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# Molokai cattle under the gun

by Nina Berglund

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State agriculture officials, anxious to enforce their program to rid Molokai of bovine tuberculosis, yesterday vowed to round up and kill all remaining cattle on the island starting next week.

Attorneys for ranchers fighting the slaughter order, on the grounds that their cattle are healthy, said they could immediately seek a court order to block the roundup.

In a harshly worded notice sent to 34 ranchers who are defying the program, the state said it will round up, appraise, tag, slaughter or transport for slaughter their roughly 1,000 cattle beginning July 30.

The ranchers were given until Aug. 8 to slaughter or move their own cattle off the island.

Cattle owners who continue to defy

the state's order will have to pay the costs of not only the state's roundup but also of transporting the animals to Oahu, if necessary, for slaughter. The costs will be deducted from an indemnity that will be paid by the federal government to compensate owners for loss of their animals.

State Veterinarian Calvin Lum said the Department of Agriculture will try to seize cattle "without forcing any confrontations" with ranchers. But he warned the state "will take whatever steps are necessary to accomplish this task."

According to the state's notice, cattle owners refusing to grant state officials access to their premises will be met with "necessary action to enforce the (slaughter) order, including but not limited to entry upon the owners' premises to remove cattle."

Lum said the state elected to pursue strong enforcement procedures out of

fairness to the 190 Molokai ranchers who cooperated with the program. Also, he said the island needs to be free of all cattle for at least a month before restocking of herds can begin in October.

"The department believes (it) must make every effort to protect the interests of the 190 ranchers who have complied with the program," Lum said. "They expect the disease to be eradicated."

Lum stressed that he and other government officials continue to believe an islandwide slaughter is the only way to ensure eradication of the disease, which he says threatens the cattle industry not only on Molokai but statewide.

"We are making a final appeal to Molokai ranchers to re-evaluate their intentions," Lum said. "We believe (cooperating with the program) will place them in the mainstream of the

state's cattle industry.

"As long as the stigma of bovine TB exists, Molokai won't get its fair share of the industry."

The state's decision to move quickly in enforcing the disease eradication program follows an order by the state Board of Agriculture July 14 to proceed with the program, based on a hearing officer's recommendation to do so.

The ranchers were given 30 days to appeal the board's order. But their attorneys, now faced with a state roundup before the 30-day period expires, yesterday said they'll be forced to "expedite" their appeal.

Yola Meyer Forbes, co-counsel for the ranchers, said the Molokai ranchers "are more adamant than ever" that they save their animals from slaughter.

"We still maintain our animals have never been exposed to TB and don't need to be slaughtered," she said. "We will seek a court order preventing the state from taking our animals."