



Federation of
Veterinarians
of Europe



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EDITO

What badgers and free-range poultry have in common

Outbreaks of tuberculosis in cattle in the United Kingdom are often linked to the prevalence of *Mycobacterium bovis* in badgers. Research has shown that infected badgers can excrete large numbers of bacteria, thereby contaminating pastures and — theoretically — infecting cattle. Many, experts and otherwise, blame badgers for the outbreaks and advocate the massive culling of badgers. However, a recent report of a British Scientific Group on Cattle TB points out that there is no clear correlation between levels of TB in badgers and in cattle. The experts believe that a better control of cattle TB could be achieved immediately by stricter biosecurity measures at the farm. This is considered “fundamental” to control of the disease, regardless of whether badger culling is a component in future policy.

Another group of experts, this time in the Netherlands, concluded that it could not be ruled out that migratory birds from Kazakhstan or Novosibirsk, infected with highly pathogenic avian influenza, would reach the Netherlands, or that they would infect other birds that did. Combined with a high poultry density in some areas and potential consequences for public health, this lead the experts to advise the Dutch authorities to call for a ban on the outdoor keeping of all commercial poultry; an advice that was immediately followed by the Minister. And despite the conclusion of experts of the Avian Influenza working group of the EU Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health — “...*that it would not be proportionate to the current risk of disease introduction from Asia through migratory birds, to implement a generalised ban on keeping poultry outdoors*” — the ban is still firmly in place.

Different experts may have different opinions. No-one can foresee the future and only in hindsight we may know who was right. However, the debates on the role of badgers or free-range poultry tend to divert the attention from other, even more important, issues: protective measures that can be taken immediately by animal owners. Or, in the words of the Commission’s working group: “...*there is the need for bio-security measures implemented at farm level to be reviewed and reinforced wherever necessary on the basis of a case-by-case risk assessment carried out at local level*”. Every farmer should ask himself: “*what can I do?*” And here lies a great opportunity for the veterinary profession to offer its expertise and local knowledge: to translate theory into practical solutions and to contribute to the prevention and control of these major zoonoses.

Jan Vaarten
Executive Director

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Animal health & Medicines

Avian influenza

EU steps up its precautionary measures

Following the continued outbreaks of avian influenza (AI) in South-East Asia, the disease has now spread to central Asia, both to domestic poultry and wild birds, resulting in the loss of more than 140 million poultry. End July, outbreaks of AI were notified by Russia (Siberia), later confirmed to be caused by the H5N1 highly pathogenic virus. The disease now has been reported in six different Russian provinces, the nearest at around 2200 km from the (Baltic) EU borders. In August, outbreaks were also observed in Mongolia (wild waterfowl only), Kazakhstan (both domestic and wild birds) and Tibet.

No human case has been reported so far in the newly affected areas in Central Asia (against 57 human deaths in South-East Asia). Due to the current characteristics of the H5N1 virus responsible for the Asian epidemic, no 'human-to-human' transmission has taken place.

A new Directive to include low-pathogenic AI

EU sanitary measures are continuously adapted to the evolving situation. Imports of live birds, poultry meat and untreated meat products from countries where AI has occurred have already been banned since January 2004. Untreated feathers were later added to the list of banned imports.

In April 2005, proposals for a new Directive on AI control were adopted. The proposed legislation will include measures for both low and highly pathogenic avian influenza, as it has been shown that highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) originates from the "low-pathogenic" virus. The low pathogenic viruses cannot be eradicated from wild birds, but the infection of domestic poultry can be effectively controlled. The current Directive¹ only covers surveillance and control measures against HPAI. The additional cost of the new measures has been estimated at 3-8 million euro a year, to be financed by the EU Veterinary Fund. This cost is expected to be "more than recuperated" by savings related to a reduced risk of future epidemics.

The new Directive should now be adopted by the Council and then transposed into national legislation in all EU Member States before entering fully into force on 1 January 2007. The adoption of the new Directive is a priority for the UK Presidency during the autumn of 2005.

Migration surveillance, import checks, preparedness plans

In order to take into account the potential spread of AI from Asia via migratory birds, EU guidelines have been set up in addition to current AI monitoring in wild birds². The guidelines include the identification of higher risk species (depending on flyways, numbers, contact with domestic poultry), at-risk sites (with mixing of migratory species, near poultry farms, along migration flyways) and at-risk



¹ Directive 92/40/EEC

² Commission Decision 2005/469/EC of 21 June 2005 on the implementation of survey programmes for avian influenza in poultry and wild birds to be carried out in the Member States

periods (migration). Passive surveillance is mainly based on abnormal mortality or disease outbreaks in at-risk species and areas. Faecal and tissue samples should be taken from dead birds for virus isolation and PCR (molecular detection) analysis. The guidelines, which apply until January 2006, were set up at the meeting of the AI working group of the Standing committee on the food chain and animal health (SCOFCAH), on 6 September.

As for the ban on keeping poultry outside, now in force in several EU countries (Germany, Netherlands), this was not adopted as an EU-wide measure, as experts did not consider it justified in view of the relatively low risk of disease spread by migrating birds.

Other measures taken at EU level include the preparation and testing of preparedness plans, surveillance and networking of reference labs, the possible availability of vaccines³. Member States are urged to introduce additional awareness programmes (to encourage farmers to further improve biosecurity), review and update the existing contingency plans and ensure a thorough application of the existing border controls on any illegal introduction of (ornamental) birds and their products.

Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies

TSE Roadmap: reflection paper on changes in EU measures

On 15 July, the European Commission adopted the TSE Roadmap⁴, a reflection paper outlining possible future changes to EU measures on BSE. Over the past few years, a significant decrease in the number of positive BSE cases has been observed (about 850 BSE cases in 2004 in the EU-25 compared to 2129 in 2002 in the EU-15), due to stringent measures at EU level. In view of the improved situation, the Commission has taken this initiative to present a roadmap on the BSE strategy in the short, medium and long-term.

A relaxation of certain BSE measures would not only have a positive impact on the farming industry, but it would also allow a shift in focus to other emerging diseases that are “*considered to be less under control than BSE*” such as Avian influenza.

Among the issues up for discussion are the rules on the removal of specific risk material, the culling policy, the feed ban, monitoring programmes, the eradication policy for small ruminants, BSE-risk categorisation and the UK embargo. The Roadmap will be used as a basis for discussion with Member States, the European Parliament and other stakeholders.



Veterinary medicines directive

FVE survey: Medicines importation under cascade needs to be facilitated


By end October, the Directive⁵ on veterinary medicines will enter into force. According to its article 3, Member States “shall bring into force the laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with this Directive by 30 October 2005 at the latest.”

³ For more information on avian influenza:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/animal/diseases/controlmeasures/avian/index_en.htm

⁴ http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/food/biosafety/bse/roadmap_en.pdf

⁵ Directive 2004/28/EC of the EP and Council of 31 March 2004 relating to veterinary medicinal products



To find out just how well prepared the various Member States are to implement the Directive, FVE sent out a questionnaire to its members last spring. A total of 17 replies were received from 13 countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom).

Results of the questionnaire showed that in 9 out of the 13 countries, the national government had consulted the veterinary profession on the implementation of the Directive, or was expected to do so at the time of replying.

Most countries (12/13) expected that only veterinarians would be considered a “suitably qualified person”(SQP) allowed to prescribe veterinary medicines. In 7 countries, the FVE members expected that there would be no exemptions from the basic rule that medicines for food-producing animals are available on prescription only. In the countries that did expect exemptions, these mainly concerned products without residues such as certain teat dips and topical products.

Regarding the so-called Cascade, measures to facilitate its implementation were still being discussed in most Member States. In particular practicalities for the importation of medicines from other Member States that are not available on the home market still needed clarification in most countries.

On 2 July, FVE met with Nils Behrndt and Karin Krauss from the Pharmaceuticals Unit of DG Enterprise. Main agenda points were the availability of veterinary medicines and the use of the cascade. Regarding the latter, the FVE highlighted the bottle-neck of importation of veterinary medicines. At present, often, they can only be ordered once the diagnosis has been made and a number of conditions have been met. This is very time-consuming and the drug may well arrive too late for the patient concerned. Possible solutions to this problem were discussed such as allowing one appointed gross-seller to stock up certain essential products. Other agenda points included pharmacovigilance, the list of “essential” drugs for the treatment of horses, responsibility of practitioners when using the cascade, residues in foodstuffs of animal origin and exemption criteria to prescription-only medicines.

Feedstuffs of animal origin

Stakeholders meeting discusses legal options

On 18 July, FVE participated in a stakeholders meeting on residues in foodstuffs of animal origin, jointly organised by DG Sanco and DG Enterprise. On the agenda: the discussion of the Reflection Paper on this item, published in December 2003. Following comments and several meetings of expert working groups, the July meeting invited stakeholders to give their opinion for the preparation of a first draft, planned for the autumn of 2005.

In order to streamline and simplify the current legislation, five possible options were discussed, of which the two first ones consisted of replacing the current legislation on residues (Regulations 2377/90, Directive 96/23/EC and Directive 96/22/EC) by either one single Regulation or by a Regulation and a Decision. Two other options proposed guidelines and self-control measures at farm level or a framework Directive as a replacement. Finally, one option proposed no change at all. The expert impact assessment of the various options was presented at the meeting.

Following the first draft, which will be submitted to the Member States, a second draft is planned for early 2006, with a final proposal by spring 2006.

Animal welfare

Action Plan of the Community Animal Welfare Policy

FVE calls for increased cooperation, reinforcement and public awareness

FVE welcomes the drafting of a first European Action Plan on Animal Welfare and applauds the work done so far by the EU, which has “*led to a significant improvement of the welfare of farming animals in Europe*”. FVE and other members of the Advisory Group on the Food Chain and Animal and Plant Health were invited to send their comments to the Commission by 15 September, in advance of a planned public internet consultation in October 2005.

EU: fore-fighter of animal welfare

Quoting Commissioner Kyprianou, FVE agrees that “*Making progress in the field of animal welfare calls for cooperation rather than confrontation.*” To make animal welfare evolve, it is vital for the EU and national legislators to build and maintain relationships with industry, stakeholders and citizens alike. And here lies an important task for the newly established Advisory Group on the Food Chain and Animal and Plant Health, according to FVE. And in order for this Group to have an impact, it is essential that it is consulted at a very early stage of the preparation of future Community policies.

On the question whether the focus should be at a EU or global level, FVE considers that Europe should firmly “*take and maintain its role of fore-fighter of animal welfare*”, both within the Community as on an international level. And although FVE is in favour of EU harmonisation of animal welfare legislation, individual countries that wish to adopt more stringent national rules should continue to be able to do so.

Closer collaboration and streamlining of competences

It is often difficult to keep track which EU institution is responsible for which area of animal welfare. According to FVE, the re-grouping, re-organising and streamlining of competences are necessary, not only within the Commission but also between the Commission and the Council of Europe (CoE), and FVE urges the Commission to set up a dialogue with the CoE for a stronger collaboration and pooled resources.

As for the training of professionals, all drivers, operators and technicians responsible for the transport, handling, slaughter and care of animals should be thoroughly trained. FVE also agrees with the need for raising awareness and informing citizens. The Eurobarometer⁶ clearly showed a great variation in awareness of animal welfare between the various EU Member States.



FVE stresses that in formulating EU policies, the institutions and Member States should, in accordance with the proposed European Constitution, “*pay full regard to the requirements of animal welfare*”. However, the significant *caveat* added to this paragraph, which refers to “*respecting (...) religious rites, cultural tradition and regional heritage*” should not be used as an excuse for condoning cruelty to animals.

But animal welfare doesn't stop here: enforcement is at least as important as the introduction of adequate legislation. FVE applauds the work done by the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) but

⁶ http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_229_en.pdf

believes that more resources, both human and financial, need to be made available to the FVO for optimal monitoring of animal welfare standards.

The veterinary profession: a pivotal role

Whilst FVE recognises the valuable work done by many non-veterinary organisations, it believes that only the veterinary profession possesses the knowledge and skills necessary for the assessment of animal welfare, the identification of the causes of poor welfare and the recommendations to correct it.

Society expects of the veterinarian to monitor and improve the protection of animals. Whatever differentiation or speciality they pursue, the primary concern and responsibility of all veterinarians should be the protection of the welfare of the animals under their care. FVE is therefore committed to remind its members of their responsibility, for example by laying it down in the European Code of Conduct.



The increased importance in animal welfare should also be reflected in the veterinary curriculum and in the training and updating of skills and knowledge of qualified veterinarians (continuing professional development). Furthermore, FVE will continue to organise working groups, hold debates and facilitate discussions to advise government and the public on animal welfare issues.

The proposed Action Plan on Animal Welfare is to be finalised during December 2005, before submission to the Council and European Parliament.

Welfare of chickens kept for meat production

Broiler Directive: FVE comments on biosecurity, ventilation and impartiality

The draft Directive on the welfare of chickens kept for meat production (broilers) was adopted by the Commission on 31 May (see Newsletter July 2005). As mentioned before, FVE welcomes the proposal and the FVE working group on broilers has now examined the draft Directive in detail and suggested a number of modifications.



Stocking densities and biosecurity

The proposed Directive lays down a maximum stocking density of 30 kg live animals per square meter and a number of welfare requirements applicable to all poultry farms. However, farms that meet enhanced welfare conditions will be allowed to stock up to 38 kg/m². Apart from stocking densities, other factors such as temperature, humidity, litter and air quality may also have a major impact on animal welfare, FVE recalls.

In order to prevent major disease outbreaks that may impair welfare, FVE urges to include, under Annex I (requirements applicable to all poultry farms), a paragraph on biosecurity (recommending “all in all out”-systems with depopulation, disinfection, change of litter before entry of a new batch of animals).

Regarding surgical interventions, FVE would like to see beak trimming only allowed on veterinary recommendation, and when all other prevention measures have failed. Castration of broilers should be banned, as there is no therapeutic or diagnostic purpose for this intervention.

Genetic selection and impartial inspections

The genetic selection for fast growing birds and the subsequent detrimental effects on broiler welfare is one of the principal welfare issues. The FVE hopes that the Commission will also look into the welfare issues of the breeding stock birds and hatcheries.

Regarding the training of poultry farmers and technicians, the FVE agrees that they should receive suitable training but does not see any reason to exempt people based on 'appropriate experience'.

Regarding the monitoring and follow-up at the slaughterhouse, FVE regrets that monitoring is to be carried out retrospectively, which means that problems will only be investigated once the birds are already dead. FVE feels that a more pro-active on-farm approach is required and that monitoring at the slaughterhouse should be carried out as a safety measure to check that on-farm welfare issues were dealt with correctly.

The full FVE position paper can be found on the FVE website (papers / animal welfare):

http://www.fve.org/papers/pdf/aw/position_papers/fve_05_pos_004_broilers_directive.pdf

This proposed Directive on broiler welfare is currently being discussed in the Council and the European Parliament. The legislators hope to adopt the final act in the beginning of 2006.

EFSA working group on laboratory animal welfare

Can invertebrates suffer?

On 31 August, a stakeholder meeting was organised by the EFSA Animal Health and Animal Welfare working group, for the discussion of a number of issues regarding laboratory animal welfare, in view of a new Directive. The questions covered:

1. If and which invertebrates should fall under the proposed Directive;
2. whether foetal and embryonic animals should be protected;
3. whether and which laboratory animal species should be purpose bred;
4. and most humane methods of euthanasia.



The comments made by FVE and other stakeholders will be considered when the finalised proposal will be discussed at the September plenary meeting of the EFSA.

Written declaration by European parliament

MEPs urge to end export refunds for live cattle

On 7 July, the European Parliament agreed on a written declaration on Live Animal Export Refunds. The Declaration calls for a stop to export refunds for live cattle and urges for public funds to finance the promotion and protection of animal welfare. This Declaration, recognised as a formal opinion of the European Parliament, will be forwarded to the Council and the Commission.

Advisory Group on the Food Chain and Animal and Plant Health

First meeting held

The newly established EU Advisory Group on the food chain and animal and plant health, of which FVE is an official member, held its first meeting on 5 and 6 of July in Brussels. Thirty-six European organisations were present. Robert Madelin, Director General of DG Sanco opened the meeting.

The first action of the Advisory Group was the discussion and adoption of its own rules of procedure. Paola Testori Coggi gave a comprehensive overview of EU Food Safety Policy, while Andrea Gavinelli gave an outline on the drafting of a first European Action Plan on Animal Welfare.

Public health

Food hygiene

Implementation measures discussed at stakeholders meeting

On 13-14 June, FVE attended a stakeholders meeting organised by DG Sanco to discuss the implementation of the new hygiene legislation.

Regarding the decontamination of carcasses, FVE thanked the Commission for the improvements made but added that FVE is, in principle, against decontamination, and that it could only be used exceptionally and on a case-by-case basis. Establishments that intend to use this procedure should incorporate it in their HACCP plan.


Concerning the Food chain information (FCI), FVE voiced its concern about the rather long transitional period (4 years) and the lack of minimum criteria to enter into force by January 2006, when operators will need to provide “minimal FCI”.

Later that month, on 28 June, FVE met with a delegation from DG Sanco, including Jaana Husu-Kallio (deputy director DG Sanco), Alberto Laddomada and Eric Marin. On the agenda: the training of the Official Veterinarian (for which FVE has developed learning objectives) and the frequency of audits in meat cutting plants (a great variation in audit and attendance was found between Member States). Other agenda points included the community animal health and animal welfare policies, the protection of broilers and the quality of veterinary education.

Transitional measures on the verge of adoption

On 14 September, the Standing committee on the food chain and animal health (SCOFAH) met to discuss the draft Regulations on the implementation and transitional measures of the new hygiene legislation (Regulations (EC) 852/2004, 853/2004, 854/2004 and 882/2004).

Their entry into force on 1 January 2006 will entail considerable changes to the rules and procedures to be followed by food operators and the competent authorities of the Member States. The application of some of these measures with immediate effect from 1 January 2006 may



present some practical difficulties, and a transitional period has been envisaged, in particular for the Food chain information (FCI) and the training of slaughterhouse staff assisting with official controls. The EU hopes to finalise the discussions before the end of September, after which the regulations after being translated, will be published in the Official Journal.

Artisanal food processors

MS much stricter than Europe for artisanal food processors

On 15 September, the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC) held a public hearing in the framework of its own-initiative opinion report on “Hygiene Rules and Artisanal Food Processors”. While the new food-hygiene legislation seems to give enough flexibility to Member States to allow derogations for SME’s (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises), often Member States seem not to make use of these derogations and even apply a “stricter” interpretation of the regulations than intended by the EU, which will be disadvantageous to these SME’s. Further issues raised were the need for waiting pens in slaughtering enterprises, the requirement to maintain a temperature of less than 12 degrees in all meat-cutting rooms and the new temperature and microbiological inspections provisions in respect of minced meat.

FVE & Professional matters

Services directive

IMCO debate ongoing

The draft Services Directive is currently being discussed in the Parliament's Internal Market Committee and by the Council Working Group. Earlier this year, in April, the Internal Market Committee (IMCO, European Parliament) held its first major debate on how to alter the Services Directive at first reading. The Directive’s rapporteur Evelyne Gebhardt (PES, DE), had proposed major amendments to the Commission's proposals, in particular to the scope and the controversial country of origin principle. She is now through closed-door meetings trying to find common ground on over 1000 amendments. The vote in the IMCO committee, planned for 13-14 September has now been postponed to 4-5 October. With the vote in plenary scheduled for the end of October (24-27), it is not sure whether this deadline can be kept. The adoption of the directive requires a qualified majority in Council and co-decision in the European Parliament.



Education

Evaluation of veterinary teaching establishments

Commission enquires about the follow-up of observed training deficiencies

Following a meeting with FVE earlier this year, Ms Pamela Brumpter of DG Internal Market acted upon certain concerns voiced by the federation and other organisations involved in veterinary education (EAEVE⁷, EBVS⁸) on the quality of education in some of the newer veterinary schools in the EU. Evaluation visits to some of these teaching establishments revealed that some of these schools did not meet the minimum training requirements as laid down in the veterinary training directive⁹. The reports drawn up by the visiting panels contain suggestions that would enable the schools to meet the necessary requirements.

On behalf of the Commission, Ms Brumpter has written an official letter to the authorities of the country concerned to ask for details regarding the follow-up given to the reports.

Meetings

FVE GA

November Brussels meeting: a full agenda

The FVE General Assembly will take place at the International Trade Union House in Brussels on Friday 18 and Saturday 19 November. The FVE sections meetings of the UEVP (practitioners), UEVH (hygienists) and EASVO (state veterinary officers) are scheduled for Thursday 17 November at the same venue. The European organisation of veterinarians working in education, research and industry (EVERI) will also meet that Thursday. It is expected that EVERI will become an official FVE section at the General assembly.

Earlier that week, on 15 and 16 November, a TAIEX/FVE meeting will be held on the movement of veterinarians within and into the EU.

Furthermore, on Wednesday 16 November at 6 pm, the statutory bodies meeting will be held.

⁷ *European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education*

⁸ *European Board for Veterinary Specialisation*

⁹ *Directive 78/1027/EEC*

TAIEX and FVE conferences

Theme: the distribution and prudent use of veterinary medicines

FVE and TAIEX¹⁰ have developed a draft programme for conferences on veterinary medicines¹¹. These conferences are a follow-up to the one held in February earlier this year. The conferences present the EU legislation on the distribution and the prudent use of veterinary medicines. The conferences are primarily aimed at veterinary practitioners from the new EU member states as well as applicant countries.

In order to save time and resources, FVE suggests combining the conference with one already organised, such as an annual meeting. FVE and TAIEX are in charge the programme and for the nomination, transport and accommodation of the speakers. However, the organisation of the conference including costs of the venue, transport and accommodation of participants fall under the responsibility of the hosting national organisation. Interested organisations may contact the FVE for further information.

Miscellaneous

International Federation for Animal Health



Peter Jones new IFAH Executive director


Peter Jones has been appointed Executive Director of the International Federation for Animal Health (IFAH), which represents the veterinary pharmaceutical industry. Mr Jones is currently head of the veterinary medicines and inspections unit of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) in London. He is to join IFAH in October.

European Medicines Agency

Fritz Ungemach EMA management Board member

¹⁰ Technical Assistance and Information Exchange office (European Commission)

¹¹ http://www.fve.org/news/pdf/fve_news/papers/05_08_25_taiex_fve_conference.pdf



On 29 July, the Council of the European Union appointed four new members to the Management Board of the European Medicines Agency (EMA). Fritz Ungemach (Germany), one of the two candidates proposed by FVE, was appointed as the representative for the veterinary profession. The appointment of representatives of European patients', doctors' and veterinarians' organisations in the EMA Board was introduced by Regulation (EC) No 726/2004 in March 2004. The next meeting of the Management Board is on 28-29 September.

Members

Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, FYROM, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia/Montenegro, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom
Sections : UEVP- Practitioners, EASVO-State Officers, UEVH-Hygienists

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