



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Marketing and
Regulatory
Programs

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

Washington, DC
20250

August 31, 2001

Dr. Matthew Cartter
President
Council of State and
Territorial Epidemiologists
Suite 303
2872 Woodstock Boulevard
Atlanta, Georgia 30341-4015

Dear Dr. Cartter:

Thank you for your letter of July 20, 2001, to Secretary Veneman regarding a position statement about West Nile virus (WNV) passed by the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists in June 2001.

We appreciate your concerns about this disease and understand your wish to have the cooperation and support of our Agency for surveillance, research, and control activities. I assure you that our Agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is committed to working cooperatively with our State partners to monitor and help control the spread of WNV. In this regard, we recognize your request for our Agency to develop a WNV grant program to help fund State agricultural agencies, veterinary diagnostic laboratories, zoologic institutions, and universities; however, I must explain that our Agency is already conducting many of the activities for which you would like us to provide grants. We believe the limited funds we have for WNV would be used most wisely within our Agency programs, which already have the necessary infrastructure and field support.

In fiscal year (FY) 2001, our Agency was authorized to use \$400,000 from our emergency contingency fund to pay for WNV surveillance efforts, laboratory testing, and related studies. The money was divided equally between our Veterinary Services and Wildlife Services programs. These two programs are cooperating with the lead Federal agency in the WNV effort—the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—as well as State and local authorities throughout the South and East. Among other things, we are assisting with surveillance of wild bird populations, providing diagnostic testing services, and augmenting efforts to find cases of equine encephalitis. The surveillance data we have collected is being used to further develop national public health strategies for WNV surveillance, control, and prevention.

As you know, one of our Agency's main goals is to protect animal health. Our Center for Veterinary Biologics has granted a conditional license for a WNV vaccine for equines. Although the vaccine has not yet been proven fully efficacious under field conditions, it is a major step in protecting horses against WNV.



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In New York, we have established a dead bird surveillance hotline, which is helping to predict where the WNV threat to humans is highest. In Alabama, New Hampshire, and Vermont, we have worked closely with State and county health departments to collect dead birds and coordinate dead bird testing. In fact, at the request of the Alabama Department of Health, our Wildlife Services program is coordinating the entire cooperative WNV effort in Alabama. We are also conducting a pilot study to determine the role that birds living in close association to people may play in the spread of the disease. In addition, we are cooperating with the U.S. Department of the Interior's U.S. Geological Survey, whose National Wildlife Health Center is coordinating a migratory bird study along the Atlantic Coast. Our Agency's National Wildlife Research Center has submitted a grant proposal to the CDC to study bird-to-bird transmission and fecal-to-bird transmission of WNV.

As I mention above, all of the funding that our Agency has been authorized to spend for WNV activities has come through our emergency contingency fund. However, we have established an internal WNV management team to coordinate our response to the disease if we receive any appropriated dollars. If you have any further questions or suggestions, you may wish to contact Dr. Randall Crom, a leader on the WNV team. His address is Veterinary Services, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA, Unit 41, 4700 River Road, Riverdale, Maryland 20737. His telephone number is (301) 734-8073.

In the meantime, our Agency is committed to providing support and technical assistance to our Federal, State, and local cooperators. Working together, we will be able to increase our understanding the spread of WNV and then initiate management activities to mitigate the disease's impact on human and animal health.

In FY 2001, Congress provided funding to the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) for WNV research. ARS scientists at the Center for Medical, Agricultural, and Veterinary Entomology (CMAVE), Gainesville, Florida, are developing new trapping systems for the detection, population monitoring, and control of mosquito vectors of WNV as well as new biologically-based (mosquito baculovirus) control technology. Both technologies are currently being tested in New York, Connecticut, and Florida. In addition, CMAVE scientists possess world-class expertise in the development and use of mosquito repellents and personal protection technology.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Reed", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Craig A. Reed
Administrator