

Improvements To Enhance UK's Livestock Disease Diagnostic Center

LEXINGTON, KY.

State and local government officials, including Gov. Steve Beshear, joined representatives from the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture today to break ground on a \$28.5 million expansion and renovation of UK's Livestock Disease Diagnostic Center.

"The investment in this facility is key to supporting animal agriculture, a vital part of Kentucky's economy. The state's world-class horse and cattle industries, as well as robust and growing poultry and small ruminant industries, require vigilance in disease surveillance and diagnosis," Beshear said. "I'm pleased the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board funds were available to make this important project a reality."

The Livestock Disease Diagnostic Center is a full-service animal health diagnostic facility. Its faculty and staff handle one of the largest case loads in the nation, seeing 60,000 clinical cases and performing 5,000 necropsies (animal autopsies) on average every year. The laboratory also protects public health by diagnosing many zoonotic diseases that can potentially cross over into the public sector.

"Enhancement of these facilities is absolutely essential if the college is to be able to fulfill its state-mandated missions for safeguarding animal health," said Scott Smith, dean of the UK College of Agriculture. "Our faculty and staff are to be applauded for managing one of the nation's heaviest veterinarian diagnostic workloads in crowded and outdated quarters. But now they will have the capacity to make a major step forward."

Improvements to the facility include the addition of wings for necropsy laboratories and administration, freeing up much of the existing building to increase overall laboratory space. These expansions will nearly double the size of the existing 38,000-square-foot facility. In addition,

the current facility will undergo a total renovation.

The center will also switch to alkaline digestion as its main form of tissue disposal, which is more cost-effective and environmentally friendly than other methods. These and other technological improvements to the facility will allow it to meet current biosafety requirements. Construction is expected to be complete by 2010.

The planning for the project began in 2003 under the leadership of Nancy Cox, UK associate dean for research and director of the Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station, and

Lenn Harrison, the center's former director. Stakeholders began looking at other diagnostic laboratories across the country and made plans for improvements. The university received \$8.5 million for the project from the 2005 state legislative session and an additional \$20 million from the 2008 legislature.

"We have a lot of people to thank, including our stakeholders and legislators, because this has been a needs-driven process," Cox said. "It was a very conscious and careful effort to place importance on animal enterprises in the state of Kentucky."

Craig Carter, the center's director, said the improvements will enable the center to be better equipped to respond in the event of an emergency or disease outbreak.

"These renovations and additions will also help us to better mitigate potentially devastating outbreaks like Mare Reproductive Loss Syndrome and in dealing with a potential agroterrorist event," he said.

Cox said that while the project has taken several years to come to fruition, the center has been moving forward.

"We haven't been standing still. We've been improving our personnel and technologies," she said. Δ