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USDA testing for 2009 pandemic H1N1 influenza in U.S. swine

By Agri-Pulse Staff

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Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced Friday that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Veterinary Services Laboratories will conduct confirmatory testing on swine samples collected at the 2009 Minnesota State Fair between August 26 and September 1. The pigs sampled at the time showed no signs of illness and were apparently healthy.

The samples collected were part of a University of Iowa and University of Minnesota cooperative agreement research project funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) which documents influenza viruses where humans and pigs interact at such as fairs. USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratories may have confirmatory results within the next few days.

"Like people, swine routinely get sick or contract influenza viruses," Vilsack said. "We currently are testing the Minnesota samples to determine if this is 2009 pandemic H1N1 influenza. We are working in partnership with CDC as well as our animal and public health colleagues and will continue to provide information as it becomes available." He added that "I want to remind people that they cannot get this flu from eating pork or pork products."

Reacting to the USDA announcement, National Pork Board CEO Chris Novak said "I would like to echo the comments of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. People cannot get this flu from eating or handling pork."

The National Pork Board commented that testing to determine if three pigs from the Minnesota State Fair in August are the first confirmed cases of the Novel H1N1 virus in the U.S. swine herd provides an opportunity to stress that:

- "Regardless of the outcome of the tests, you cannot get the H1N1 flu from eating pork. Pork and pork products remain safe to eat and handle."
- "Scientific studies conducted by the USDA have proven that the H1N1 flu is a respiratory virus, not a food-borne illness, and it is not found in the blood or meat of pigs exposed to the virus."

- “The two most important steps you can take to protect you and your family from the H1N1 flu are to wash your hands often with soap and water or hand sanitizer and avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.”

An outbreak of 2009 pandemic H1N1 influenza occurred in a group of children housed in a dormitory at the fair at the same time samples were collected from the pigs, but no direct link to the pigs has been made. USDA reports that current information “would suggest the children were not sickened by contact with the fair pigs.”

USDA continues to remind U.S. swine producers about the need for good hygiene, biosecurity and other practices that will prevent the introduction and spread of influenza viruses in their herds and encourage them to participate in USDA’s swine influenza virus surveillance program. Monitoring and studying these influenza viruses in swine, will help USDA learn about the virus, develop better tools to diagnose and develop new and improved vaccines to protect U.S. swine herds. USDA encourages commercial pork producers to intensify the biosecurity practices that they have in place, particularly during this flu season.

For more information on USDA’s 2009 pandemic H1N1 efforts, go to:
www.usda.gov/H1N1flu.

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