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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

9 CFR Part 82

[Docket No. 02–117–10]

Exotic Newcastle Disease; Removal of Areas From Quarantine

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Interim rule and request for comments.

SUMMARY: We are amending the exotic Newcastle disease regulations by removing portions of Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura Counties, CA, from the list of quarantined areas. This action removes restrictions on the movement of birds, poultry, and certain other articles from those areas. With this action, there are no longer any areas in the United States that are quarantined because of exotic Newcastle disease.

DATES: This interim rule was effective September 16, 2003. We will consider all comments that we receive on or before November 18, 2003.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments by postal mail/commercial delivery or by e-mail. If you use postal mail/commercial delivery, please send four copies of your comment (an original and three copies) to: Docket No. 02–117–10, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3C71, 4700 River Road Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737–1238. Please state that your comment refers to Docket No. 02–117–10. If you use e-mail, address your comment to regulations@aphis.usda.gov. Your comment must be contained in the body of your message; do not send attached files. Please include your name and address in your message and “Docket No. 02–117–10” on the subject line.

You may read any comments that we receive on this docket in our reading room. The reading room is located in room 1141 of the USDA South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC. Normal reading room hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. To be sure someone is there to help you, please call (202) 690–2817 before coming.

APHIS documents published in the **Federal Register**, and related information, including the names of organizations and individuals who have commented on APHIS dockets, are available on the Internet at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppd/rad/webrepor.html>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Aida Boghossian, Senior Staff Veterinarian, Emergency Programs Staff, VS, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 41, Riverdale, MD 20737–1231; (301) 734–8073.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Exotic Newcastle disease (END) is a contagious and fatal viral disease affecting the respiratory, nervous, and digestive systems of birds and poultry. END is so virulent that many birds and poultry die without showing any clinical signs. A death rate of almost 100 percent can occur in unvaccinated poultry flocks. END can infect and cause death even in vaccinated poultry.

The regulations in “Subpart A—Exotic Newcastle Disease (END)” (9 CFR 82.1 through 82.16, referred to below as the regulations) were established to prevent the spread of END in the United States in the event of an outbreak. In § 82.3, paragraph (a) provides that any area where birds or poultry infected with END are located will be designated as a quarantined area, and that a quarantined area is any geographical area, which may be a premises or all or part of a State, deemed by epidemiological evaluation to be sufficient to contain all birds or poultry known to be infected with or exposed to END.

Prior to the effective date of this interim rule, portions of Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura Counties, CA, were designated as quarantined areas in § 82.3(c) of the regulations. As a result, the interstate movement from those

quarantined areas of birds, poultry, products, and materials that could spread END was prohibited or restricted. Further, because the Secretary of Agriculture declared an extraordinary emergency because of END in California, the intrastate movement from the quarantined areas of birds, poultry, products, and materials that could spread END was prohibited or restricted, as provided by the regulations in § 82.16.

Previous Quarantine Actions

On October 1, 2002, END was confirmed in the State of California. The disease was confirmed in backyard poultry, which are raised on private premises for hobby, exhibition, and personal consumption. Over the course of the following months, END was confirmed in backyard and commercial poultry on premises elsewhere in California and in backyard poultry in Arizona, Nevada, and Texas. Consequently, in a series of six interim rules published in the **Federal Register** between November 2002 and May 2003, we amended the regulations in § 82.3(c) by designating specific portions of each of those States as quarantined areas. As of May 2003, all or portions of three counties in Arizona, nine counties in California, two counties in Nevada, three counties in New Mexico, and two counties in Texas were designated as quarantined areas in § 82.3(c). As provided for by the regulations in § 82.3(a), these quarantined areas encompassed each area where poultry infected with END were located and a surrounding geographical area deemed by epidemiological evaluation to be sufficient to contain all birds or poultry known to be infected with or exposed to END.

Previous Reductions in Quarantined Areas

Beginning in May 2003, we began releasing areas from quarantine after Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) epidemiologists determined, based on the results of extensive investigations conducted in Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas, that it was possible to reduce the size of the quarantined areas in those States. Specifically:

- In an interim rule effective May 14, 2003, and published in the **Federal Register** on May 19, 2003 (68 FR 26986–26988, Docket No. 02–117–6), we