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Ag officials still finding cattle on Molokai — prosecution considered

By Edwin Tanji
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KAUNAKAKAI — Agriculture officials still are finding cattle on Molokai and state veterinarian Calvin Lum said he has asked the attorney general to consider criminal prosecution of the owners.

"There are cattle there and we have requested the attorney general to conduct a criminal investigation of certain ranchers who we believe have secreted their animals to keep them from us," Lum said yesterday.

Lum said workers on Molokai rounded up two animals last week. The workers sighted four more animals Tuesday and will try to track them down this week.

"We have had sightings, but safety is a big factor, too," he said. He said the cattle are being found in ravines and areas that might be hazardous to cowboys trying to round up the animals.

The state ordered the eradication of all cattle on Molokai in mid-1985 in an effort to eliminate bovine tuberculosis on the island. Some ranchers fought the program in court, but a state Circuit Court judge last September ruled the slaughter can proceed.

There were 9,389 animals removed from Molokai as of Jan. 15, Lum said. Of that number, 45 were confiscated subsequent to the September court ruling from owners who were not willing to give up their cattle.

Lum said ranchers who may

be hiding their cattle are only hurting other ranchers in their area. Under the eradication program, cattle may not be returned to an area until officials are convinced that there no longer are any animals remaining in the area.

Some areas have been cleared for return of cattle, but no rancher has asked to be allowed to bring in animals, he said.

Cattle owners who turned in their animals were compensated through a federal indemnity program that offered up to \$400 for each animal. Dr. Ulysses Lane, area veterinarian for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, said the government paid out \$3.2 million to Molokai cattle owners. He said his office is still processing some indemnity claims.

During the slaughter, there were four animals from two different ranches found to have bovine tuberculosis, Lane said.

Lum said he has not yet sent information on the cattle found on the island to the attorney general. But, he said, his office has consulted with the attorney general on the problem.

"I had hoped we would not have to come to this," he said. "It is a difficult situation when we're trying to close this down, but some owners are not cooperating."

Bovine tuberculosis is similar to the tuberculosis that infects humans. It can spread to humans from contact with contaminated animal products.