

# **Animal Health** *Network*

Your Local Information Link for Animal Safety and Security

## **Introducing the Animal Health Network to Administration in Extension**

The following text can be used as a conversation starter when introducing the Animal Health Network to administrators in Extension.

The concept for the Animal Health Network emerged from a series of focus groups conducted in 2006 aimed at identifying key social communications systems and institutions; credible sources of information, and key languages; and indicators of how to effectively communicate with underserved communities of backyard, non-commercial, and hobbyist livestock and poultry owners.

Based on focus group discussions, the primary source of information for this population was word of mouth from trusted individuals, feed retail owners, and local Extension educators.

It was also discovered that local feed retailers, especially in the more rural settings, would be less likely to participate in a nation-wide or even state-wide network, but would participate in a local network maintained by their local Extension educator.

Based on this ... it was proposed that a two-way emergency education and communications network linking state veterinarians to feed retailers through the established Extension system in each county, could be created to reach into this underserved community with science-based animal disease-related information and alerts directly from the State Veterinarian's office.

Such a network contributes to the protection of the nation's food and agriculture infrastructure and helps support commercial interests and achieve missions of the Department of State Health Services, the United States Department of Agriculture, state animal health agencies, state land-grant universities, commercial animal industries, private veterinarians, county Extension agents, and feed retail managers.

The goal of the network is to add value – not serve as a news release system ....the goal of the network is to deliver the state veterinarian's message through the established Extension system at critical times. The message to be delivered MUST be very specific, tell what has happened and tell groups what to do.

Adoption of the Animal Health Network has the potential to reduce the vulnerability of the nation's food production sector by allowing early detection and rapid response to animal diseases in noncommercial herds and flocks.

For example, if the Animal Health Network were ultimately adopted in all U.S. states and territories with only 70% of all 3,066 U.S. counties participating (2,146 counties), Network messages would have the potential to reach over 1.7 million non-commercial livestock and poultry owners within one week of the message receipt by local feed retailers.

