West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Testifies to Congress on CWD Research

Charleston W.Va. -- On Wednesday, December 4, 2019, West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt testified before the U.S. Senate’s Committee on Environment and Public Works as the key expert witness on the current status of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), as well as the captive cervid industry. The U.S. Senate is exploring potential legislation to establish a Chronic Wasting Disease Task Force to further study the issue.

“Bringing various partners together to study how prion-based diseases affect domesticated livestock can only be beneficial to U.S. Agriculture. Understanding how these diseases migrate will further help us contain and cure the diseases,” said Commissioner Leonhardt. “This is not just an issue isolated to cervids but to all livestock. We hope Congress will take this matter seriously.”

Commissioner Leonhardt had five minutes to present a brief overview to the Committee on Environment and Public followed by an additional five minutes for questions. Commissioner Leonhardt and the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) submitted a full report to the committee as part of the testimony. During his allotted time, Commissioner Leonhardt asked Congress to put forth a coordinated effort to tackle prion research for all domesticated livestock.

“The WVDA and the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources have done a great job taking the necessary precautions to contain the spread of CWD in our state. Despite our efforts, we still understand very little about the disease. It is time we put more resources towards a solution,” Leonhardt said.

Chronic Wasting Disease was first found in West Virginia in 2005. Currently, seven counties (Grant, Mineral, Hardy, Hampshire, Morgan, Berkeley and Jefferson) are
under a CWD Containment Area. The disease has not been found in any captive cervid operations.

For Commissioner Leonhardt’s comments click here

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The West Virginia Department of Agriculture protects plant, animal and human health through a variety of scientific, regulatory and consumer protection programs. The Commissioner of Agriculture is one of six statewide elected officials who sits on the Board of Public Works.

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