

New Mexico Prepared

Defense Center prepares state for agriculture emergencies.

by Jane Moorman

If an agricultural emergency flares, New Mexico will be prepared through the efforts of the Southwest Border Food Safety and Defense Center located at New Mexico State University (NMSU), say state officials.

In preparation for agriculture emergencies — whether caused by natural disasters, disease or humans — response trailers are stationed in Albuquerque, Clovis and Las Cruces. The trailers contain equipment necessary for a quick response to an incident anywhere in the state, including personal protective equipment, decontamination equipment, emergency power equipment and other supplies.

Kits the size of army duffel bags containing personal protective equipment and tools to respond to incidents are in the hands of the New Mexico Agriculture Livestock Response Team that includes 25 large-animal veterinarians, as well as New Mexico Livestock Board inspectors, New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA) personnel in the field and all NMSU Cooperative Extension county agents.

County emergency management task forces across the state are preparing plans of response to agricultural emergencies within their counties. Tabletop exercises are being conducted to prepare county law enforcement, and fire and medical response

personnel to be ready for incidents that affect agriculture.

A focus point

This preparedness is the result of the awareness and preparedness training provided by Billy Dictson and Jeff Witte, co-directors of the Southwest Border Food Safety and Defense

Center (SWBFSDC). “Most states don’t have a focus point like our center to coordinate the awareness and response training,” Dictson says. “They have various people doing things, but not one focus group pulling it all together.”

In New Mexico, that focus group is the unique partnership between NMSU’s College of Agriculture and Home Economics’ Cooperative Extension Service, NMDA, and the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security. Through the food safety and defense center, these agencies have

been working for nearly three years to raise the awareness of New Mexicans about agriculture and food safety, especially from terrorist-transmitted disease.

The state’s homeland security department provides the federal funding, while NMDA buys the necessary equipment and NMSU provides the educational component to prepare New Mexico to respond to emergency incidents within the ag industry.

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— Billy Dictson

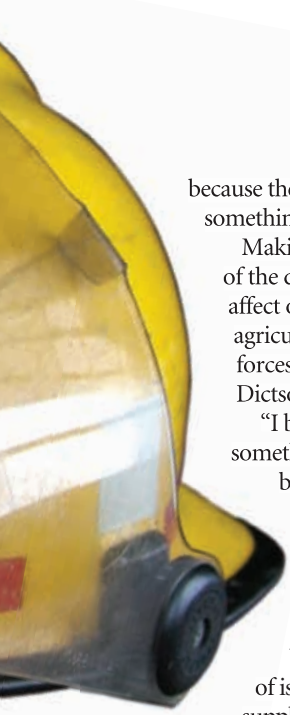
“We’ve provided vulnerability assessment and community preparedness training to agricultural industry folks, from the New Mexico Livestock Board, New Mexico Department of Agriculture and NMSU Cooperative Extension personnel to industry groups such as the cattle growers, wool growers [and] dairy producers, as well as county emergency management personnel, including law enforcement, fire and emergency medical responders and public health personnel,” Dictson says of the work he and Witte have accomplished during the past three years with \$4.18 million in grants and contracts.

Organized response

From this training, two response teams have been established: the New Mexico Agriculture Livestock Response Team consisting of 25 large-animal veterinarians and the Avian Influenza Response Team consisting of personnel from the Extension service, NMDA, livestock board, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, and New Mexico Department of Health in four regions of the state.

The training has also included tabletop exercises with agriculture, environment and health agencies’ personnel from the four U.S. states and six Mexican states that share the border between the U.S. and Mexico.

“This was the first time these agencies had worked together to resolve a common problem,” Dictson says of the exercise that took place during November 2007 in Albuquerque. “This type of exercise has not been done anywhere else in the nation. The people along the northern border with Canada are interested in what we are doing



because they would like to do something similar.”

Making people aware of the dangers that could affect our food sources and agriculture are the driving forces behind the work of Dictson and Witte.

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Educating the masses

This spring and summer, SWBFSDC took its awareness training to the grassroots level by educating the general public about food safety and agriculture vulnerability.

“We will train between 20,000 and 30,000 people between now and the end of June,” Dictson said in early June. “There is some form of training being done in every county and with various livestock associations.”

Other projects to make the general public aware of agriculture and food safety include:

- ▶ Awareness programs with elementary school students through a farm safety day and “Kids, Kows and More” programs in 16 counties where 800-1,500 students attend.

- ▶ Home preparedness kits — which include flashlights, hand sanitation lotion, prescription record books and safety literature — will be distributed to 20,000 youth through the county Extension offices.

- ▶ The New Mexico Farm and Ranch Bureau’s Ag in the Classroom program is preparing a booklet, “Your Food Supply:

Keeping it Safe and Secure” that will be inserted in 400,000 newspapers.

- ▶ One hundred teachers in the Ag in the Classroom program focused lessons on

agriculture and food safety this spring.

- ▶ The 172 dairy farms in New Mexico will receive vulnerability assessments to become bio-secure dairies and best practice dairies. The assessment teams will be coordinated by Robert Hagevoort, NMSU Extension dairy specialist.

- ▶ Approximately 4,000 4-H and FFA livestock exhibitors will receive response kits, and livestock response kits will be provided to 4-H agents and vocational agriculture teachers.

For more information about the SWBFSDC activities and trainings, visit their web site at <http://cahe.nmsu.edu/ces/nmhs/index.html>.

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