

National Agricultural Biosecurity Center Project

A tool being developed by the Kansas State University [National Agricultural Biosecurity Center](#) will assist agricultural emergency management coordinators in planning efforts to combat animal disease outbreaks and other emergencies.

The tool is a database called ICAAR, which stands for Identifying Corrective Actions from Agricultural Response. The name sounds complex, but the concept is fairly simple: collect information from states about what they learn from emergency preparedness exercises and how to improve future plans, then allow others with a need to know to access it.

[Ken Burton](#), program director at the National Agricultural Biosecurity Center, says emergency planning team members identify responses and corrective actions after every training or event, with trainings and simulations conducted in all 50 states. The problem is that the information isn't readily available.

"After-action reports, historically, are kept fairly close to the vest and not widely shared," Burton said. "The downside is that there can be a lot of reinventing of the wheel — a state identifies a problem and others aren't aware, so we aren't maximizing benefit from efforts expended."

ICAAR provides a searchable database to serve as a central repository for emergency response managers and planners to learn from others' exercises, challenges, and successes. The project is supported by the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Health Affairs Food, Agriculture and Veterinary Defense Branch, or DHS FAV Defense, through the Food Protection and Defense Institute at the University of Minnesota.

"The database currently contains five years' worth of material, so it has a good start," Burton said. "The more information we can add to the database, the more value it will bring to agricultural response coordinators."

Now the goal is to spread the word about the tool and get feedback on its interface and functionality. In February, Burton gave a talk about the database at a workshop for the Multi-State Partnership for Security in Agriculture the database and interest was high.

"Information sharing in a secure manner is pretty key," Burton said.

Marvin Meinders, chief of DHS FAV Defense, said sharing after-action reports has always been a problem.

"People don't want to put in writing and distribute things that went wrong, but that denies others to learn the lessons and improve their programs," Meinders said. "The strategy with this project is that information will be put in a positive format: 'This is what was done well, these are methods of improvement.' It's a best practices thing."

"What we're trying to encourage is a one-stop shop where people can go to find out things about agriculture readiness and help them put all these pieces together into a readiness program for their

state," he said.

Sandy Johnson, emergency management coordinator for the Kansas Department of Agriculture, says a tool like ICAAR is long overdue.

"If you keep doing exercises and don't learn anything from them, that's a little scary," Johnson said.

Kansas is slated to conduct agricultural emergency exercises the week before Christmas in 2016, 2017 and 2018. This year, the focus will be on feedlots and secure beef supply planning. Johnson said exercise development is both complex and expensive. Major challenges in Kansas are traceability of animals, sharing data, and providing adequate veterinary support in a scenario requiring testing of large livestock populations. She likes the idea of learning from other states' exercises.

"Having the ability to learn from other people's mistakes is a great thing," Johnson said.

Meinders said states also could use ICAAR to justify budget priorities.

"In an era of budget cuts, people can use this tool to make the argument that an issue was found to be important, and they can justify conducting exercises," he said.

Meinders said he expects the tool will be ready by the end of this fiscal year.