

Kansas Exercises Animal Disease Response Preparedness

The Kansas Department of Agriculture held a tabletop exercise on Tuesday, Nov. 28, as the first stage of the state's annual emergency preparedness exercise. This year's exercise, named Phoenix, will continue Dec. 18–20, 2017, as the agency simulates a foreign animal disease event to practice the state's agriculture emergency response plan.

The three-day functional exercise in December will be based out of KDA headquarters in Manhattan, but will also involve multiple counties across the state in the simulation. It will enable KDA and its partners in other state agencies, federal and local government, university, agriculture industry, and several other states to practice the state's foreign animal disease response plan. More than 100 individuals attended the November tabletop event, and more than 200 individuals plan to participate in the multiday Phoenix exercise in December, which will be based on the confirmation of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in the United States.

Kansas leads the nation in foreign animal disease planning, training, and exercising, which benefits all partners across the state in understanding roles and responsibilities in a response. Responding to a foreign animal disease like FMD will require cooperation among state, local and federal government, private industry, educational institutions and others to stop the spread of the disease and enable the industry to get back to business as quickly as possible.

“Agriculture is the largest industry and economic driver in Kansas, and an outbreak of a highly contagious animal disease would be a high consequence event for the Kansas economy and could have a devastating effect on Kansas farmers and ranchers,” said Kansas Secretary of Agriculture Jackie McClaskey. “We are grateful to have so many partners join us for this exercise in our effort to serve and protect Kansas agriculture.”

The KDA Division of Animal Health has worked on a long-term strategic plan to improve its ability to respond to animal disease emergencies, including complex, interactive exercises involving a wide range of partners throughout the state. Each exercise builds upon plans and procedures that have been developed based on past exercises and actual emergency events.

In addition to KDA, which will operate as the Incident Command Post for the exercise, several counties will activate emergency operations centers as part of the Phoenix exercise, and several private facilities will participate to practice their own biosecurity plans.

Foot-and-mouth disease was last identified in the United States in 1929. FMD is a highly contagious disease of cattle, sheep, swine, goats, deer and other cloven-hooved animals. It is not a human food safety concern nor a public health threat. It is a primary concern for animal health officials because it could have potentially devastating economic consequences due to disrupted trade and lost investor confidence.