

Internal and external communication processes have been established to ensure that response to an FMD outbreak is efficient, effective, and supported by communication. This document provides a brief overview of communications in an FMD Response. Please see the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) *FMD Response Plan* and Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA) website ([http://www.aphis.usda.gov/about\\_aphis/programs\\_offices/lpa/](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/about_aphis/programs_offices/lpa/)) for details on any aspect of this guide.

### Communications Objectives

In an FMD outbreak, all communications must

- ◆ furnish accurate, timely, and consistent information;
- ◆ maintain credibility and instill public confidence in the government’s ability to respond to an outbreak;
- ◆ minimize public panic and fear; and
- ◆ address rumors, inaccuracies, and misperceptions as quickly as possible.

### Key Public Messages

Six key, and succinct, messages will be conveyed in an FMD outbreak.

#### For consumers:

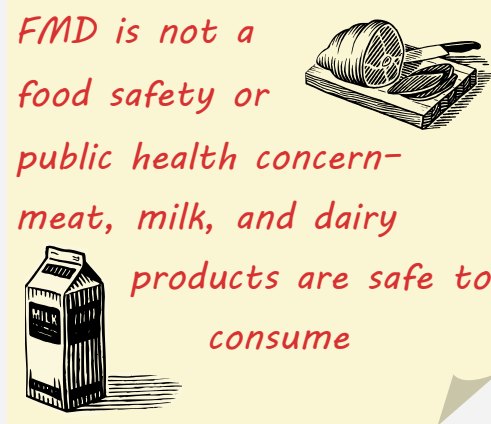
- ◆ FMD is not a threat to public health.
- ◆ Meat and meat products are safe to eat.
- ◆ Milk and dairy products are safe to eat.
- ◆ We are responding quickly and decisively to eradicate the virus.

#### For producers:

- ◆ Protect your herds with good biosecurity practices.
- ◆ Be vigilant about reporting signs of illness.

#### Additional important information for the public:

- ◆ FMD is a serious animal disease, but it is not a public health concern.
  - ◇ FMD only affects cloven (divided) hooved animals, such as cattle, sheep, swine, and goats. It does not affect horses, dogs, or cats.
  - ◇ FMD is not the same as Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD), a common childhood illness; while their names are similar, FMD and HFMD are caused by different viruses, and HFMD is not transmitted to or from pets or other animals.
- ◆ In an FMD outbreak, protecting the security and well-being of animal herds is the top priority of USDA and stakeholders.
  - ◇ The most effective way to prevent more animals from getting sick is to humanely euthanize and dispose of animals in a targeted area. The goal is to euthanize as few animals as possible, but this is a very emotional and difficult time for livestock producers.
  - ◇ There is no universal vaccine for FMD, and vaccination is not a treatment for already infected animals. Meat and milk from vaccinated animals are safe to eat.



### Internal Processes and Responsibilities

During an emergency, LPA will lead and coordinate rapid response efforts. LPA and Veterinary Services manage the development of Q&As, factsheets, and website content about the emergency. If the emergency response requires Federal resources outside the Program Lead Unit, the Emergency Management Leadership Council becomes part of the chain of command.

LPA ensures that timely and accurate information is communicated to stakeholders, States, international partners, Congressional staff, the media, and the public. LPA will:

- ◆ Develop or implement a plan that outlines key audiences, approved messages, outreach goals, materials needed, and a timeline for notifying audiences.
- ◆ Provide on-site support to train incident staff on approved messages for media response or stakeholder and public outreach.
- ◆ Coordinate with State and industry counterparts to ensure effective communication channels are in place.

The LPA Public Information Officer (PIO) deployed to an incident will be an APHIS Public Affairs Specialist. He or she is responsible for helping LPA coordinate effectively with personnel and media on site. The PIO will:

- ◆ Establish and oversee processes for coordinating and clearing public communications.
- ◆ Ensure that an overall unified message is developed and communicated publicly.
- ◆ Coordinate this unified message with the Response Coordinator, LPA and APHIS Management, State Departments of Agriculture, other Federal agencies, and USDA’s Office of Communications.



**Joint Information Center (JIC)**

In an FMD outbreak, LPA will invite State, local, and industry communicators to participate in a JIC. The JIC is a central location that facilitates operation of the Joint Information System (JIS).

The JIS organizes, integrates, and coordinates information to ensure consistent messaging across multiple jurisdictions and disciplines. It includes the plans, protocols, procedures, and structures used to provide public information.

In the JIC, communications personnel will perform emergency information functions, crisis communications, and public affairs functions. JICs may be established at various levels of government, at incident sites, or can be components of Multiagency Coordination.

**USDA Office of Communications (OC)**

USDA OC will review and coordinate all information programs; maintain the flow of information; provide liaison between USDA agencies, mission areas, other Federal agencies, the mass communication media, State and local governments, and the public; and conduct operations from a JIC in an emergency. When the JIC is activated, the OC will:

- ◆ Send a field PIO who will link back to the JIC in order to support the Incident Command. Upon direction from the JIC, the field PIO represents and advises the IC on all public information matters.
- ◆ The field PIO also handles on-scene media and public inquiries, emergency public information and warnings, rumor monitoring and response, media monitoring, and other functions to coordinate, clear, and disseminate accurate and timely information related to the incident.
- ◆ Actively communicate program project activities to other Federal agencies; media; State, Tribal, city, and county governments; industry and stakeholders; trade partners; and the general public. USDA will distribute specific messages to the public and to industry stakeholders via broadcast and print media channels.

**OC Outreach and Tactics**

Stakeholder	Tactics
Intergovernmental/ stakeholder outreach	Internal USDA conference call with USDA agency public affairs and mission areas
	Federal Interagency conference call (White House, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Department of the Interior, Department of Homeland Security, White House Homeland Security Council, and Department of State)
	Intergovernmental conference call with local and State governments (including animal health, homeland security, and natural resources)
	Stakeholder conference call with livestock industry groups
	Congressional conference call or personal visits
Media outreach	Conduct press conference with HHS, State representative, and other relevant officials to discuss animal implications, actions being taken, and guidance for the public
	Issue news release
	Issue media advisory listing available resources (b-roll Beta tapes, still photos, Q&As, fact sheets, updated sound bytes via web)
	Establish media briefing schedule to ensure predictable, established lines of communication with reporters to provide updates on management of the outbreak
	Distribute Q&A and fact sheet and post on website
	Provide b-roll tapes upon request (Ames laboratory testing/inspectors at processing plant)
	Provide still photos on website (laboratory testing/inspectors at plant)
	Offer updated sound bytes via website
	Monitor media 24/7 to promptly correct misinformation
General public outreach	Distribute public service announcements (PSAs) and sound bytes to radio stations
	Post downloadable PSAs and sound bytes on USDA website

### Internal Communications (IC) Planning

In order to prevent FMD spread, it is vital to maintain consistent communication at all times.

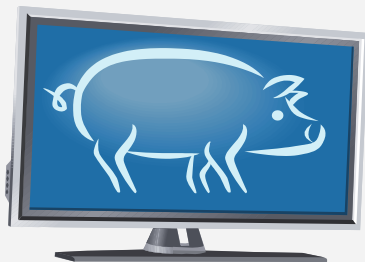
- ◆ An Incident Communications Center will be established by the Communications Unit Leader.
- ◆ The Communications Unit Leader creates a plan to coordinate activities and resources to support informed and timely decision making. This plan is designed to ensure effective, accurate, and efficient communication between the field team and all involved parties and adherence to appropriate ICS guidelines. The plan will cover e-mail, telephone, and radio communications as well as field team accountability.
- ◆ The Communications Unit Leader will gather information on the communication and technology requirements necessary to begin, monitor, and close-out an FMD outbreak investigation.
- ◆ The Communications Unit must determine the required radio nets, establish interagency frequency assignments, and ensure the interoperability and optimal use of all assigned communications capabilities. Radio networks will be organized as follows:
  - ◇ A command net will link together IC, Command staff, Section Chiefs, Branch Directors, Division, and Group Supervisors.
  - ◇ Tactical nets may connect agencies, departments, geographical areas, or functional units.
  - ◇ A support net to handle resource and logistical functions.
  - ◇ Ground-to-air nets and air-to-air nets to coordinate air traffic.



### External Communications Planning

The PIO will direct external communications. Communication activities for emergency response begin with a press release, press conference, and local media coverage and build as program activities escalate. The PIO will develop an external communications strategy, which the IC must approve before implementation. The plan should include:

- ◆ Designated line and staff responsibilities for the information teams.
- ◆ Internal information verification and approval procedures.
- ◆ Agreements on information release authorities, including who releases what, when, and how.
- ◆ Regional and local media contact list.
- ◆ Procedures to coordinate with field response teams.
- ◆ Designated spokespersons for animal health issues and third-party validators in an emergency.
- ◆ Response team after-hours contact numbers.
- ◆ Contact numbers for emergency response information partners.
- ◆ Procedures to secure needed resources to operate the public information and media operation 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and fund an 800 hotline number.
- ◆ Agreements and procedures to join the JIC, if activated.
- ◆ Vehicles of information dissemination.
- ◆ Key messages to stakeholder groups.



### External Communications Protocols

#### Media

The media desk in the JIC serves as the contact point for all media inquiries regarding FMD and response activities. If necessary, IC public information staff will liaison with media at a response site. The PIO will use these guidelines for media communication:

- ◆ Give all media equal access to information.
- ◆ Conduct press briefings and interviews when appropriate. Give local and national media equal time.
- ◆ Try to observe media deadlines.
- ◆ Escort media representatives to ensure safety.
- ◆ Record information released, and ensure IC has copies.
- ◆ Provide press releases when possible.

#### Stakeholder

The appropriate personnel will communicate with animal owners and industry members to keep them informed and promote the health of animals. They should keep lists of important contacts and may become actively involved in supporting response efforts by issuing press releases and distributing information to local law makers, citizen groups, and the media.

#### Public

To ensure public good will and reduce suspicion, fear, and anxiety, the general public must be kept informed. The news media will perform that role, but a serious emergency may warrant providing additional information via an 800 number hotline. The PIO will oversee call center operations, train people answering phones, and provide information. If the line is not staffed, it must have a recorded message directing callers to the website and allow them to leave their contact details so that staff members can be assigned to collect messages and return calls.

#### Public Official

State, county, city, and other Federal agencies; area legislators; and affected congressional delegations must be informed of program activities so that they can be responsive to constituent's questions. The PIO will provide updates for local community leaders and other parties.