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A ranking of animal diseases in the province

sets the stage for better control and prevention of outbreaks

Early detection and rapid response

Prince Edward Island
CANADA

Canada

A new surveillance system is being developed on Prince Edward Island (PEI) that will make it easier to control and prevent animal disease outbreaks in the province.

Department of Agriculture and Land veterinary epidemiologist Dr. Ibrahim Elsohaby said the work was already underway last year when COVID-19 put an international spotlight on the risk of animal to human disease transmission.

In a series of workshops, Dr. Elsohaby met with agricultural producers, researchers, veterinarians, testing labs and public health officials to determine which animal diseases should be a part of a PEI surveillance system.

"We ranked 127 animal diseases in terms of their risk to human and animal health and their potential impact on Island agricultural sectors and the economy," he said.

The rankings cover six groups – bovine, swine, horses, sheep and goats, poultry, and bees.

The province is already a member of the Canadian Animal Health Surveillance Network, a group of federal, provincial and university animal health laboratories that work together on early detection and rapid response to animal disease threats.

When major animal disease outbreaks occur in Canada, emergency response teams for each commodity and a fully coordinated Incidence Command System involving all levels of government kick into gear.

"A system to track local cases of animal disease is what the province is working on," said Dr. Elsohaby.

As well, under PEI's *Animal Health Act*, not all animal diseases need to be reported to provincial authorities.

Based on his new rankings of animal diseases, Dr. Elsohaby said he will recommend adding to the list of notifiable diseases under the Act.

"We have developed a prioritization tool which ranks animal diseases from most important to the least important so that we can target diseases with the resources we have," he said.

"The next step is to develop the infrastructure which allows us to collect this data from veterinarians and testing labs so that we can analyze it and see where trends may be forming and where we might be able to take preventative action."

Provincial veterinarian Dr. Jill Wood says the new disease prioritization model will give her more information to work with when she responds to calls about animal diseases.

"The report of an animal disease is not necessarily going to lead to a quarantine or an order to destroy the animals," she said. "For some diseases, the response might be just phoning the individual farm and following up."

"But if we see by the data that there is a trend, that there is more disease than people thought, we may want to expand that individual call and follow up with other producers in the sector and hold some training sessions on prevention."

Dr. Elsohaby said he based his animal disease ranking design on one used by the internationally recognized Centre for Disease Control in Atlanta.

To rank the diseases, he also followed the One Health concept that assumes that animals, humans, and the environment are all connected.

Dr. Elsohaby said the perspectives of producer representatives in the workshops were important in establishing the disease rankings.

"Diseases can have socio-economic impacts and those who work on the farm and deal with the direct consequences have a unique perspective that needs to be in the equation," he said.

He said the next step will be to develop a system to get positive test results into a reporting data base that can be analyzed on an on-going basis.

"We don't have the resources to track every disease, but we can track the ones that matter most, and once the system is in place, we can build on it," he said.

He added that animal disease prioritization and surveillance will continue to be modified to include new and emerging diseases.

The animal disease prioritization exercise was supported in part through the federally and provincially funded Canadian Agricultural Partnership.