

## **Diagnostic Sample Submissions for Animals**

Lambing, kidding, and calving seasons are well underway and the typical questions about abortions, calf scours, and other problems have been asked. This week I was asked if I would provide some general guidelines about obtaining help with disease diagnosis.

First of all, getting at least a tentative diagnosis is crucial to formulating appropriate and cost-effective treatment, control, or prevention plans. Sometimes this isn't easy or simple, but it should start with your local veterinarian. Most veterinarians can provide at least some diagnostic services that might include bacterial culturing, blood work, and post mortem examination of dead animals. If additional testing is needed, the veterinarian might send samples they have collected to a laboratory for additional testing. A full diagnostic effort on a live animal, especially a valuable one, might involve sending the animal to a referral center such as the OSU College of Veterinary Medicine's large animal hospital. This may be needed for situations involving several animals.

Occasionally, a veterinarian will recommend that an animal owner deliver a dead animal or other samples to a diagnostic laboratory such as the ODA's Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory. This is a full service laboratory accredited by the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians. They can perform post mortem examinations and collect appropriate samples for further testing, and they can provide diagnostic tests for other kinds of samples such as placentas from abortion cases or tissue samples for trace mineral analysis (copper, selenium, lead, etc.).

When an owner delivers animals or other samples to the Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory, they will be asked to provide information about the problem and any other pertinent observations. Often the veterinarian will call ahead to provide the laboratory some of this information and to let the laboratory people know that the animal/samples are coming. If the veterinarian hasn't called in advance, the animal owner will be asked the name of his or her veterinarian. Results of post mortem examinations and diagnostic tests as well as charges for the service are sent to this veterinarian. Usually the Laboratory sends out a preliminary report of the postmortem findings the next work day followed by test results within just a few days. Sometimes owners and veterinarians can get information about the initial findings almost immediately depending on the case. Also, with the laboratory's current computer system veterinarians can access the cases they are managing for lab results and updates day or night, 24/7, year round. A final report is sent to the veterinarian as soon as all results are available. Laboratory results are considered medical records and the veterinarian shares them with the animal owner.

Sometimes there is an urgent need to submit a large animal to the Laboratory on a weekend in order to be able to preserve the animal under refrigeration conditions until the post mortem examination can be done. Regular necropsy and diagnostic services are not available on

weekends, but arrangements for this can be made by calling ahead at 1-614-728-6220. If the call is made after normal work hours (8 AM – 5 PM Monday through Friday), an after-hours emergency phone number is provided. Please note there is an after-hours service fee of \$75 in addition to the costs of diagnostic tests. In some cases, the veterinarian can perform the postmortem examination in the field, keep fresh samples refrigerated over the weekend (and formalin-fixed tissue samples at room temperature) and ship them overnight to the lab on the next work day.

Treatment and control efforts carried out without an accurate diagnosis may be costly and ineffective and may compromise animal welfare. Today's economic climate requires using the best information you can get.

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