



I am often asked, “How is everything going with NADeFA?” or “How is the industry?”. These are not simple questions to answer and there sure is no short answer to either of them. What I can quickly say is that we have more things going in our favor than we have in the last decade. Even if I look back five years, we have made great

strides, and in the last two years we have gained tremendously! But we still have a long way to go! There are many challenges in front of us, but I am excited about the new technology and tools we have available to confront them.

We have been talking about the need for better diagnostics, or a live test for CWD, as long as I can remember. Guess what? We have one! As a matter of fact, the test is even validated and approved in our CWD Program Standards to be used to clear trace investigations. This same live test (rectal lymph tissue tested by IHC) was used as a pilot project in Ohio, it has been used by many breeders in Texas to regain movement qualifications, and it has been used in several research projects funded by our NADeFA Cervid Livestock Foundation. The test works well, but we need to start using it on a larger scale to build data and confidence, such as was the case many years ago when we first started using the TB Blood test.

How about the latest news that they have discovered prions in semen? I am surprised at the people that seem to think this is big news. Heck, they have found prions in feces, urine, saliva, blood, meat, soil, plants, bird and other scavenger droppings, so what is the big news that they found prions in semen? I would have been shocked if they had not found them! What I think is fantastic is the technology in these amplification tests such as RT-QuIC and PMCA; they are becoming so sensitive that they can find prions in all of these samples. What we don't know is what it truly means to find prions at such microscopic levels that they must be amplified hundreds of thousands of times to detect them. Just because they can detect them does not mean they are infectious at their normal levels! More research is needed.

What I truly am excited about is that when they compare these amplification tests, such as RT-QuIC, to our “Gold Standard” IHC method they find that IHC can miss early infections. This has little impact on our farmed deer as our Certification Programs require 100% testing of every animal that dies, so we are guaranteed to detect disease within our herds. But, what about the wildlife surveillance on the other side of the fence? They are using biased surveillance methods by relying on hunters which traditionally target fat healthy animals and then use a test without the ability to detect early infections. This explains why we see so many states fail to identify endemic areas until after CWD has spilled into our farms and is picked up by our Monitoring Programs.

So, where am I going with all of this? Right now, as this is being written, deer of all the various CWD genomic markers believed to be resistant to CWD, are on their way to the Prion Research Unit at the National Animal Disease Center, USDA-Agricultural Research Service in Ames, Iowa. These same amplification tests can be used to answer questions such as “what is the true incubation period for CWD and how will it vary within whitetail deer alleles linked to CWD resistance?”. As we learn about the incubation period, we also will be able to answer even more important questions such as, “do they still shed disease and if so when do they start to shed disease?”. All of these projects will be more streamlined than in years past because of these new technologies. The projects will also help validate these more sensitive tests and develop guidelines we can use as tools to manage our herds within CWD endemic areas.

I receive a lot of questions asking about humic acid and its effects on CWD. I wish I had better answers, but the truth is that we do not know much more today than we did a year ago when I brought the lead researcher, Dr Judd Aiken, to the NADeFA convention in Tulsa to explain what he found about humic acid degrading prions in the environment. I can tell you that the trials conducted within our industry indicate that we need to continue moving forward to learn more – which is better than if they failed and directed us to look for something else. I also can say that in moderation and at recommended levels there can be other health benefits to feeding humic acid and using it as a soil treatment to fertilize your ground. What I do know for certain is that we have plenty of research projects, positive herds, and farms within endemic areas to continue the evaluation of the benefits of humic acid, and these new amplification tests will be the perfect tools to get us the answers in a more timely manner.

While I am talking about successful research, I would like to remind everyone that has ever dealt with EHD, that we now have a vaccine which was validated by USDA/CVB to develop and maintain an antibody response to EHD-2. Medgene labs, in South Dakota, has EHD-2 available right now and should have EHD 1 and 6 later this summer (Bluetongue to follow). I have also been working with Kansas State University and USDA/ARS to develop EHD vaccines using similar technologies which will also offer protection against all three EHD strains. The initial challenge studies look very promising and there is a small vaccine company within Texas that is interested in producing this vaccine for our industry. So, we possibly could have a couple different products to pick from in the next year or two.

This news update is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to all the true details behind the scenes. None of these things “just happened”; they all are a result of many years of effort, thousands of miles driven, hundreds of flights flown, and countless days away from home, involving too many





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NADeFA News (Cont.)

people to list. The one common factor that cannot be disputed is that NADeFA was neck-deep involved and has never swayed from our goal of putting disease issues behind us and keeping commerce moving! If you want to hear more about these projects or want to do more to be involved and proactive in protecting your family's investments and livelihood, please consider making the trip to our NADeFA conference in French Lick, Indiana, March 26th – 28th. Your support is needed in order to continue these efforts! We still need donations and are accepting sponsorships of all levels. If you cannot make it, please consider at least calling the NADeFA office and telling

them you can't make it but would like to donate \$200 toward protecting your future (this would also be a good time to renew your membership).

Remember that the North American Deer Farmers Association belongs to You, and it is not too late to register for the conference, book your hotel, or make a donation. See you in French Lick!!

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