

Belize Agricultural Health Authority and Ministry of Agriculture declare outbreak of vesicular stomatitis

One equine farm infected with Vesicular Stomatitis, New Jersey strain

Belmopan, 15th March 2007

The Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA) and the Ministry of Agriculture advise the livestock industry of an outbreak of vesicular stomatitis (VS) in the Cayo District. LADIVES, the regional vesicular disease reference laboratory in Panama, informed BAHA on the 14th March, 2007 of the positive result. The disease, commonly known in Belize as “sore mouth”, affected one 10 year old castrated male horse in a herd of 11 horses. BAHA is already investigating a suspect case in a cattle ranch within 5 km of the first affected farm.

Belize periodically reports vesicular stomatitis and usually the disease affects a few animals and farms in one district. Occasionally, as in 1997, it affects many animals and farms in more than one district. The importance of this disease is that it cannot be differentiated by visual symptoms from foot and mouth disease (FMD), a disease that has never been reported in Belize and the rest of Central America and the Caribbean. FMD can cause death in animals and is a disease of economic importance as trade in livestock and products is prohibited by most countries.

Humans can also become infected with VS when handling affected animals. In humans, vesicular stomatitis is an acute illness that resembles influenza. The symptoms may include fever, muscle aches, headache and malaise. Vesicles are rare, but can occasionally be found on the mouth, lips or hands. Most people recover in 4 to 7 days.

Farmers are requested to:

1. Immediately report any case of sore mouth (salivation), lameness and blisters on the breast of the animals.
2. Separate animals with lesions from healthy animals, preferably by stabling. Animals on pastures apparently are affected more frequently with this disease.
3. As a precautionary measure do not move animals from farms affected by VS —unless they are going directly to slaughter—for at least 30 days after the last lesion found has healed.
4. Implement on-farm insect control programmes that include the elimination or reduction of insect breeding areas and the use of insecticide sprays or insecticide treated ear tags on animals.
5. Use protective measures when handling affected animals to avoid human exposure to this disease.

Reports can be made to BAHA's hot line: 660-9028

END