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Supreme Court blocks killing of Molokai cattle

The Hawaii Supreme Court yesterday blocked a government round-up of Molokai cattle, at least temporarily.

The round-up was set to be launched early next week by state officials who believe all cattle on the island must be slaughtered to eradicate bovine tuberculosis.

But a group of ranchers protesting the round-up and slaughter won a temporary stay from the Supreme Court, which deemed it "necessary to enable this court to properly consider the arguments for and against a stay pending appeal."

The Supreme Court's order halts the government round-up through the end of the day next Thursday.

The Molokai ranchers and the government have been battling each other in court since last fall, when state and federal officials announced its program to eradicate bovine tuberculosis.

About 8,000 Molokai cattle already have been slaughtered or moved off the island, but some 700 head of cattle owned by the protesting ranchers remain on the island.

The ranchers fighting the government eradication effort contend their animals are healthy and never have been exposed to the disease. They have filed a court appeal and want to save their animals from slaughter pending its outcome.