

**Testimony on House Bill 294**

by

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Senate Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation Committee:

The Montana Department of Livestock supports this bill to provide protections for agricultural data for the following reasons.

1. The sustainability of a ranching operation can be negatively impacted by a false positive test result.
  - Some diseases such as trichomoniasis, Johne's and others are difficult to diagnose and there is no "gold standard" test that would positively identify a herd as infected.
2. Preliminary clinical diagnosis or laboratory results may be wrong, and result in significant and undesirable market fluctuations.
  - As an example, a rumor of a positive diagnosis of foot and mouth disease (FMD) at a Kansas market in 2002 resulted in tens of millions of dollars in cattle futures fluctuations.
3. The concern over lack of confidential response by state animal health officials can result in slower or lack of reporting of suspicious symptoms in one's herd.
  - This delay in response to emerging and foreign animal diseases in the livestock population would cause greater disease spread and financial impact on the industry, state and nation.
4. Decrease participation of livestock producers in surveillance programs resulting in:
  - Less effective animal health programs that rely on voluntary submissions of samples by producers and their veterinarians

- A negative impact on public health because the majority of animal diseases including tuberculosis, brucellosis, rabies, and anthrax are transmissible from animals to people. Decreased surveillance in the animal population, therefore have a negative impact on public health.
- As an example, national H1N1 (swine flu) surveillance and swine dropped to 33 swine farms in July of 2010 because of concerns by swine producers over the lack of confidentiality in sample submissions. This decreased collection on the occurrence of the disease in swine prevented public health from understanding the potential threat to the human population. After the confidentiality issue was resolved, the number of submissions increased over fivefold within four months.

In conclusion, human health entities provide protections for patient information. Likewise, the federal government and neighboring states have recognized a critical need to maintain confidentiality of diagnostic and animal health information for the reasons cited above. Protections for this information help individual producers, protect animal health and public health.

For these reasons, I urge an expedient PASS on HB294.