



# MANAGING CONFIDENTIALITY IN MINNESOTA

## Voluntary Regional PRRS Elimination Project N212

ACCESS TO SHARED CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION IS A PRIVILEGE. THOSE ENTRUSTED WITH CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION MUST USE IT WITH DISCRETION.

### INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE:

The purpose of this document is to establish guidelines for producers, veterinarians, and other individuals involved with voluntary regional PRRS elimination programs as they share and disseminate information regarding the PRRS status of participating herds. Although the law varies from state to state, veterinary medical records, including the disease status of herds, is privileged information and cannot be shared without the consent of the herd owner.

### PARTICIPATION AGREEMENTS:

In Minnesota, participants are required to sign a “participation agreement” that permits access to all diagnostic test results and states: “Your farm’s PRRS status or sequence information will not be kept confidential...Maps will be available to other cooperating producers and veterinarians and one or more of these individuals may share the map with someone outside the project. Also, we will be presenting the project at various meetings.” This statement clearly states that participating producers give up their rights to maintaining confidential medical records related to PRRS. So why do we worry about maintaining confidentiality?

### THE DILEMMA OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

Regardless of documents signed by participants, coordinators, leaders of a voluntary program and producers within a project face a dilemma. We balance the need to disseminate information that will benefit the group with the risk of divulging information that may be damaging to an individual producer. Despite having the producers’ permission to release and discuss status, all participants recognize the sensitivity of this knowledge and do this with discretion.

### REGIONAL MEETINGS and CONFIDENTIALITY REMINDER:

Maps of herd PRRS status and outbreak information from participants are often presented at regional meetings. Attendance is composed of participating producers, non-participating producers, veterinarians, and agribusiness people with a vested interest in the swine industry. Each person attending may have a different perception of the program and will have a different level of experience with it. Therefore, it is encouraged to open each meeting with a reminder of the importance of managing confidentiality appropriately.

The purpose of these meetings is to share the updated PRRS status of area herds, to learn more about PRRS and its control, to encourage more participation in control and

elimination of PRRS, and to determine how best to cooperate to achieve a common goal. These meetings have been, and must remain open to all.

#### MANAGING CONFIDENTIALITY in the N212 MN PRRS PROJECT:

1. The participation agreement clearly explains to a producer that his or her PRRS herd status will NOT be held confidential. We require that a participating producer sign a participation agreement prior to identifying that herd's status in the data base and on the maps. Herd status will remain "unknown" until the participation agreement is signed.
2. A producer participating in a voluntary program may withdraw at any time by notifying the regional coordinator in writing of his/her intention to do so. Herd status of that producer will revert to "unknown" and no attempt will be made by any member of the regional elimination team to retrieve any diagnostic information on that herd. Producers who withdraw are free to (and are encouraged to) re-sign a participation agreement at any time. Unless a producer notifies the project coordinator that he/she is withdrawing, the signed participation agreement is understood to be in effect.
3. The data base and maps of swine producers in the region and their respective herd statuses is maintained by one member of the regional elimination team.
4. While the PRRS status of a herd is not confidential, we use utmost discretion in releasing this information. The data base and maps are only made available to participating producers, veterinarians and other regional PRRS elimination teams whose producers agree to share their data. Any regional team acquiring data from another region must get permission from the regional coordinator, explain how the data is intended to be used, recognize the source of the data, determine a procedure to update the changing status of herds in that area, and use the information with the same discretion expected of all PRRS elimination projects.
5. The data collected for a regional control and elimination project should not be used for commercial purposes. Producer mailing lists will not be distributed or sold to any business or entity and are intended for the sole purpose of furthering the control and elimination of PRRS from the region.