

UPEI NewsRELEASE

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Atlantic Veterinary College at UPEI designated international centre of expertise to study devastating salmon virus

For immediate release:

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(Charlottetown, PEI): The Atlantic Veterinary College at the University of Prince Edward Island has been designated an international Reference Laboratory by the Office International des Epizooties (OIE) for infectious salmon anaemia (ISA) – a viral disease devastating to Atlantic salmon and aquaculture industries in the Northern hemisphere. The OIE Reference Laboratory at AVC is the only ISA lab in North America and only the second ISA lab in the world.

The OIE is the World Organization for Animal Health headquartered in Paris. An international science-based standard setting organization with 167 members, the OIE has responsibility for collecting, analyzing and disseminating information on animal disease and control. OIE Reference Laboratories are centres of expertise and standardization of diagnostic techniques for specific animal diseases.

“AVC has the world-class capabilities needed to make significant contributions to aquatic health through the establishment of the OIE Reference Laboratory for ISA in North America,” says Dr. Tim Ogilvie, Dean of AVC. “We are excited by the possibilities and very proud that our faculty member, Dr. Fred Kibenge, has been designated the OIE Expert to lead the laboratory. His appointment to this prestigious position is well deserved and a positive step for the aquaculture industry of Canada and beyond.”

Dr. Kibenge has gained international recognition for his establishment of a robust research program on ISA virus. A professor of virology at AVC/UPEI, Dr. Kibenge’s expertise has helped distinguish AVC as a leader in finding solutions to this disease in the Bay of Fundy. Tests developed by Dr. Kibenge’s lab at AVC are currently being used to detect ISA virus antibodies in wild salmon in New England rivers.

“Establishment of this laboratory for ISA at the Atlantic Veterinary College is a testament to the critical role that AVC plays in Canada’s overall veterinary infrastructure and furthers Canada’s continued leadership and contribution at the hemispheric and regional level,” explains Dr. Brian Evans, Chief Veterinary Officer for Canada with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

“The laboratory under Dr. Kibenge’s direction, provides a unique opportunity to build on AVC and UPEI’s expertise in the field of aquatic animal health while forging new partnerships with international researchers and facilities. This work will be of benefit to Canadians and others around the world,” says Evans.

Dave Rideout, Executive Director of the Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance says his organization is very pleased with OIE's decision and what it could mean for the aquaculture industry.

“We have always known that in terms of aquatic health, AVC is world-class. Designation as an OIE Reference Laboratory affirms this view,” says Rideout. “Our industry depends on the aquatic health research, excellence in student development and training, as well as the diagnostic advice that AVC provides.”

The OIE Reference Laboratory for ISA is now operational at AVC with one Research Associate assisting Dr. Kibenge. A Post-Doctoral Fellow, several graduate students and one co-operative education Bachelor of Science student are also currently dedicated to ISA research through the lab.

ISA, which does not affect humans but is infectious and can be fatal to fish, was first detected as a new disease in marine-farmed Atlantic salmon in Norway in 1984. The OIE recognized the disease in 1990, naming it ISA. Since that time, there has only been one OIE Reference Laboratory for ISA in the world, located in Norway. ISA was detected for the first time outside Norway in 1996 when it appeared in the Bay of Fundy, New Brunswick. In 2002, approximately 10 per cent of marine-farmed salmon in New Brunswick were infected. Since an initial outbreak of ISA in Maine in 2001, millions of fish have been destroyed in an effort to control the disease.

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