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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEWS RELEASE DATE: April 10, 2020

RABBIT DISEASE CONFIRMED IN ARIZONA

Phoenix – The Arizona Department of Agriculture (AZDA) in conjunction with Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) has confirmed two separate cases of rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus 2 (RHDV2) in domestic rabbits and wild rabbits.

RHDV2 is not harmful to humans. RHDV2 is a viral disease that causes sudden death in rabbits and can be spread through contact with infected rabbits, their meat or their fur, or materials coming in contact with them.

On March 25, the Arizona State Veterinarian's Office received Information from the State Veterinarian in New Mexico that they had a confirmed case of RHDV2 in a domestic rabbit and were seeing a die off of wild rabbits as well. On April 2, New Mexico reported that since the March 24, 2020 diagnosis of RHDV2 in pet rabbits was confirmed at Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (FADDL), 5 additional detections on premises in 5 counties have been confirmed, and this investigation is ongoing. On April 2, they confirmed RHDV2 in a wild black-tailed jackrabbit and wild cottontails, representing the first detection of this virus in wild rabbits in the United States.

On April 1st, Arizona Game and Fish received 2 separate reports from wildlife managers in the Douglas area of dying cottontails and jackrabbits. A cottontail and black-tailed jackrabbit were collected and delivered on April 4th to Dr. Justice-Allen, wildlife veterinarian for AZGFD. Lesions were found consistent with RHDV2. Samples from these rabbits were sent to the FADDL at Plum Island. On April 8th, the laboratory confirmed that these animals had died from RHDV2.

On April 6th the AZDA received a report of a sudden die off in a domestic rabbit population in North Eastern Arizona. Samples were collected and sent to FADDL and were reported out as positive on April 9, 2020.

RHDV2 is a viral disease that only affects rabbits (not people, pets, or livestock). Until very recently, it was not known whether or not North American native rabbits would be susceptible to it. They are not susceptible to another strain of the virus, RHDV1. This virus is not related to coronavirus; it is a calicivirus. Infection with this virus is associated with a high mortality rate and it is quite contagious. The virus can survive in the environment for an extended period of time.

The presence of RHDV2 in the U.S. domestic rabbit industry or in the wild rabbit populations would potentially impact the pet rabbit industry; 4- H, FFA, and other hobby groups; exhibitions; laboratories; and the meat, pelt, and hunting sectors.

Rabbit owners who have questions about this disease should contact their veterinarians. If a case is suspected, veterinarians should contact APHIS or email diseasereporting@azda.gov to contact the State Veterinarian's Office or call 623-236-7201 for wildlife issues.

A vaccine for RHDV2 is not currently available in the U.S. Rabbit owners should practice good biosecurity measures to protect their animals from this disease, such as washing your hands before and after working with rabbits and not sharing equipment with other owners.

Avoid contact with wild or feral rabbits. We recommend burying dead rabbits to reduce the risk of disease transmission. Visit https://agriculture.az.gov/ or azgfd.gov for more information about RHD.