

USDA Confirms Additional New World Screwworm Cases, First Outside of Texas

From an article in MeatingPlace by Chris Moore

The U.S. Department of Agriculture confirmed two additional cases of New World screwworm and the first reported case beyond Texas in New Mexico, bringing the total number of confirmed U.S. detections announced over the last week to four.

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service said the new cases involved a calf in La Salle County, which adjoins Zavala County where the first case was found, and a dog in Lea County, New Mexico, in the state's southeastern corner. Officials said epidemiological investigations are underway for both cases.

According to USDA, early reports indicate the infected dog had recently been in Mexico. Additional details will be released as they become available.

John Bellinger, co-founder and former CEO of Food Safety Net Services, was named Monday by the White House as senior advisor for New World screwworm preparedness. He is CEO of food exporter Agri-West International and former chairman of the U.S. Meat Export Federation and the Southwest Meat Association.

New World screwworm is a parasitic pest whose larvae feed on the living tissue of warm-blooded animals. The pest can affect livestock, pets, wildlife and, in rare cases, humans, causing severe wounds and economic losses.

"Over the past week, USDA has identified and expeditiously confronted four confirmed detections of New World screwworm," Dudley Hoskins, USDA under secretary for marketing and regulatory programs, said in a statement. "While we address these instances that require immediate attention, and continue to sample suspected cases, we are simultaneously working to eradicate the pest entirely."

USDA and the Texas Animal Health Commission said 75 personnel are currently deployed in Texas as part of the response, with additional support staff providing laboratory diagnostics, logistics, treatment distribution, aerial operations and outreach.

For each confirmed case, officials are implementing measures outlined in the agency's New World screwworm response plan, including maintaining a 20-kilometer quarantine zone, increasing fly trapping efforts, conducting wildlife surveillance and expanding outreach to producers and veterinarians.

USDA also announced that sterile fly dispersal operations will begin from Moore Air Base in Edinburg, Texas. Sterile pupae arrived at the facility Friday, and aerial releases are scheduled to begin Saturday. The agency said sterile flies are dyed with fluorescent colors to distinguish them from wild flies during surveillance efforts.

USDA urged livestock and pet owners to inspect animals for draining or enlarging wounds, maggots, egg masses, signs of discomfort or lesions around body openings and to immediately report suspected infestations to veterinarians or animal health officials.

The agency emphasized that the U.S. food supply remains safe, noting that New World screwworm does not infest meat or other food products and that affected animals would be identified through federal inspection processes before entering commerce.