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**Testimony of Jesse L. Vollmer, DVM
Assistant State Veterinarian
Senate Bill 2342
Senate Agriculture Committee
Roosevelt Room
January 29, 2009**

Chairman Flakoll and members of the Agriculture Committee, I am Assistant State Veterinarian Jesse Vollmer. I am here today on behalf of the North Dakota Department of Agriculture and the State Board of Animal Health (BOAH) in support of SB 2342, which if passed will provide state funds for the ND Voluntary Johne's disease control program.

Johne's disease is a bacterial disease of both wild and domestic ruminants. The disease causes chronic diarrhea and weight loss. There is no treatment for the disease and it is always fatal. I have enclosed a detail explanation of the disease with my testimony for you review.

North Dakota BOAH has administrated a Johne's program for eight years. The Johne's program that we currently have in place, tests herds for the disease, classifies herds as to severity of the problem and provides an educational component to producers to have the disease and to those that may not be aware of the disease. Currently we have 185 farms participating in the testing portion of the program.

The most important aspect of the Johne's disease program is the biosecurity and preventive actions that it teaches by filling out and adhering to the management practices identified in the required risk assessment. If a farm/ranch is doing the management practices necessary to prevent Johne's, it will go a long way towards preventing other diseases that are also spread via fecal oral contamination.

Primarily because of the way animals are handled, this is a disease seen most commonly in dairy herds. Data from the 1996 dairy NAHMS study indicates that the lost opportunity cost to producers is over 200 dollars per cow per year in an infected herd. We are asking for similar data for beef herds, but due to the complexity and diversity of the industry and the inability to minimize the variables within and between beef herds, this data collection is extremely difficult. I am sure if this data was available it would relate to millions of dollars lost production to our beef producers.

The disease was quarantinable in the state of North Dakota until the mid-90's. From a practicing veterinarian's view point it was financially devastating for a client to have the disease diagnosed in their herd. All animals from the herd then had to be sold only for slaughter only. This law was thankfully changed in the middle of the last decade. However, the disease was infecting new herds yearly during this period. Also during this time period, both veterinarians and animal scientists were telling producers to feed colostrum and lots of it to calves that were stressed at birth. The current thinking at the time was that the best source of colostrum was the local dairy, so it was a common practice and now we are now left to clean up the disease that got a foothold in the state and still exists.

Most of the funding for this program has come from USDA APHIS cooperative agreements. However, the state provided \$177,500 to Johne's program for 2001 biennium. Current indications are that the federal government will end its Johne's program funding in March of this year, leaving no means of funding to maintain the existing program.

The monies being asked for will cover the program at the current level of participation for the upcoming biennium. Testing assistance consists of direct payments to producers to help defray the costs of testing. Technical assistance covers the costs of the private certified veterinarians to do the required risk assessments and agreement forms. The education line in the bill will cover efforts to further educate both participating and nonparticipating producers as well as veterinarians on the disease and pertinent new research and technologies as they become available. Office support is to help cover the cost to the North Dakota State Board of Animal Health to administer the program.

We have many diseases that affect animals in the world and some are easier than others to diagnose, treat and eradicate/control. Since this disease is expensive, time consuming and difficult to deal with for livestock producers, we are asking for continued support to provide funding for this important disease issue. For these reasons, we urge a "do pass" on SB2342.