

NDA's Commercial Feed Inspections Benefit Consumers and Manufacturers

It's a cloudy, blustery and cold morning in east-central Nebraska, a typical April day in the Cornhusker state. Agriculture Inspection Specialist Chelsea Mills pulls into the parking lot of a large farm supply store, parks her vehicle, and opens the hatch to retrieve the tools she needs for the next hour or so.

The contents of her leather bag include metal probes, a plastic scoop, various stickers, plastic sample bags and other miscellaneous items. She grabs the necessary items, her laptop, a pen and a clipboard, and heads into the store to begin work for the day. Mills is one of five Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) field inspectors across the state who are part of the **Commercial Feed Program** administered through the **Animal and Plant Health Protection** focus area.

The program's mission is twofold: safeguard human food derived from animals as well as animal health; and ensure feed is safe, unadulterated and honestly prepared.

The program has a large list of responsibilities including inspecting manufacturing and retail facilities where livestock feed and/or pet food are processed or sold.

"We certainly want to make sure that all livestock feed and pet food are stored in an environment that prevents contamination and keeps the products safe for consumption," NDA Program Manager Steve Gramlich who oversees the Commercial Feed Program said. "Just as important is to make sure what manufacturers put on the label is what is really in the bag."





At a farm supply store, a livestock feed sample is extracted using a probe.

Those were Mills' objectives as she headed into the farm supply store. She immediately went to the livestock feed and pet food section and examined the area.

"I'm checking to make sure there aren't any broken bags, insect problems or animal feces," said Mills. "When I get into the warehouse, I'll check for adequate insect and rodent control."

This store easily passes the cleanliness check. The next step... start collecting feed samples to take to the NDA Feed, Fertilizer and Agricultural Lime (FFAL) laboratory for ingredient analysis.

Before extracting samples from bags of livestock feed, Mills proceeds to find 20 bags with the same lot number to assure she has an adequate and fair sample size. She proceeds to poke ten of the bags with a metal probe and then lets a few tablespoons of feed from each bag pour into a small

plastic sample bag. As she collects samples, she very quickly seals the hole with a sticker that assures the consumer the contents are inspected and checked for accuracy by NDA.

"The probing process works well for the large quantities that livestock feed is sold," said Mills. "But we usually just buy samples of pet food since they come in much smaller quantities."

After collecting samples within the store, Mills heads to the storage area to continue her inspection. Because of the large quantity of stacked bags, retrieving the samples in a warehouse can be a bit more rigorous.

"It can take me a while when I have to unstack several bags to get an adequate amount of bags with the same lot number," said Mills.

With the inspection completed and samples collected, Mills jumps into her vehicle and is off to a feed manufacturer about a 30-minute drive away.

"When we analyze the ingredients in livestock feed or pet food we are protecting both the consumer and the manufacturer," said Gramlich. "If a label says there is X amount of protein and a certain percentage of fat in a product we want to make sure that is what the consumer is getting. We also are making sure that all sizes of manufacturers are on a level playing field."

Gramlich added that there are approximately 280 livestock feed and pet food manufacturers in Nebraska which are all inspected on a routine basis. Products sold in Nebraska but



Program Manager
Steve Gramlich

manufactured outside of the state still must meet ingredient standards, labeling requirements and nutrient guarantees. If a product is found to be non-compliant, the manufacturer is notified.

Meanwhile, Mills continues her workday. A long, dusty road eventually ends at a feed manufacturing facility. She has been here before and knows they take great pride in making sure all their products match what is on their labels. Nonetheless, Mills tries to inspect such facilities on an annual basis as schedules allow. It gives her the opportunity to interact with the manager to exchange questions and answers.

The inspection at the manufacturer is more involved than the retail outlet. The grounds at the facility cover a much larger area, and there are several steps in the manufacturing process to review.

“We’re going to take a look at their processes to make sure the feeds are manufactured properly,” said Mills. “We’re also going to review their log books to make sure everything is recorded appropriately. And then we’ll check to see that the scale is maintained to ensure that the ingredients and final products are weighed accurately.”

A friendly discussion takes place between Mills and the manager as they go through each stage of the process, which can be different for different types of feed. This particular manufacturer produces some feed with medications so extra steps have to be taken to make sure new U.S. Food and Drug



Mills records the ingredients from the label of a livestock feed bag.

Administration (FDA) guidelines are met.

After checking out the facilities and equipment, Mills heads to the warehouse where she has to move more bags and collect more samples. After writing down ingredients from the label, she has the manager sign the paperwork and completes the onsite portion of the inspection.

Gramlich says while many of the NDA inspections are similar

to the two Mills conducted that day, the Department has several other duties that fall under the Commercial Feed Program.

“Our list of responsibilities is fairly long,” said Gramlich. “It includes such tasks as following up on complaints, processing commercial feed licenses, annual Salmonella checks on pet foods and BSE (**Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy**) inspections which we contract with the FDA.”



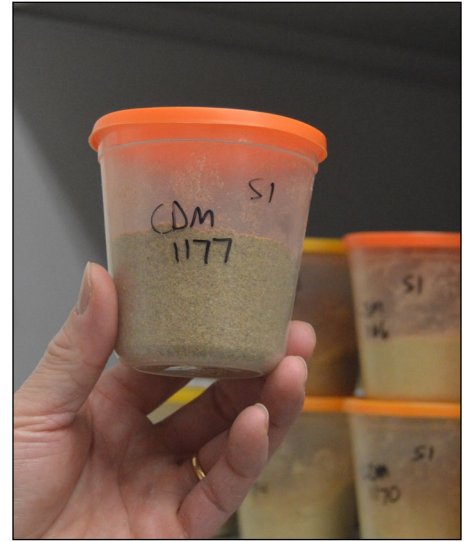
One Part of a Big Picture

The Commercial Feed Program is one segment of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Protection (APHP) focus area.

APHP is comprised of numerous programs, created primarily by statute, with the intent of protecting both consumers and businesses. The programs provide assurance that livestock and plant health are protected, thus maintaining commerce opportunities for Nebraska products.

Ongoing surveillance, testing, certification, outreach, tracing, inspecting, and eradication efforts are some of the regulatory duties charged to APHP.

Field inspectors for the various programs are assigned large territories in order to cover all areas of Nebraska. Their work requires efficient planning or cross utilization of other staff due to sometimes lengthy travel times from one site to another.



Feed samples are taken to the NDA FFAL Laboratory, where they are ground, weighed and tested. Chemists Sally Tieso and Bill Steinbach in center photo.

For Mills, her day does not end after the feed manufacturing facility inspection. The hour drive back to her home office is followed by a couple hours of paperwork. A few days later, she drops off the samples at the NDA FFAL Laboratory in southwest Lincoln.

It's a Monday morning and the chemists are glad to see Mills when she dropped off the recently collected feed samples. They know it will keep them busy but they have enough time to enjoy the fresh-baked cinnamon rolls that she included with her delivery.

NDA Chemists Sally Tieso and Bill Steinbach, begin the examination process by splitting the feed sample into a smaller portion and placing it into an electric mill where it is ground, mixed and poured into a small plastic sample container. Both workers are meticulous in creating log sheets and labels for each sample container to prevent any cross contamination.

"We will be analyzing these samples for protein, calcium and phosphorus to make sure they match what's on the label," said Tai Ha, supervisor for the FFAL laboratory. "If we do find a sample that is non-compliant, we will regrind the rest of the original sample and run a second test."

The ground portion of the sample is taken into the lab where Steinbach weighs and prepares it. The sample

is given to Ha to analyze for protein, calcium and phosphorus using sophisticated instruments.

"Last fiscal year we performed 14,095 analyses on 1,669 feed samples but some years we have done as many as 20,000 analyses," said Ha. "On average we find 7 to 8 percent of the samples to be non-compliant, which we consider to be pretty low."

Recently the NDA FFAL laboratory earned ISO 17025 accreditation which is an internationally-recognized system of quality management in testing laboratories. It demonstrates the effort the staff members have put in to achieve and maintain a high level of proficiency in lab testing.



FFAL Lab Supervisor
Tai Ha

"We have a great deal of confidence in the work our feed lab conducts," said Gramlich. "They do a lot of important work for us. Not only in analyzing ingredients but checking products for possible contamination and diseases."

The Commercial Feed Program in itself is multi-faceted, but it is just one of the many programs that NDA's Animal and Plant Health focus area administers to provide consumer confidence and protection.

"We all take great pride in our work," said Gramlich. "We know what we do is important and we want to deliver the best results possible for Nebraskans."