NVAP Reference Guide: Animal Health Emergency Management

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The strength and success of the U.S. agricultural economy are largely due to the bonds forged by the government, veterinarians, and producers in preventing, controlling, and eradicating foreign animal diseases (FADs). In an era characterized by unprecedented levels of international transportation and trade, the threats posed by FADs (either accidentally or intentionally introduced) have never been greater.

FADs can enter the United States accidentally through the importation of infected animals or animal products. Such diseases can be carried inadvertently into our country via contaminated clothing, shoes, or other objects. An act of terrorism can also introduce FADs. Once introduced, a FAD may be very difficult to control and eradicate because of the high potential for animal exposure from high livestock concentrations and movements of market-bound animals. Pathogens spread by wildlife can pose an additional problem for control and eradication.

Even a single case of a FAD, like foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), would negatively impact the U.S. economy due to the international and interstate restrictions that would be imposed on the trade of livestock and livestock products. The spread of FADs would have impacts that could include the failure of individual farms and potential effects on other segments of the U.S. economy. Other significant costs

would be incurred in controlling the spread of disease pathogens by animal depopulation or vaccination, cleaning and disinfecting livestock environments, and disposing of animal carcasses. These activities also generate concern about the environment. In addition to impacts on the economy and the environment, many FADs are zoonotic and, therefore, also present potentially significant threats to public health.

Outbreaks of FADs in the United States (Venezuelan equine encephalomyelitis in 1971, exotic Newcastle disease in 1971-73 and 2002–03, highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in 1983-84), and overseas (FMD in the United Kingdom in 2001, Japan in 2010, and North and South Korea in 2010-11; HPAI H5N1 in Asia, Africa, and Europe from 2003 to 2011), have underscored the dangers these diseases pose to U.S. livestock and poultry. Our livestock, poultry, and wildlife populations have little or no immunity to such diseases, which, if introduced, could cause potentially catastrophic losses to the American animal industry and threaten the availability of the safe, wholesome, affordable, abundant food supply Americans currently enjoy.

APHIS Veterinary Services safeguards U.S. poultry and livestock from the introduction, establishment, and spread of FADs. This involves regular health surveillance of our domestic animal herds and flocks and monitoring of animal disease outbreaks around the world. APHIS also works with other federal agencies at airports and maritime ports to inspect and approve incoming shipments of animals and animal products.

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