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New lab strengthens defense against animal diseases



Cecilia Parsons/For the Capital Press
Standing in front of the newly dedicated Alex A. Ardans laboratory in Tulare, Calif., are, from left, Dr. John Adaska, branch chief of the Tulare facility; Michael Larimore, dean of the UC-Davis School of Veterinary Medicine; Dr. Alex Ardans; and CDFA Secretary Karen Ross.

California bolsters state network of researchers

By CECILIA PARSONS
For the Capital Press

Rapid detection and response to disease outbreaks in livestock and poultry is the goal of a new diagnostic laboratory operated by the University of California for the state Department of Food and Agriculture.

The \$4.9 million state-funded project is in Tulare, adjacent to the UC Veterinary Medicine Teaching and Research Center and in the center of one of the top dairy production counties in the nation.

The facility has the space and capability for avian and livestock necropsy and other studies onsite.

Livestock and poultry producers and their veterinarians will be able to submit samples or bring animals to the lab for diagnosis. With early diagnosis and detection, steps can be taken to halt the spread of contagious diseases.

Speaking at the lab dedication

on Oct. 28, State Veterinarian Annette Jones said protecting California livestock and poultry from catastrophic disease outbreaks, particularly those that are foreign to domestic animal populations, is one of the CDFA laboratory system's primary functions.

"We depend on the world-class diagnosticians at CAHFS on a daily basis to alert us to disease and help us understand the nature of new or evolving diseases so that our veterinarians can make critical decisions and take swift and effective action," she said.

The Tulare facility is one of four labs in the California Animal Health and Food Safety laboratory system charged with protecting animal health and public safety. Last year the system accepted 33,559 submissions from 2,336 veterinarians and 9,645 animal owners providing disease surveillance throughout California.

The new 29,000-square-foot laboratory was named in honor of the laboratory system's founding director and UC professor emeritus Alex A. Ardans, who led the statewide

diagnostic service for 21 years until his retirement.

Ardans, who was present for the dedication, along with CDFA Secretary Karen Ross, played a major role in restructuring and revitalizing California's state diagnostic laboratory system.

He was also instrumental in the launch of the National Animal Health Laboratory Network, responsible for responding to emergency animal disease outbreaks anywhere in the U.S. He received his veterinary degree from UC-Davis in 1965 and joined the faculty there in 1969. He was named founding director of the state laboratory system in 1987.

Dr. John Adaska, branch chief, said the facility is outfitted with technology to allow classroom instruction via video. A video link also allows for multiple, concurrent consultations on disease outbreaks or other livestock disease emergencies.

The necropsy department has separate handling facilities for poultry and livestock, security features to ensure containment of disease,

incinerator capable of disposing one cow per hour and bio-secure disposal of all effluent. Large animal handling equipment is in place to hold live animals and move deceased animals for testing.

Adaska said that when all new equipment is in place the facility will serve as a valuable resource for livestock and poultry producers in the southern San Joaquin Valley who need quick and accurate identification of disease, including ruling out the presence of serious contagious diseases such as anthrax. The early warning system can also protect food safety by keeping diseased animals out of the food chain.

Adaska also pointed out that the new branch lab would build on a long history of successes achieved by the statewide system. Those include diagnosing exotic Newcastle disease among backyard chickens in 2002, leading to a \$168 million state and federal eradication effort.

The lab system also played a major role in limiting spread of avian influenza in 2015 as the U.S. experienced one of the worst outbreaks of the disease among poultry.

Construction of huanglongbing research lab on track

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

The citrus industry is on track to open a dedicated research center near the University of California-Riverside next year to tackle the deadly tree disease huanglongbing.

The project's schedules and financial commitments are being met and the process of obtaining local, state and federal permits has gone smoothly so far, reported the Exeter-based California Citrus Mutual.

"We've got an excellent contractor we're working with and we're on track to hopefully get some good research projects in there by ... this time next year," Citrus Mutual public affairs director Alyssa Houtby said.

The grower-funded Cali-



Courtesy of UC-Riverside

An artist's rendition shows a planned new laboratory near the University of California-Riverside that will specialize in research into defeating the deadly citrus tree disease huanglongbing. The project will be built with the help of \$8 million in donations from the citrus industry.

fornia Citrus Research Foundation has raised \$8 million to construct a biosecurity-level 3 building near the university, which has more than 100 years' experience in citrus re-

search. A level-3 lab can house the live bacterium.

The facility will enable scientists to do work with plant pathogens that previously couldn't be done in South-

ern California. The nearest high-level pathogen lab is at UC-Davis, and materials often must be sent as far away as Texas or Florida to be tested.

Huanglongbing — which has devastated the citrus industries in Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina and Texas — has been found in 26 citrus trees in Southern California neighborhoods, Houtby said. Huanglongbing isn't harmful to humans or animals but causes discoloration of fruit and leaves and eventually kills the tree.

The project proceeds as a 118-square-mile portion of Placer County northeast of Sacramento has been added to the quarantine for the Asian citrus psyllid, which can carry huanglongbing. State officials met with Placer County growers in March to advise them how to protect mountain mandarins and other citrus fruit should the psyllid arrive.

About one-third of California's land mass is now under quarantine for the psyllid, requiring shipped fruit to be free of leaves and debris. The state is considering adopting a regional quarantine structure under which fruit moving between regions would have to undergo a wet wash.

A committee has made final recommendations for a stepped-up quarantine to state Food and Agriculture Secretary Karen Ross, and changes could be implemented within the next couple of months, Houtby said.

The industry supports improving the quarantine, she said.

"We are in full swing with the navel harvest in the Central Valley and there's a lot of fruit going up and down the state," she said. "There's a lot of opportunity for the psyllid to spread."

In other developments involving the psyllid and huanglongbing:

- The state and Citrus Mutual are continuing to hold training workshops for farm labor contractors and crew bosses on measures to control the spread of the psyllid.



Courtesy of California Wolf Center

Karin Vardaman, far right, of the California Wolf Center and others attend a range rider training session in Montana last May. The Wolf Center will host another series of meetings with ranchers in Northern California and Southern Oregon beginning on Nov. 11.

Workshops seek to help ranchers avoid wolf-livestock conflicts

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

YREKA, Calif. — A wolf recovery group that has sought common ground with ranchers is hosting another series of workshops in Northern California and Southern Oregon aimed at finding solutions to wolf-livestock conflicts.

The meetings, which start Nov. 11, will seek to merge ranchers' expertise about their livestock and land with science-based knowledge of wolf biology and behavior, organizers say.

The workshops will be similar to those held in April to teach ranchers how to prevent depredation, said Karin Vardaman, the California Wolf Center's director of wolf recovery.

"We learned a lot from the last workshop," Vardaman said, noting that facilitators now have a better understanding of the area's landscape.

"One of the critiques we heard ... is that California is different," she said. "What we're doing is taking it and applying it to the relevant landscape of California and Oregon."

The daylong workshops will be led by the Working Circle Collaborative's Timothy Kaminski, ranch manager and cow boss Joe Englehart and wolf specialist Carter Niemeyer, who have a combined 70 years of experience on wolf-livestock interactions, according to a meeting flier.

The three will lead discussions on such topics as understanding gray wolves and their behavior, recognizing areas

and conditions that pose risks to livestock, finding ways to improve range and livestock production while avoiding conflicts with wolves, and understanding depredation investigations.

The meetings are only the latest effort at outreach to ranchers by the Wolf Center, which has set up a range rider program with volunteers to help livestock producers determine if there are wolves in the area.

State and federal protections make it illegal to kill or hunt wolves in California, even in the case of livestock depredation. Wolf advocates and state officials have been promoting nonlethal means of warding off wolves, including using guard dogs, motion-sensor lights, brightly colored flags or range riders or providing supplemental feed to livestock to keep them away from grazing areas when wolves are known to be present.

Each of the workshops is 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and no registration is necessary. Here are the dates and locations:

- Nov. 11: Fort Jones Library, Fort Jones, Calif.
 - Nov. 12: Holiday Inn Express, Yreka, Calif.
 - Nov. 14: Holiday Inn Express, Ashland, Ore.
 - Nov. 15: Bonanza Community Center, Bonanza, Ore.
 - Nov. 16: McCloud River Mercantile Hotel, McCloud, Calif.
 - Nov. 17: Inter-Mountain Fair and Event Center's Heritage Room, McArthur, Calif.
 - Nov. 18: Plumas Sierra County Fair's Serpilio Hall, Quincy, Calif.
- For information, email contact@workingcircle.org.

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