

[Back to Story](#) - [Help](#)

YAHOO! NEWS

REUTERS 

Climate change pushes diseases north: expert

By Jeremy Clarke *51 minutes ago*

Global warming is pushing northwards diseases more commonly found in developing countries, posing a risk to the financial and physical health of rich nations, the head of a livestock herders' charity said.

Steve Sloan, chief executive of GALVmed, said on Friday insect-borne diseases were increasingly moving north, such as the viral infection bluetongue that has hit cattle and sheep in the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Germany.

If Kenya's Rift Valley Fever also reached Europe, the impact would be immense, he said.

"These 'African' diseases have become global issues because of climate change," Sloan told Reuters in an interview.

"Following the bluetongue outbreak in Germany, some meat markets in the country saw an annual drop of up to a third," he said. "Wait until something like Rift Valley Fever arrives, that brings death with it as well."

Bluetongue, which is not harmful to humans, has been present for several years in Spain and Italy.

The disease, transmitted by midges, was first discovered in South Africa and has been spreading north since the late 1990s. Experts say that is due to global warming.

"There is a very real threat that diseases like River Valley Fever will follow bluetongue into Europe," Brian Perry, senior scientist at the International Livestock Research Institute, told Reuters. "Climate change has a definite impact in the establishment of these diseases."

Within a month of bluetongue being detected in the southern Netherlands last year, the number of Dutch farms affected by it had doubled to more than 400, despite measures to stop the spread of the virus.

"These are economic diseases that should frighten the hell out of Europe's meat business, not to mention the threat they pose to human lives," Sloan said.

"Climate change is bringing them to Europe."

GALVmed aims to reduce poverty of livestock keepers in developing countries by improving access to pharmaceuticals and vaccines.

Copyright © 2007 Reuters Limited. All rights reserved. Republication or redistribution of Reuters content is expressly prohibited without the prior written consent of Reuters. Reuters shall not be liable for any errors or delays in the content, or for any actions taken in reliance thereon.