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CEEZAD Focuses on Zoonotic Diseases

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Juergen A. Richt

CEEZAD focuses on zoonotic diseases |

Juergen A. Richt and other K-State scientists are zeroing in on zoonotic diseases, which are diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans.

Richt and his team recently traveled to Morocco to investigate an outbreak of West Nile Virus in horses and to Mongolia to study outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in camels and sheep. K-State has an important role in the study of zoonotic diseases, thanks to the newly designated Center of Excellence for Emerging and Zoonotic Animal Diseases, or CEEZAD.

The Department of Homeland Security is funding the center, and Richt, a Regents distinguished professor at Kansas State University and a Kansas Bioscience Authority Eminent Scholar, will serve as the director.

The CEEZAD team will support research that will protect human and animal health

and further boost K-State's reputation as a hub for animal health research. This cooperative agreement is \$2 million per year for six years, totaling \$12 million.

Although zoonotic diseases have existed for centuries, scientists want to better understand how diseases adapt and change. At least 60 percent of all human pathogens are zoonotic, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and 75 percent of recently emerging infectious diseases that affect humans come from animals. Some of these diseases pose catastrophic risks to human health, livestock health and the agricultural economy.

CEEZAD will enhance the Department of Homeland Security's capabilities to protect America against agroterrorism caused by zoonotic infectious agents.

"We need to become alert to how agriculture can become a force for good or evil, depending upon the motives of those

who have the competence and confidence in dealing with agricultural matters," Richt said.

CEEZAD scientists will conduct research, develop technology and train a specialized work force to defend U.S. pre-harvest agricultural systems against catastrophic events caused by emerging and zoonotic pathogens.

CEEZAD is partnering with the Foreign Animal and Zoonotic Disease Defense Center at Texas A&M University to co-lead the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to involve university researchers in zoonotic and animal disease detection. More than 30 universities and other partners around the world are also involved as collaborators. This partnership will unite research efforts in vaccines, detection and diagnostics, epidemiology and education and outreach.

By Trevor Davis, Communications and Marketing



The USDA Tower, Manhattan, Kan.