



Federation of  
Veterinarians  
of Europe



Newsletter - November 2005

# EDITO

Since the beginning of October Europe has been startled by a series of outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. Although national bodies and the European Commission have taken a range of measures to control these outbreaks and to prevent further spread of the virus, further cases may very well occur. The disease not only causes severe animal health and welfare problems, but also poses - at least potentially - a serious risk to public health. Further spread of the disease may cause both large economic loss in the agricultural sector and have a profound impact on human society.

This threat should not merely be regarded as an emergency requiring a rapid response, but as a long-term global threat to animal and human health, requiring sustained and coordinated control and eradication measures. An important line of defense against the virus is good bio-security and surveillance at farm level. In this respect the value of a reliable veterinary network should not be underestimated or neglected; otherwise being penny wise can easily turn into pound-foolish. Another critical aspect of these outbreaks is the perception by the general public. Possible risks should not be taken too lightly; for example one should be clear about what to do when traveling to risk areas. On the other hand rousing of public sentiment and frightening people usually does not contribute to the introduction of proportional, well balanced, efficient disease control policies. This should be avoided.

Another current issue that needs attention is the implementation of the new medicines Directive 2004/28/EC. According to its article 3, Member States must comply with it by 30 October 2005 at the latest. From that date onwards, for food producing animals the general rule will be that for dispensing veterinary medicinal products to the public, a prescription will be required. From our point of view, one of the crucial points here is that the use of veterinary medicinal products is linked to a proper examination of the animal(s) and an evaluation of the circumstances where under it lives. If not, if the use of medicinal products in food producing animals is not supported by a proper indication, needless or excessive use of medicines may occur, something which is a threat to animal health and welfare, public health and the environment. Veterinary medicinal products should only be used when there is a sound veterinary reason to do so. In the United Kingdom however, where one has sought to continue the existing system, this is not guaranteed; farmers can buy so called "POM VPS" products directly from a pharmacist. In our opinion, this is not in line, at least not with the spirit, of the Directive.

**Jan Vaarten**  
Executive Director

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## Animal health & Medicines

### Avian influenza

#### **FVE urges to combat disease at its roots**

Since early October, Europe has been affected by outbreaks of the highly pathogenic strain of avian influenza (HPAI, H5N1).

And, in spite of stringent measures adopted by both national authorities and the European Commission to control and contain the disease, further cases may very well occur as the seasonal migration of birds from affected areas continues.

The highly pathogenic strain of avian influenza causes major animal health and welfare risks, with a high economic impact and a potentially severe risk to public health.

In order to combat the disease, FVE recommends:

To combat the disease as much as possible “*at its roots*”. Even now, when migratory birds may have transported the virus over long distances and into Europe, it still is “*essential that infection sources in Asia be eliminated as soon as possible*”. To this end, technical and financial support should be made available.

To avoid all contact between migrating and domestic birds as much as possible. In case of an outbreak of avian influenza on a farm, any pigs present on the same holding should also be monitored and screened.

To consider vaccination when developing disease control plans. “*Despite its consequences on international trade, vaccination can be a useful tool*”. However, vaccination should only be used in addition to other control measures such as enhanced biosecurity. Only vaccines that permit to differentiate between infected and vaccinated animals (so-called DIVA vaccines) should be used. FVE welcomes the Commission decision to permit the vaccination of zoo animals.

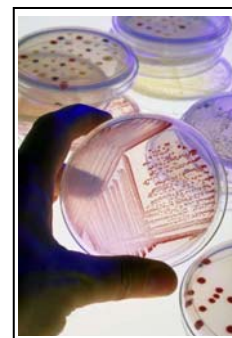
To avoid the destruction of large numbers of healthy birds fit for consumption, as well as their products. “*Vaccination does not render animals unfit for consumption*”, FVE stresses. Provided flocks are free of infection, they are fit for human consumption. The development of tests permitting to demonstrate the absence of wild virus at farm level should be encouraged.

To acknowledge that the risk of hobby or backyard flocks to be infected with HPAI is negligible. The mass culling of such flocks situated within restriction zones is unnecessary, as was concluded by the EFSA scientific report on Animal health and welfare aspects of Avian Influenza (September 2005)

Finally, FVE urges to relay only correct and factual information to the media. “The arousal of public sentiment and frightening people usually do not contribute to well balanced, efficient and efficacious disease control policies”, the Federation recalls.

## Antibiotic resistance

### OIE to establish list of “veterinary critically important antimicrobials”



The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) has been asked to draw up a list of critically important antimicrobials in veterinary medicine. Aim of this list is to safeguard the efficacy and availability of veterinary antimicrobial products for diseases where there are few or no antimicrobial alternatives. The OIE was given this remit following the 2004 Oslo meeting with the World Health Organisation (WHO) the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). Chief veterinary officers of OIE member countries have been requested to submit national lists to the OIE, which will maintain a consolidated list.

The list of critically important antimicrobials in veterinary medicine, once identified and listed by OIE, is to complement the identification of such antimicrobials in human medicine, to be drawn up by the WHO. *“The overlap of critical lists for human and veterinary medicine can provide further information, allowing an appropriate balance to be struck between animal health needs and public health considerations”*, according to the recommendations of the Oslo meeting.

However, regarding the establishment of such a list, FVE deems it *“essential”* that, besides officials from OIE members, *“the opinion of the veterinary profession is taken into consideration”*. It therefore proposed the OIE to submit a list of antimicrobials considered critically important by European veterinarians. The proposal was warmly welcomed by the OIE.

FVE was furthermore contacted by the European Commission on the same issue. The Commission sought FVE’s opinion to assist it in drafting the EU co-ordinated response. Time was short as lists had to be submitted by the end of October, and FVE sent out questionnaires to its member associations.

## Availability and use of veterinary medicines

### Meeting between FVE and the CVMP

The FVE was invited to meet the Committee of Veterinary Medicinal Products (CVMP) on 6 October. The CVMP of the European Medicines Agency had decided to invite stakeholders to give them the opportunity to present their activities and to allow an informal exchange of ideas. FVE, who warmly welcomes this initiative, was the first party to meet the CVMP in its new, ‘post enlargement’ composition.

FVE was represented by its president Tjeerd Jorna and executive director Jan Vaarten, and by UEVP president and chair of the FVE-UEVP working group on veterinary medicines, Christophe Buhot. After a brief presentation, the FVE delegation highlighted some points of concern to the veterinary profession. Much attention was given to certain aspects of the transposition and implementation of the new medicines Directive (2004/28), which was to be finalised by 1 November. FVE urged that the sequence ‘examination of animals; diagnosis; preventive or therapeutic intervention; evaluation’ should remain intact. *“Veterinary medicines should only be used if there is a sound, veterinary reason to do so*, the delegation stressed, something that is *‘not guaranteed under the British system for the so-called POM-VPS products’*. In the UK, these prescription-only medicines may be delivered by either veterinarians, pharmacists or other,

'suitably qualified persons', upon submission of a subscription but without the necessity of prior examination.

Other topics discussed were veterinary medicines for minor uses and/or minor species (MUMS), the list of essential products for the treatment of horses and the availability of medicines in general.

## Veterinary medicines

### FVE-UEVP working group meets

The FVE-UEVP ad hoc working group on veterinary medicines met on 12 October in Paris. The meeting was chaired by Christophe Buhot, president of the Union of European Veterinary Practitioners, and was also attended by Alistair Barr, president of the Federation of European equine veterinary associations (FEEVA).

On the agenda: the implementation of the medicines Directive (2004/28), the Commission's proposal to revise the residue legislation and the OIE initiative to collate a list of 'veterinary critically important antimicrobials'. Regarding medicines availability for horses, since 1 November, horses may be declared as 'not intended for human consumption'. Such a declaration should be laid down in the horse's passport and cannot be changed. These horses may be treated with a wider range of medicines.

In future, it should also be possible to treat horses without such a declaration (and thereby, intended for human consumption by default) with medicines featuring on the so-called 'positive list'. Use of such products should be recorded in the horse's passport, and withdrawal times are set at 6 months. Proposals for this list were adopted by the CVMP in May, but a final Commission decision is still awaited.



From left to right: Alistair Barr, Rainer Schneichel, Christophe Buhot, Jan Vaarten, Henk Vaarkamp

## Farmed fish

### New health and trade rules proposed

In July, the Commission proposed new EU legislation on the health of farmed fish and shellfish (molluscs) and the control of certain diseases in the aquaculture sector<sup>1</sup>. The proposed legislation aims to simplify and upgrade existing legislation, in order to improve the general aquaculture health situation across Europe. It also aims to better facilitate safe trade in aquaculture animals and products, and to boost the competitiveness of this important sector for the EU. A central aspect of the proposal is a shift in focus to preventing disease occurrence at each point in the production chain rather than dealing with it only when an outbreak occurs. Aquaculture is an important sector in the EU, with a production value of around €2 580 million.

The proposed Directive brings the rules for placing aquaculture animals and products on the market in line with the standards of the World organisation for animal health (OIE). In drawing up the proposal, the Commission held stakeholder consultations and carried out a detailed impact assessment. FVE has set up a Working group on farmed fish, which will draw up comments on the proposed Directive. The UK hopes to adopt this new Directive under its presidency (before the end of the year).

## Animal welfare

### Health and welfare of farmed rabbits

#### EU experts adopt opinion on the impact of housing and husbandry

On 13-14 September, experts of the Animal health and animal welfare (AHAW) panel of the European Food Safety Authority adopted an opinion of the impact of housing and husbandry on the health and welfare of farmed rabbits<sup>2</sup>. The report covers a wide range of topics and includes chapters on behaviour and biology, statistics, current farming systems, housing and husbandry including space allowances, feeding, reproductive and weaning practices, genetics, health and biosecurity.

The authors of the report found that there was “a serious lack of information and scientific studies on the farming of this species compared with other farmed species, particularly on welfare.” They also noted, with concern, that the mortality and morbidity of farmed rabbits seems ‘considerably higher’ than in other farmed animal species due to enteric and respiratory infections, and reproductive problems.

The Panel makes some recommendations to biosecurity, disease prevention and therapeutic interventions and underlines the need for improved rabbit welfare, including increased cage size and lower stocking densities. It also emphasizes the need for more research, stressing that “*the main problems holding back development and improvements in rabbit health and welfare is the lack of research and of a cohesive structure in the industry by which improvement strategies can be implemented at farm level*”.



<sup>1</sup> <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2005:0362:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.efsa.eu.int/science/ahaw/ahaw\\_opinions/1174\\_en.html](http://www.efsa.eu.int/science/ahaw/ahaw_opinions/1174_en.html)



**17-18 November**

## **Welfare Quality Conference**

The Welfare Quality project will be hosting its first conference in Brussels on 17 and 18 November 2005<sup>3</sup>. Main goals of this workshop will be to present and disseminate the initial results from the Welfare Quality project and to facilitate a dialogue with stakeholders. This workshop will provide an excellent opportunity for stakeholders to meet senior project members and to gain insights into cutting edge animal welfare research.

The Welfare Quality project is about integration of animal welfare in the food quality chain. The project aims to accommodate public concerns and market demands, to develop reliable on-farm monitoring systems, product information systems, and practical species-specific strategies to improve animal welfare. It focuses on three main species: cattle (beef and dairy), pigs, and poultry (broiler chickens and laying hens).

## **Public health**

## **EU Hygiene package**

### **Regulations, Implementing measures and Transitional arrangements**

From the first of January onwards, the EU Hygiene package will apply. In the mean time, the Commission in cooperation with the standing committee (SCoFCAH) is working on several guidance documents, implementing measures and transitional arrangements.

Amongst other, the following topics are covered in these documents:


- The terms “where necessary”, “where appropriate”, “adequate” and “sufficient”
- Flexibility (traditional methods of production, HACCP)
- The registration and approval of food businesses
- Guides to good practice (hygiene and HACCP)
- Technical issues (heat treatment and training)
- Food chain information (FCI) and the composition criteria for minced meat.
- Training of slaughterhouse staff assisting with official controls.

An overview can be found on the FVE website:

[http://www.fve.org/papers/pdf/fhph/european\\_legislation/hygiene\\_package\\_implementing\\_measures.pdf](http://www.fve.org/papers/pdf/fhph/european_legislation/hygiene_package_implementing_measures.pdf)

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<sup>3</sup> [www.welfarequality.net/everyone/30372](http://www.welfarequality.net/everyone/30372)



## **Official controls and *Trichinella*: implementing measures approved**

Commission proposals for the implementation of measures for the organisation of official controls and for specific rules on official controls for *Trichinella* in meat were approved on 26th September at the Standing Committee for the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCFCAH).

These proposals explain how the new legislation on food hygiene will work in practice. They are part of the simplification of the EU food hygiene rules which will enter into force on 1 January 2006.

Discussion (and approval) of the remaining implementing measures are expected to take place at upcoming SCFCAH meetings.

### **Feed labelling**

## **Stakeholder consultation in view of revising legislation**

A consultation organised by DG Sanco will be held among stakeholders on the legislation on feed labelling. Issues concern labelling requirements, nutritional claims, advertising, authorisation procedures for certain feed materials and the legislative approach. As a member of the Advisory Group on the Food Chain and Animal and Plant Health, FVE has also been asked to give its input.

Stakeholders are requested to submit their views by 16 January 2006. The Commission intends to prepare a legislative proposal in 2007.

### **First step on the TSE Roadmap**

## **Commission proposes to allow return of the T-bone steak**

In view of the 'significant and consistent decline' in the number of confirmed BSE cases, and the absence of BSE in 'healthy slaughtered animals under 30 months' since 2001, the Commission has proposed the TSE Roadmap to review existing legislation on TSEs (see Newsletter of September 2005). Under current EU legislation, the vertebral has to be removed from all slaughtered cattle over 12 months. However, experts from the European Food Safety authority (EFSA) concluded in April 2005 that it would be safe to raise the age limit for the removal of the vertebral column.

Acting on this advice, the Commission has proposed a minimum age limit of 24 months, a proposal which was endorsed by Member States in the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCFCAH) on 5 October.

Subject to scrutiny by European Parliament and final adoption, this paves the way for the return of 'beef on the bone' such as the T-bone steak or the Italian 'Fiorentina' steak in the EU. This is the first proposal related to revising certain BSE measures since publication of the Commission's TSE Roadmap.



## FVE & Professional matters

### FVE participation in consensus conference

#### Conference on health professionals crossing borders

On 13-14 October, the national regulatory bodies of health professionals, professional organisations and representative of the European Commission met in Edinburgh to discuss registration and supervision of health professionals in Europe. The meeting was a follow-up on earlier meetings, held in Warsaw and Amsterdam, and was attended by some 150 participants, including Catherine Roy and Nancy De Briyne for FVE. So far, the veterinary profession had not been considered a 'health profession' and had not been officially invited to attend. FVE also regrets that veterinary regulators had so far not been invited.

Three workshops were held at the meeting, on European certificates of professional status, on the exchange of information on the fitness to practice, and one on the set-up of a European web portal of competent authorities.

The creation of a European certificate of current professional status would be voluntary and hold all essential information (name, address, nationality, qualifications c.q. specialisations and registration status). However, it was recommended that such a certificate would not preclude the sharing of more detailed information, in particular in case of poor professional conduct. As for the European web portal of competent authorities ([www.healthregulation.org](http://www.healthregulation.org)), this would also include the FVE website, as well as all veterinary competent authorities throughout Europe. Each country ought to set up its own website, made available in at least two languages and linking into a European network.

Further details will be communicated during the meeting of veterinary statutory bodies, to be held on 16 November.

### OIE conference on veterinary services

#### Recommendations on set-up and evaluation of quality veterinary services

The Regional Commission (Europe) of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) organised a seminar on the structure of national veterinary services in OIE member countries, on 12-14 September. This is a logical step following the adoption of the OIE strategic plan for 2005-2010, which sets out the promotion of veterinary services worldwide as a priority.

The seminar, held in Suzdal (Russia), was attended by some 70 delegates from 36 countries, and by representatives from the European Commission. FVE was represented by its president Tjeerd Jorna and executive director Jan Vaarten.

Véronique Bellemain, director of the French National School of Veterinary Services (and OIE collaboration centre for the training of official veterinarians), gave a presentation on the structures and principles of veterinary services.

Participants of the seminar recommended that the OIE continue its action to convince national and international policy and decision makers to view the work of the veterinary services as an international public good — and grant them the resources needed to comply with OIE standards.

The OIE should also set up a new, voluntary procedure for the evaluation of compliance of the quality of veterinary services with the OIE code.

As for the OIE member countries, the assembly concluded among others that they

- Apply quality standards of veterinary services (minimum standards set out in Chapter 1.3.3. of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code)
- Ensure public veterinary services are provided throughout the food production chain, or set up effective coordination
- Ensure public veterinary services include the management of animal and public health, under a national chain of command
- Take all necessary measures to maintain or develop a network of veterinary practitioners to ensure an efficient on-farm health surveillance in case of (re)emerging animal health problems
- Encourage and implement risk communication measures, in particular to consumers
- Nominate the Chief veterinary officer as national OIE delegate, and involve the CVO in the policy decision-making process.

The recommendations adopted at the conference will now be put to the general assembly of the OIE general meeting in Paris, next spring.



## Professional recognition

### Directive on professional qualifications published

The Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications has (finally!) been published in the Official Journal of 30 September<sup>4</sup>. It has entered into force on 20 October last, and EU Member States will need to comply with the Directive by 20 October 2007. The current Directives on veterinary qualifications (78/1026/EEC and 78/1027/EEC) will be repealed from that date.

<sup>4</sup> Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the recognition of professional qualifications, OJEC L 255.

## Services directive

### IMCO vote postponed

The vote on the Services Directive in the IMCO Committee of the European Parliament has been postponed because of lack of time for discussion of the compromise amendments. Some amendments were tabled but could not be discussed properly. Forty MEPs voted in favour of the postponement.

The new calendar is now as follows: The new deadline for tabling amendments was set at 12 October and the next IMCO Committee vote is planned for the 21-22 November session. This means the vote in plenary cannot be held before January, under the Austrian presidency.

## UK study on suicide rates

### Veterinary suicides nearly four times national average

Findings published in the *Veterinary Record*<sup>5</sup> suggest that the suicide rate among veterinarians in the UK is nearly four times the national average and double that of doctors or dentists. Lethal injections were the most common method of suicide. Professor Richard Halliwell, who commented on the findings, suggested that being a veterinarian is '*extremely stressful*' as vets are expected not only to deal with life and death of animals but also with people who have either significant commercial or emotional involvement with those animals. Increasing study debts and isolation among new graduates as well as ready access to drugs may compound the problem.

Several support mechanisms, such as the VetHelpline and the Veterinary Surgeons Health Support Programme are already in place in the UK, but clearly "*this is not enough*", according to Professor Halliwell, who suggested incorporating 'coping skills' in the veterinary curriculum and to increase awareness within the profession.



Prof. Richard Halliwell


## Education

### Educational exchanges

### Increased collaboration between EU and Australia

The EU and Australia are stepping up their efforts to promote cooperation between their universities and vocational training institutions. After a three-year pilot phase, the European Commission and the Australian government have each tripled their commitment to €1 million to stimulate innovative curriculum development and student exchange projects. The new programme is aimed at promoting better understanding and more structured collaboration and exchanges

<sup>5</sup> *Incidence of suicide in the profession in England and Wales, by R.J. Mellanby. Vet Record (2005). 157; 415-417*



between higher education and vocational training institutions in the European Union and Australia.

The first EU-Australia pilot project, launched in 2002 and led by the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University (Denmark) and the University of Western Sydney (New South Wales), focused on agriculture, food systems and environment studies and involved 72 students in the exchange<sup>6</sup>.

## Meetings

11 November 2005

### **FVE to attend meeting on food safety**

On 11 November, FVE will attend a meeting of the Working group of the Commission's Advisory Group on the Food Chain and Animal and Plant Health. Main agenda points: the TSE road map and composition criteria of minced meat.

## Miscellaneous

### **Erratum**

The article on the revision of the Community residue legislation "*Stakeholders meeting discusses legal options*" carried the surtitle "*Feedstuffs of animal origin*". This should have been "*Residues in feedstuffs of animal origin*". FVE regrets the omission.

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<sup>6</sup> The deadline for the submission of proposals is 30 November 2005. For guidelines and application forms, please consult the following website:  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/eu\\_others/australia/call\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/eu_others/australia/call_en.html)



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Federation of Veterinarians of Europe - AISBL  
rue Defacqz, 1 B – 1000 Brussels  
Tel: +32.2.533.70.20 - Fax: +32.2.537.28.28  
E-mail: [info@fve.org](mailto:info@fve.org) - Internet: [www.fve.org](http://www.fve.org)