

Kan., Okla. conduct joint livestock disease drill

October 23 2009, By JOHN MILBURN , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Trucks that could be hauling livestock along the Kansas and Oklahoma border were detained and their drivers questioned Thursday, during a drill aimed at protecting the nation's food supply from foot-and-mouth disease.

State and local authorities set up roadblocks and pulled [livestock](#) vehicles over near Sitka, Kan., and Turpin, Okla., to ask questions about their loads and destination. It was part of what officials said was the first two-state exercise to halt the movement of livestock should the disease break out.

"Right now, we have three 18-wheelers pulled over, but all these [cattle](#) trailers have been empty so far," said Jack Carson, spokesman for the [Oklahoma](#) Department of Agriculture. "Nobody expected it, but everybody has been courteous."

The exercise comes only two days after final congressional approval of the first \$32 million in funds for planning and construction for a proposed lab that would research foot-and-mouth and other animal diseases at Kansas State University in Manhattan. The 520,000-square-foot National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility would replace an aging lab on Plum Island, N.Y.

Thursday's test, which was monitored by states including Colorado, Iowa and Nebraska, was based on the scenario of a presumptive case of foot-and-mouth disease in another state that would prompt Kansas officials to

declare an emergency and clamp down on borders.

There are more than 5,000 access points along Kansas' borders with its four neighboring states, but only 500 that can handle large semi tractor-trailer livestock haulers. Kansas Livestock Commissioner George Teagarden said the state believes that at any given moment, about 50,000 head of livestock are on Kansas roads.

"We realize that we can't stop traffic on every road," he said. "We need to reduce the risk and we don't want to move the disease wherever it is."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture said 19.5 million head of livestock were moved across state lines in 2008 for feeding and breeding.

In the event of an actual outbreak, livestock haulers would be stopped, turned back to their originating location or the livestock held for inspection.

The traffic stops at Sitka went smoothly and drivers were cooperating, said Kansas Highway Patrol Trooper Edna Buttler. Vehicles on U.S. 183 were pulled over to a Department of Transportation lot alongside the road for inspection. One truck had to be decontaminated, based on the scenario, requiring that the tires to be washed.

Kansas has been developing its plans for responding to a foreign animal disease outbreak, such as the intentional introduction of foot-and-mouth and mad cow disease, since 1998, Teagarden said.

Critics of the planned biothreat lab have suggested that locating it in the continental U.S. makes an accidental release of a pathogen such as foot-and-mouth more likely. Sen. Pat Roberts, a [Kansas](#) Republican and defender of the project, said the state has worked to protect U.S. agriculture and the lab is another piece of that effort.

There's been no reported case of foot-and-mouth disease in livestock in the U.S. since 1929. Because of that, Teagarden believes the biggest threat for an outbreak involves terrorists intentionally introducing it into an area to harm the U.S. economy.

"It's a disease that doesn't affect humans, so they could play with it without endangering themselves," he said.

Teagarden said the FBI participated in Thursday's exercise and would investigate any real case.

There's also the question of whether foot-and-mouth could be accidentally brought to the U.S. by someone who's traveled to another nation. Teagarden and other officials find that unlikely, but Mark Shearer, coordinator for the Multi-State Partnership for Security in [Agriculture](#), doesn't discount it.

"It's as easy as stepping in a pile of cow poo," Shearer said, "and presto, you bring the thing back."

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