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PhilippinesÂ launches vaccine development center at CenTrAD campus

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The Philippines Department of Agriculture (DA) officially inaugurated the vaccine unit at the Center for Transboundary Animal Diseases (CenTrAD). This state-of-the-art facility is dedicated to the development of shots to immunize animals against infectious diseases, particularly African Swine Fever (ASF), Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD), and Avian Influenza (AI). These infectious diseases are major threats to the countryâ??s livestock and poultry industries, as well as national food security.

The DA has allocated P151 million for a three-year vaccine development program, which includes the procurement of the governmentâ??s first Biosafety Level 3 Laboratory (BSL-3). This type of laboratory allows research on microbes, both indigenous and exotic, that can cause serious or potentially lethal diseases through inhalation. The program aims to deliver vaccine prototypes by 2028 or sooner.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. explained that while vaccines for ASF, AI and FMD are available internationally, locally developed vaccines based on indigenous strains tend to be more effective in preventing outbreaks. He said a dedicated facility like the vaccine unit at CenTrAD is crucial for addressing the economic losses caused by ASF and AI and for safeguarding the countryâ??s livestock from FMD.

The Philippine swine sector has incurred billions in losses since the first ASF outbreak in 2019. The current swine population is only at 60 percent of the nearly 13 million heads before the outbreak. ASF has led to significant job losses, billions in investments and income, and has hindered efforts toward achieving food security. AI, on the other hand, has caused the

culling of over 10 million chickens since its first outbreak in 2017.

Though the World Organization for Animal Health considers the Philippines to be FMD-free, cases in neighboring countries still pose a substantial risk to the swine and ruminant industries. Like ASF, there is no known cure for FMD.

CenTrAD, a joint project of the DAâ??s Bureau of Animal Industry and Central Luzon State University (CLSU), is funded by the DA. It is set to become the leading agency for the diagnosis, surveillance, research, and technology development related to transboundary animal diseases.

Located adjacent to the CLSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital, CenTrAD houses laboratories for microbiology, virology, parasitology, histopathology, and molecular assays, along with an epidemiology training and digital analysis room. The construction of the entire facility began in 2019, with an estimated cost of P230 million, and was completed in 2022.

The inauguration ceremony was led by Secretary Tiu Laurel, DA Undersecretary for Livestock Dante Palabrica, CLSU President Evaristo Abella, DA National Livestock Program Chief Dr. Claro N. Mingala and Dr. Virginia M. Venturina, Director of CenTrAD.