Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I'm Judy Simpson. In the early spring and emergency call went out in Addison County. The call was part of an important safety trial with a direct bearing on Vermont’s economy and landscape. Across the Fence's Rebecca Gollin tells us more.

There’s been an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Orwell, and local emergency departments are on the scene…

Julie Smith/ UVM Extension; Incident Commander- “The decontamination team came out, local fire department came out, local rescue came out, the local town emergency management director came out,”

The Addison County decontamination team is getting suited up, while other first responders figure out how to handle the crisis.

Nats, “Ben, I’d like to assign you safety commander for the day”

Tim Bouton/ Addison County Senior Emergency Planner – “The truck needed to be cleaned on its way in, make the milk exchange, and then clean it again on its way out, before it goes to the next farm.”

Luckily this is just a drill – but it’s an important one for all of Vermont - especially agriculturally-rich Addison County.

Smith – “We are hoping to raise awareness among farmers and raise preparedness on farms in their co-operatives, in their communities, in terms of what resources do they really need to have available at the get-go, regardless of what’s going on. I hope we never need to use it, but need to have that capability built into our system.”

Bouton - “We've been told that if there was ever a foreign animal disease in the area, one of the likely scenarios would be that farms would be quarantined, and then released one at a time as they were proved to be non-infected.”

It’s a labor-intensive scenario for these first responders, who are for the most part, volunteers.

Peter Ochs/ Addison County decon team – “Addison County is a very agricultural community with a lot of farms and our team is very small.”

Julie Smith is a veterinarian and dairy specialist for UVM extension. For this drill, Smith is the incident commander. (nats) Her interest lies in both the animal health aspects of a major outbreak, and how to keep Vermont’s dairy industry safe. Smith has been working on a state-wide plan with other health and biosecurity professionals. The drill will give the team a better sense of the manpower and resources that would actually be needed to contain an outbreak like this.

Smith – “We went through questions and troubleshooting, problem solving, with every step of the process, saw how it rolled out - saw how our tarp held up, and learned a lot that will help inform future directives, or guidance for this type of event
and may …help the bigger picture of planning in terms of knowing what really is involved, what it really does take to pull off a cleaning and disinfection of a milk tank or truck on a farm.”

The drill is also following guidelines for a national milk supply plan that aims to move milk safely during an animal disease event.

Smith – “The secure milk supply plan focuses on biosecurity of that milk truck entering and leaving farms, the biosecurity followed by the milk hauler, him or herself, as doing the process of collecting the milk from the farm and how that tanker is handled at the receiving plant, whether it is a creamery or a bottling plant or a manufacturing plant…”

Even if Vermont never has an outbreak like the one being played out in this scenario, training drills like this help first responders stay sharp.

Bouton – “The team needs to get together and practice, we need to go through the trailer, understand what we have, have everyone become familiar with the equipment – that’s just really critical to having a reasonable response time”

Louis Hall/ Orwell Fire Chief – “We haven't done it before and we don’t know where people are coming from, what they expect from us.”

Ochs – “I think the drill went well - it brought up some technical things, you know, we saw what we needed to do - this was the 1st time we'd actually washed a truck - we normally train to wash people, coming out of - that have been contaminated, so it brought up some new challenges.”

Those challenges range from the limited resources of most rural areas communities, to working with people and equipment that are unfamiliar.

Hall - “I came away with more appreciation of what the decon team does... we had not seen their equipment out on the field, getting to know what they were working with, what they wanted us to do in various situations.”

Smith – “A lot of it is situational, you have got to evaluate how clean is the truck, you’ve got to evaluate the situation, what disinfectants work, what disinfectants are available, how are we going to mix it, how are we going to apply it, what kind of equipment do we have available?”

After the drill is over, participants will de-brief.

Bouton – “We'll hold what we call an after action review, which would then result in an after-action report which should highlight any issues that came up, things that we did well, things that we did not do well, or things that we would like to improve on.”

That feedback will help Smith and her colleagues as they refine their work on preparing and protecting Vermonter’s and their communities from an animal disease outbreak.

Smith – “It's one thing for someone to spend a lot of time thinking about the problem, and thinking about solutions, and coming up with a plan, but that doesn't mean anything to the folks who are actually going to be facing the problem in their own location, their own neighborhood, their own state. So the thought process in getting the right people together and thinking through it, really has to happen in every community.”

While there’s a long way to go before every Vermont community is ready for a major animal disease outbreak, this drill was a good start.

Smith – “It really helped us show both what does it take for a team to do this on a farm, and what do we really need to think about as a community to be prepared given our limited resources, and our objective of protecting the milk supply and protecting our dairy economy in the state.”
Hoping for the best, but preparing for the worst, these first responders will be ready no matter what comes their way. In Orwell, I’m Rebecca Gollin with Across the Fence.

Thanks Rebecca. Joining me now is a person who served as the incident commander for the drill at UVM Extension Veterinarian Dr. Julie Smith. It is nice to have you with us. That drill was a really big first step and must have taken a lot of coordination to get all those different aspects of the community together to participate?

Julie.: Sure; good afternoon Judy. Thanks for having me here to talk about this drill. Like you said it does take a huge amount of coordination to conduct this type of drill in addition to the responders who we saw in the video piece. In or should do this drill the only things made possible were having permission from the Seiferts of Arbutusland Farm, having support from Agri-Mark Inc., and having the cooperation of Cape Hope and Sons milk hauling company. They sent a milk truck to sit in a driveway for an hour. That does not happen very much on a Vermont farm. With that piece in order to have a site to do the drill and truck so that we had that cleaning and disinfection. Then we broadened the responders and were able to do that through relationships the project team and I have developed over the last few years with the emergency planners in Addison County we were able to conduct a drill that met both the objectives of that decontamination team and the responder organizations in that area and met our project objective of demonstrating what would take in terms of the labor resources and the other resources needed to carry out a cleaning and disinfection protocol according to the secure milk supply guidance.

Judy.: Can you tell us a little bit more about the secure milk supply plan?

Julie.: Sure. At the national level, the secure milk supply plan is a guidance document that sets out the biosecurity standards that would need to be met to move milk in the situation where there was an outbreak of foot and mouth disease but we need to move milk from farms that are not known to be infected but there near other farms that are. That plan has been developed and now groups of states and regions are developing their own version of the secure milk supply that will apply in their specific area. In New England there's a group of state veterinarians working with USDA AFS Office on that plan and in fact our drill has already helped them with their planning efforts. I was able to present about what we did in this drill to a group of state veterinarians in New England and they were about to do an exercise and think about their resource availability and how they would want to respond to an issue like foot and mouth disease.

Judy.: You talk about foot and mouth disease but that's something that's very different from hand foot and mouth disease?

Julie.: That's right, the two diseases although the names sound a lot alike are very different. Hand, foot and mouth disease is a disease of children primarily. Foot and mouth disease on the other hand is a livestock disease. It affects our cattle, pigs, small ruminants, the ones with two toes and foot and mouth disease is not considered a public health threat. People have not come down with foot and mouth disease from consuming pasteurized dairy products. The state and regional dairy promotion folks are ready with messages in case we had foot and mouth disease in the country to relay concerns about food safety. The milk is not a food safety issue, that's not the issue, that's not a concern that led us to do a drill like this, but a concern that requires these strict security measures is the issue of potentially spreading disease from farm to farm.

Judy.: Because when you think about how many farms would an average milk truck visit?

Julie.: Some of our trucks would visit over 10 farms before going to the receiving plant so.

Judy.: In theory that would have to be done if there was an outbreak at each step of the way.
Julie.: Potentially. That's where we are right now. The New England folks are working out just how we would want to move milk in that kind of event.

Judy.: How does this fit in with the animal disease response?

Julie.: In some situations cleaning and disinfection like we saw in the drill would be required. The reason for that is like I said because foot and mouth disease it's so easily spread. It's extremely infectious; so it's really important for dairy farmers and their cooperatives to work together thinking about how best to keep milk moving. It's a huge risk management problem and it has high stakes so we want to stop the disease but we don't want to shut things down so we cannot get our milk from our farms to the market. So if we can think through some of these issues and what's in the best interest of the big picture in terms of risk management that's what we're hoping this project will encourage folks to do.

Judy.: What was the biggest lesson that you learned from this drill?

Julie.: It comes back around to buyer security. After going through the drill we recognized even more the importance of farmers taking responsibility for biosecurity on their own farms. It starts out that farm gate. Farmers can control access to new animals they control access of people vehicles and equipment and what safeguards and sanitation needs to be accompanying each of those visitors to come on and off the farm. We're hoping that our trial will help farmers recognize the importance of access control and what they can do. Another part of a project has been getting farmers to think about all the people to visit their farm on a regular basis. One of the key messages that came back to us after the drill was a quick debriefing a hot wash and some of those responders were very clear to say look we in an event could see ourselves as advisers, consultants if cleaning and disaffections need to be set up. But our respondents cannot conduct cleaning and disinfection on an ongoing basis. So we're fortunate as a county to have a team that has training in cleaning and disaffections. Not every county in the U.S. has such a team that's ready and available for this kind of event so really dairy farmers and their cooperatives need to sit down and think about what it is they need to do and focus more on bio- security day to day. When you recognize through this drill and other activities I've been a part of have recognized the resource limitations that exist on all levels feeling this event once we find that we have that disease. Given that, biosecurity takes on a whole new dimension of importance.

Judy.: I'm sure there some simple things farmers can do to start down that road of biosecurity on their farms. As you said making sure that you realize how many people do visit.

Julie.: It's great knowing who comes on and off the farm, it is a really good starting point.

Judy.: Where can people get more information about this project?

Julie.: For more information they can contact outreach professional Lou Bedor. He can be reached by e-mail or if more convenient by phone at (802) 497-0033.

Judy.: Once again we're not trying to scare people about by a security on the farm but it is an important issue that we all need to be aware of as far as Food Security is concerned.

Julie.: Absolutely.

Judy.: It's much better to prevent and then to react to it.

Julie.: Absolutely and that's why USDA funded this project.
Judy.: Thank you so much for coming on and talking about it it's really interesting.

Julie.: I appreciate the opportunity to do so.

Judy.: And congratulations all the people who helped out with the drill.

Julie.: Absolutely.

Judy.: That's our program for today. I'm Judy Simpson we will see you again next time on *Across the Fence*.

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