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WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 2009 ■ SECTION

TEXAS ■ SWINE FLU

### Widower seeks to sue operator of pig farm

#### Flu victim's husband targets U.S. firm's operation in Mexico

By Mary Ann Roser

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

A court petition seeking answers in a Cameron County teacher's swine flu death accuses a Virginia-based company of having "horribly unsanitary conditions" at its pig farm in Mexico and wants to discover what role the farm might have played in the outbreak.

statesman.com/swineflu

Get the latest updates on the swine flu.

The petition was filed in state District Court in Cameron County by Steven Trunnell of Harlingen on behalf of his wife, Judy Dominguez Trunnell, a 33-year-old special education teacher who died May 5 after delivering a healthy baby girl by cesarean section days earlier.

She was the first U.S. citizen to die of swine flu; a toddler from Mexico City died in Houston on April 27.

Marc Rosenthal, an Austin lawyer with Rosenthal & Watson, filed the petition Monday and said Trunnell is seeking to sue the world's largest hog producer and pig processor, Smithfield Foods Inc., which operates a farm in La Gloria, Veracruz, under the name Granjas Carroll de Mexico. The company raises 1 million pigs on the farm. Residents have long complained about the farm's stench and foul conditions, said Rosenthal, who has offices in Austin and Brownsville.

"The conditions in which they allow this pig

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### FLU: Man says officials wrong about wife's health

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farm to operate ... would not be allowed in the United States," he said.

Keira Ullrich, investor relations manager for Smithfield Foods in New York, declined to comment on the allegations.

Trunnell, 36, said Tuesday that he had never heard of the pig farm and has to educate himself about it. He said he contacted lawyers because "of all the misinformation" about his wife's medical history that was being spread.

Although health officials said Judy Trunnell had "chronic underlying health conditions," her husband said that was incorrect. She was in excellent health and had no medical problems before falling ill with swine flu, he said.

She had psoriasis, a skin condition, but that was unrelated to her death, Steven Trunnell said. Her immune system was compromised by the pregnancy — pregnant women are at risk for complications from flu — and hearing medical officials say otherwise was "devastating," he said.



FAMILY PHOTO

Steven Trunnell said his late wife, Judy Dominguez Trunnell, did not have any conditions that would have contributed to her death.

Telling their daughter, 4, that "Mommy was never coming home was the hardest thing I ever had to do," he said.

Medical authorities have not determined the origins of the swine flu outbreak. Rosenthal said the petition will enable the law firm to investigate the outbreak and gather evidence for a potential wrongful death lawsuit. Damages of up to \$1 billion will be sought, he said.

On Tuesday, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said it had 3,009 confirmed

swine flu cases in the United States. Texas reported 294 confirmed cases, while Travis County had four confirmed and nine probable cases, according to Carole Barasch, spokeswoman for the Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department.

Last week, a man in his 30s died of swine flu in Washington state, becoming the nation's third fatality. Health officials said he had a heart problem in addition to the flu.

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