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Philippines launches PHP 141-Mn drive to develop homegrown animal vaccines

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The Department of Agriculture (DA) has launched the Animal Vaccine Development Program (AVDP), a multi-agency initiative designed to accelerate the development of vaccines against some of the country's most economically damaging livestock diseases, including African Swine Fever (ASF) and foot-and-mouth disease (FMD).

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. formally led the signing of the program agreement on June 15, bringing together the DAâ??s National Livestock Program, the Bureau of Animal Industry, the Philippine Carabao Center, and Central Luzon State University.

Backed by a total investment of PHP 140.9 million, the program will receive PHP 77.6 million in 2026, PHP 30.6 million in 2027, and PHP 32.7 million in 2028. Beyond vaccine development, the initiative seeks to build long-term domestic capabilities in animal health research, biotechnology and disease preparedness.

The move comes as the Philippines continues to grapple with the economic consequences of recurring livestock disease outbreaks. African Swine Fever has decimated hog populations and inflicted billions of pesos in losses since its emergence in the country, while repeated outbreaks of avian influenza have forced the culling of millions of poultry birds, disrupting supply chains and contributing to food inflation.

The government believes locally developed vaccines could provide a strategic advantage over imported alternatives. By tailoring vaccine formulations to pathogen strains circulating within the Philippines, researchers hope to improve disease protection and outbreak control while reducing reliance on foreign suppliers.

Building a Domestic Vaccine Ecosystem

At the heart of the initiative is a broader effort to create a domestic ecosystem for animal vaccine research and production.

Scientists participating in the program will initially focus on developing vaccine candidates against ASF and FMD. While the Philippines remains free of foot-and-mouth disease, outbreaks in neighboring countries continue to pose a regional threat, underscoring the importance of preventive measures and early preparedness.

A key component of the program is the planned establishment of a Biosafety Level 3 (BSL-3) laboratory, a high-containment facility that will enable researchers to safely handle dangerous animal pathogens. The facility is expected to significantly enhance the country's research capabilities by supporting vaccine development, disease surveillance, technical training and emergency response planning.

The laboratory will also position the Philippines to conduct more advanced animal health research domestically, reducing dependence on overseas facilities and expertise.

From Outbreak Response to Prevention

The launch of the AVDP signals a strategic shift in the government's approach to livestock disease managementâ??from reacting to outbreaks to building long-term resilience against them.

Livestock diseases have repeatedly disrupted production, discouraged investment and contributed to higher meat prices, affecting both farmers and consumers. Industry stakeholders have long argued that stronger domestic disease prevention capabilities are essential to improving productivity and restoring confidence in the sector.

By investing in local vaccine development, policymakers aim to create more durable defenses against future outbreaks while supporting the recovery of industries that have faced years of disease-related losses.

The initiative is also expected to generate broader economic benefits by strengthening food security, protecting rural livelihoods and enhancing the competitiveness of the livestock sector.

For a country that has spent much of the past decade battling costly animal disease outbreaks, the program represents a significant step toward scientific self-reliance, agricultural resilience and long-term food system stability.