



EarthWatch Rhode Island



Topic: Safeguarding Rhode Island's Animal Health

Filmed August 27, 2006 at the Washington County Fair, Richmond, Rhode Island

Background

Approximately one million domestic animals live in the state of Rhode Island. Of that, about half are cats and dogs and the other half is livestock and other pets. Safeguarding animal health is important to the Rhode Island economy, public health, and food supply. DEM is responsible for numerous programs to keep Rhode Island animals, as well as those who visit from other states, healthy. While private veterinarians and local animal control officers assume most of the responsibility for household pets, the Department's efforts focus on livestock, diseases of concern, disaster planning and the licensing and inspection of pet shops, kennels and animal control facilities.

The health of Rhode Island's dairy and livestock is of particular importance as the state aggressively promotes local agriculture and agricultural products as a way to sustain the farming industry. Examples of DEM-supported efforts include Rhody Fresh Milk, the Rhode Island Raised Meat Cooperative, Rhody Warm Wool Blanket project, and free-range poultry and eggs. In addition, petting zoos, fairs, circuses and farm animal exhibits promote agri-tourism and allow people of all ages to come face to face with farm animals and livestock. These industries as well as others rely on healthy livestock to produce quality products and to protect public health.

However, different types of livestock can carry different diseases and some can be transmitted to people. (Diseases that can be transmitted to humans are called zoonoses). For example, cows and calves can carry the bacterium *E. coli* (ee COH-lie). Pigs can carry the bacterium *Yersinia enterocolitica* (yer-SIN-ee-ah en-TER-o-koh-LIH-tee-kuh). Chickens can carry bacteria such as Salmonella, (sal -mon - Nell - ah). Many of these germs are in farm animal manure and can make people sick.

The Division of Agriculture's Animal Health Unit protects both the animals and the public by administering and enforcing state laws to control animal and zoonotic diseases. Rabies, Avian Influenza, EEE, brucellosis, and tuberculosis are currently diseases of major concern to the Department. The Animal Health Unit, which currently consists of the State Veterinarian, an Animal Health Technician and an Administrative Assistant, tests and examines approximately 5000 animals each year.



Former State Veterinarian Dr. Christopher Hannafin examines a pig at the Washington County Fair

DEM also checks to make sure that livestock entering or leaving Rhode Island have Certificates of Veterinary Inspection or CVI. A CVI, issued by a licensed veterinarian, provides documentation that an animal or a group of animals is healthy and shows no sign of contagious or communicable diseases. In the event of a disease outbreak, investigators use CVI's to track the disease back to its source and identify potentially exposed animals or people.

As the Department does its part to protect animal health, it also encourages Rhode Islanders to take precautions to help prevent illnesses when visiting animal exhibits:

- Find out where hand-washing stations are located.
- Always wash your hands after petting animals or touching the animal enclosure, especially before eating and drinking. Running water and soap are best. Use hand gels if running water and soap are not available.
- Keep food and drinks out of animal areas.
- Do not share your food with animals.
- Supervise children and never allow them to put their hands or objects (i.e. pacifiers) in their mouth while interacting with animals.



Julie Brodner of Cottrell Homestead Farms tells NBC10 Reporter Lisa Purcell about the importance of DEM's animal health care program to her as a farmer.

For more information about livestock issues and diseases, visit the Division of Agriculture website at www.dem.ri.gov or the Center for Disease Control's Healthy Pets Healthy People website at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/>.

For more information about household pets, contact your veterinarian or visit the Rhode Island Veterinarian Medical Association at <http://www.rivma.org/>.

On-Camera Interviews:

- Michael Sullivan, Director, DEM
- Julie Brodner of Cottrell Homestead Farms (A Rhody Fresh Farm)



DEM Director Michael Sullivan introduces a cow to the camera as DEM Animal Health Technician Marisa Davis looks on.