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PRESS RELEASE

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U.S. & THAI GOVERNMENTS LAUNCH ASIA'S FIRST PROGRAM TO TRAIN VETERINARIANS TO INVESTIGATE ANIMAL DISEASE OUTBREAKS THAT COULD SPREAD TO HUMANS

BANGKOK (June 5) – Responding to the spread of infectious diseases from animals to humans, the United States and Royal Thai Governments, in collaboration with the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), today launched Asia's first training program for veterinarians to become "disease detectives," specialists who trace and control animal diseases that could possibly spread to human beings.

The Field Epidemiology Training Program for Veterinarians (FETPV) is the first program of its kind in the region that is exclusively for animal doctors. The two-year curriculum focuses on the causes, distribution and control of diseases. It also includes opportunities for joint training of human and animal medical professionals. The FETPV Coordination Unit was officially inaugurated at the Department of Livestock Development (DLD) today.

Thailand's DLD is serving as a hub to build the training capacity of veterinarians in the region who will later develop similar programs in their own countries. Six veterinarians from Burma, China, Indonesia and Thailand are enrolled in the FETPV. The inaugural program, running through May 2011, consists of instruction at DLD's headquarters and field investigations of disease outbreaks.

Organizers note the importance of launching this course in Asia where numerous diseases have their origin in animals including the 2009 Influenza A (H1N1), Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Nipah, and Avian Influenza H5N1.

"The Royal Thai Government is committed to promoting training that improves animal disease surveillance, control and prevention," said Dr. Yukol Limlamthong, Director-General of the DLD of the Thai Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives. "With the establishment of the FETPV, we will increase the capacity of animal health staff throughout the region." The DLD has partnered with the Thai Ministry of Public Health to implement this regional program.

The training for animal health professionals is modeled after the FETP program for physicians at the Thailand Ministry of Public Health. That curriculum was originally developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The physicians' program is also aimed at investigating outbreaks, analyzing data, conducting field research, and making recommendations to public officials.

"With the establishment of this FETPV coordination unit, Asia is better prepared to detect and respond to outbreaks of diseases that are spreading from animals to humans," said Olivier Carduner, Director of the U.S. Agency for International Development's regional mission.

The FETPV is supported by CDC and USAID's Regional Development Mission for Asia. With USAID funding, FAO is providing technical support for the establishment of the FETPV office, the development of its curriculum, finding mentors for trainees, and supporting outbreak investigations.

"Scientists tell us that most human diseases originate in animals," said Dr. He Changchui, FAO's Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative. "FAO's partnership with this program is therefore oriented toward building prevention capacity in Asian countries so they can respond to emerging infectious diseases, including highly pathogenic avian influenza. It is imperative that we act now."

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