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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RABBIT OWNERS SHOULD TALK WITH VETS ABOUT RHDV VACCINE OPTIONS

LINCOLN – The Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) recommends that rabbit owners talk with their veterinarians about vaccine options to protect their rabbits from Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV). RHDV is a highly contagious and often deadly viral disease that affects wild and domestic rabbits.

“Even though RHDV hasn’t been confirmed in Nebraska to date, it has been found in wild and/or domestic rabbits in several states including the bordering states of Colorado, South Dakota and Wyoming,” said NDA State Veterinarian Dr. Dennis Hughes. “It’s important for rabbit owners to know about this disease so they can more closely monitor the health of their rabbits and talk with their veterinarians about RHDV vaccine options.”

Symptoms of RHDV include fever, anorexia, wasting, diarrhea, lethargy, seizures, bleeding (from nose, mouth or rectum) and respiratory illness. RHDV can also cause sudden death in rabbits, even if they aren’t showing any other symptoms.

RHDV is not contagious to people, livestock or other animals, but it is spread between rabbits and can also survive for weeks in contaminated environments.

Enhanced biosecurity helps prevent the introduction and spread of viruses and diseases including RHDV and should always be taken to protect rabbits, even if they are vaccinated. In addition to thorough cleaning and sanitation practices, rabbit owners should consider housing rabbits indoors, restricting visitors to their rabbitries, and isolating new rabbit additions for 30 days.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has issued a conditional license to Medgene Labs, located in Brookings, South Dakota, to distribute their RHDV vaccine. As the State Veterinarian, Dr. Hughes has given permission to Medgene Labs to distribute their vaccine to licensed veterinarians in Nebraska who will order and distribute the vaccine to clients.

RHDV is a notifiable Foreign Animal Disease, and practitioners who suspect RHDV in their domestic rabbits should contact the Nebraska Department of Agriculture at 402-471-2351. People concerned about unusual deaths of wild rabbit and hare populations in Nebraska are encouraged to contact Nebraska Game and Parks at 308-763-2940.

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All rabbits entering Nebraska must be accompanied by a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI, or health certificate). If you are considering moving an animal into Nebraska from an affected state, please call 402-471-2351 to learn more. Nebraska rabbit owners wanting to ship rabbits out of state should consult the State Veterinarians of the destination states for import requirements.

Additional information on RHDV can be found on NDA's website at:
<https://nda.nebraska.gov/animal/diseases/rhd/index.html>.

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