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Are You Ready for the Next Food Safety or Animal Health Crisis?

State departments of health and agriculture operate within an interconnected food system in which an incident in one state can quickly affect producers, processors, retailers, and consumers across multiple states. Recent outbreaks of *Cyclospora*, *Salmonella*, and New World Screwworm have captured the public's attention and underscore how quickly critical agriculture infrastructure can be disrupted

During outbreaks and product recalls, departments of health and agriculture sit at the center of a complex communications and response environment. Producers, veterinarians, processors, retailers, and consumers expect clear, consistent, and timely guidance. Governors' offices, legislatures, and the media demand up-to-the-minute information. But incomplete or inaccurate information about risks can rapidly spread across social media and informal networks, eroding trust, delaying control measures, and increasing both economic and political impacts.

Response must function in this complexity. Shared markets and extensive interstate movement of products amplify challenges, allowing a localized incident to rapidly evolve into a regional crisis, demanding unified, coordinated response and information-sharing across multiple states and agencies.



Conducting a Multi-Jurisdiction Exercise

Departments can begin to address these challenges by hosting a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary tabletop exercise (TTX). After CNA facilitates a TTX, we provide concrete, achievable corrective actions that jurisdictions can take over months or years, such as updating plans, purchasing equipment, or conducting additional training and exercises. The exercise can cover a range of objectives (see below) to suit the department's needs. For shorter, half-day exercises, it is often best to select two or three objectives; for a full-day exercise, up to five objectives can be achieved effectively.

- Test **Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs)** as they are executed in the context of a simulated infectious animal disease outbreak.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities for collecting, validating, and **sharing intelligence and critical information** to support timely and accurate public messaging.
- Test processes for **coordinating public information** among state departments of agriculture, state and local public health and emergency management agencies, and federal partners.
- Discuss the **role of the private sector**, including potential resources available to support mitigation, response, and recovery actions.

Examine how states can work with producers, industry associations, and extension services to **amplify credible messages** and provide tailored guidance to specific sectors.

Test information sharing, coordination, and integration of private-sector stakeholders in support of **recovery efforts**.

Decision Points

To help right-size the exercise and ensure that it fulfills expectations, departments should consider the following questions:

- What objectives are most relevant?
- Who should be involved? You may want to include state commissioners, secretaries, and directors of agriculture; state veterinarians and animal health officials; and/or representatives from public health and emergency management agencies, among others.
- Will this be a workshop or an exercise?
  - Workshops provide foundational work for developing plans
  - Exercises test existing plans
- How long should this workshop or exercise be?
  - Half-day? Full-day?
- What type of scenario will accomplish the objectives?
  - Foodborne or zoonotic disease outbreak
  - Environmental or industrial contamination
  - Intentional product tampering or agro- or bioterrorism

After-Action Process

Throughout the exercise, note-takers will capture identified gaps, strengths, and recommendations for improvement. These notes, along with existing plans and procedures documentation, will form the basis of a summary report and recommendations for action, which CNA can provide in two weeks or less.

Why CNA?

CNA has designed, executed, and evaluated over 400 homeland security exercises since 1999. Participants in these exercises have ranged from local first responders to the President of the United States. We specialize in multi-jurisdictional and multi-disciplinary exercises that require coordination with diverse stakeholder groups. Our analysts bring deep experience in emergency management, public health preparedness, and critical infrastructure protection. They have supported federal, state, and local partners in planning for and responding to complex incidents including cyberattacks, natural disasters, disruptions to critical infrastructure, and human and animal disease outbreaks.



About CNA

The CNA Corporation (CNA) is a not-for-profit analytical organization dedicated to the safety and security of the nation. With nearly 700 scientists, analysts, and professional staff across the world, CNA's mission is to provide data-driven, innovative solutions to our nation's toughest problems. It operates the Center for Naval Analyses—the Department of the Navy's federally funded research and development center (FFRDC)—as well as the Institute for Public Research. The Center for Naval Analyses provides objective analytics to inform decision-making by military leaders and ultimately improve the lethality and effectiveness of the joint force. The Institute for Public Research leverages data analytics and innovative methods to support federal, state, and local government officials as they work to advance national and homeland security.

For more information about food safety and animal health exercises, contact Dawn Thomas at thomasdh@cna.org.

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