

NEWS RELEASE

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Province not adequately prepared for an animal disease emergency: Auditor General

WINNIPEG – The Province is working to prevent and prepare for animal diseases, but further work needs to be done, says Auditor General Tyson Shtykalo. This finding is contained in a new report, *Animal Disease Preparedness*, released today.

The audit assessed whether the Department of Agriculture and Resource Development (the Department) is prepared for an animal disease emergency. The audit found the province has taken steps to prevent animal disease emergencies, but preparation efforts have been inadequate.

“Even with rigorous prevention activities, some animal disease will still occur,” Shtykalo said. “As a result, it’s important that appropriate preparation is done to minimize the impact of diseases when they occur. We found the Department has not taken sufficient steps to prepare for an animal disease emergency.”

An animal disease emergency could have significant consequences for the economy and potentially threaten the health of Manitobans. Manitoba’s agriculture sector is a major economic driver — responsible for 9% of the provincial GDP in 2019. That year, farm cash receipts were valued at \$6.6 billion, with \$2.4 billion of that coming from livestock. “If an animal disease were to disrupt the agriculture industry, there could be significant consequences, including widespread consumer alarm and the culling of livestock,” Shtykalo said.

The audit found the Department identified animal diseases—both known and emerging—that are of higher risk for Manitoba, but it did not have any documented rationale for prioritizing these diseases. The audit also found response plans were not in place for most of these diseases of interest. As a result, the Department had not determined what equipment, supplies, and personnel would be needed to respond to an emergency.

“Each specific disease carries its own set of risks and circumstances,” Shtykalo said. “Along with a more generic response plan for responding to any animal disease emergency, we expected the Department would have a response plan for each of the diseases of interest.”

The audit also found Manitoba has a livestock traceability system in place to track the movement and location of animals, but improvements are needed. For example, the report states some of the systems are not fully integrated with each other, which means staff must input information manually. This could result in delays in sharing critical information during an animal disease emergency.

In addition, the audit found that while legislation authorizing prevention activities exists, many needed regulations have not been developed. “Regulations are necessary as they provide specifics on how to apply legislation to avoid misinterpretation or misuse of power,” Shtykalo said.

The report notes the Department has given limited consideration to recovery from an animal disease emergency. Recovery efforts could be needed for the people involved with the animals including producers, veterinarians, and department staff, and could include financial assistance, mental health supports, and job retraining.

The report contains 13 recommendations. **To view the report, please visit** <http://www.oag.mb.ca/reports>.

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For more information contact:

Frank Landry, Communications Manager
204.792.9145
frank.landry@oag.mb.ca