LINCOLN—A devastating swine disease new to the United States hasn't shown up in Nebraska yet, but it's already forcing bacon prices nationwide to new highs.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Veterinary Diagnostic Center stands ready to test piglets for the porcine epidemic diarrhea virus, said Dr. Bruce Brodersen, assistant professor in the center and the School of Veterinary Medicine and Biological Sciences.

Porcine epidemic diarrhea—PED for short—has been around since at least the 1970s but first showed up in the U.S. this summer.

"Since the swine population has never been exposed before to this virus, they're very susceptible," Brodersen said. "The disease outbreaks are very severe because there's no immunity to it at all. So, it's been devastating as far as pig mortality is concerned."

Brodersen said he expects PED to turn up in Nebraska eventually, but swine producers can take steps to avoid it coming to their facilities.

Surveys show PED may be spread when trucks gather anywhere there are common loading and unloading chutes such as buying stations. From those common areas, the virus can be tracked back to individual operations. Brodersen urged producers to be very careful to clean their trailer or truck before they go home.

"You should always follow very strict biosecurity steps," he said. No vaccine is available in the U.S. yet.

Piglets infected with PED experience diarrhea and vomiting violent enough to kill them. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has confirmed only about 400 cases of the disease in the lab, but its toll has already been estimated in the hundreds of thousands.

As a result, pork price futures have risen to historic levels, with hundredweights of pork going for about $105 in recent trading at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. The USDA reports that the same amount of pork went for $78 in March.

Fox Business News reported that the prices for pork bellies, which are cured into bacon, have risen particularly fast. On Tuesday, the wholesale price of a hundred pounds of fresh pork belly topped $189, 5% more than it was five days earlier and apparently at or near all-time highs.

Retail prices for bacon don’t track one-to-one with belly prices, Fox Business News reported, but they also have risen. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated the price of a pound of bacon in urban supermarkets at $4.92 in June—up 14% from June 2012 and another all-time high.