receive a new enrollment and status date.

E. Management of CWD Positive, Exposed, or Suspect Herds

- 1. Suspect and exposed animals will be promptly investigated and quarantined until results are returned to determine the disposition of the herd.

2. CWD Positive Herd - If an enrolled herd has a confirmed diagnosis of CWD, the Department will immediately issue a quarantine, and the herd will be removed from the Nebraska CWD HCP.
3. The Department will conduct an epidemiologic investigation of CWD positive, CWD-exposed, and CWD-suspect herds that includes the designation of suspect and exposed animals and that identifies animals to be traced.
4. The Department will conduct trace backs of CWD-positive animals (including positive animals detected at slaughter) and trace-outs of CWD-exposed animals and promptly report any out-of-state traces to the appropriate state.
5. Trace-back or Trace-forward Herd – If an epidemiologic investigation reveals an enrolled herd to be a Trace-back or Trace-forward herd, the Department will issue a hold order, quarantine, or suspend the Nebraska CWD HCP status, and will develop a herd plan based on the epidemiological investigation. Movement restrictions for these herds may only be removed after completion of the herd plan agreement.
6. The tissues from all CWD-exposed or CWD-suspect animals that die or are depopulated or otherwise killed will have obex and medial retropharyngeal lymph nodes collected and tested for CWD. Carcasses or tissues from these animals shall be disposed of in an approved manner, as described in the USDA Veterinary Services (VS) Chronic Wasting Disease Program Standards, May 2019.

F. Acquisitions and Commingling

1. Enrolled herds may acquire animals from another enrolled herd with the same or higher management level and the status will remain the same as before the acquisition. If the animals are of a lower status, the herd will take on the lower status of the animals that were acquired.
2. When establishing a new herd entirely from an enrolled herd, the herd of origin's status level will transfer to the new herd, if the new herd owner notifies the Department and submits an application for participation in the program within 30 days of the animals' arrival on the farm and before any herd additions.

G. Use of Semen and Embryos

Enrolled herds may not use germplasm from any donor herd found to be CWD positive.

#### H. Animals Imported From Foreign Countries

Imported animals from foreign countries may enter the program at the appropriate level; if they have an equivalent certification program, or are recognized free of CWD by Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) standards. If animals, at any time, commingle with animals of a lower program status before entering the recipient herd, the herd will assume the lowest status of the commingled herds.

#### **Part 4 – Herd Information**

NDA will maintain Quarantines, Herd Plans, Infected Herds, and Herd Certification in the federal Surveillance Collaboration Services (SCS) database. The individual animal data will be maintained in spreadsheets at the Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

#### **Part 5 – Laboratory Submission of Samples**

1. It shall be the responsibility of the owner to ensure complete, good quality tissue samples are collected and immediately arrange for submission of the required CWD samples of all animals twelve (12) months of age or older, which die from any cause.
2. Samples should be submitted to an APHIS-approved laboratory **within 7 days** of collection.
3. The collection of samples may only be collected by the following individuals: a State or Federal official, accredited veterinarians documented to be proficient in collection techniques, or an NDA certified-CWD sampler. All expenses shall be paid by the owner. The owner may contact the Department for information on certified CWD samplers at (402) 471-2351.
4. An NDA certified-CWD sampler will receive training on the correct procedure to collect the required samples. Once approved as a certified-CWD sampler, the individual will be added to the CWD sampler list. It is recommended for facilities to have more than one certified CWD sampler per herd to assure collection and submission of samples are acquired and submitted in a timely fashion.
5. If the certified-CWD sampler demonstrates, a series or pattern of missed samples, or failure to collect quality samples, NDA will remove them from the certified-CWD sampler list, and the owner will be required to utilize another certified CWD sampler to collect their samples. Once certification is lost, it can be reinstated by retraining and demonstrating proper technique to NDA personnel. If the certified-CWD sampler continues to collect improper samples, NDA can permanently remove the CWD sampler from the list.

## 6. Required Samples:

- **Formalin-fixed specimens** are used for immunohistochemistry (IHC) testing and histopathology for routine herd surveillance. Tissues required are Obex and Medial Retropharyngeal Lymph Node (MRPLN). **The Obex and MRPLN should be collected regardless of sample condition (e.g. autolyzed, frozen, etc.) and submitted to the approved laboratory to comply with the routine herd surveillance requirement.**
- Confidence in CWD detection is increased when **both** the Obex and MRPLN are tested.
- Use a single container for each animal. ***Do not freeze the formalin-fixed specimens.***
- **MRPLN:** half of each of the left and right lymph node.  
**Obex** with 1-2 cm brain stem (including the apex of the “V” in the obex).
- The following **FRESH** tissues are required to be included with each sample submitted for CWD testing:
  1. the trimmed pieces of brainstem from each side of the obex,
  2. the other halves of the MRPLN's,
  3. the official ID/ear tag attached to a piece of **FRESH** tissue. If part of the ear cannot be removed (i.e. for taxidermy purposes) then the identification tag should be affixed to a separate piece of the hide skin and submitted with the diagnostic specimens. If the original official tag is damaged or cannot be affixed, a new official ID tag should be affixed to the hide skin and correlated to the original ID.