



FVE Policy Paper: Herd Health Plan

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A) General Part outlining Objectives and Benefits of a Herd Health Plan

The role of the farmer has changed during recent years: from 'producing animals' towards 'producing food'. Current legislation therefore refers to the farmer as "**food business operator**" (FBO) who "*shall ensure that all stages of production, processing and distribution of food under their control satisfy the relevant hygiene requirements*" laid down in Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs, Art 3. In addition annex I of Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 lays down general hygiene requirements to be respected by food businesses at all stages of the food chain.

The new **Animal Health Strategy for the European Union** (2007-2013) where "*Prevention is better than cure*" (COM 539 (2007) final) also emphasises on the importance of on-farm biosecurity measures and on the crucial role farmers have in this (pillar 3). But not only farmers: '*a collective approach must be taken in addressing prevention and biosecurity measures*'. This includes the private practitioner as an advisor and partner who is helping the farmer to assure the health of the farmed animals and therefore the quality of his products, and the Official Veterinarian who is performing regular checks on a certain number of farms per year.

Safe food is produced by healthy animals. Health and welfare are greatly influenced by the way animals are kept. The farmer is responsible to achieve optimal animal health and welfare. To support the farmer with the implementation of the above mentioned requirements the design of a **Herd Health Plan** for each specific farm as part of the "stable to table" approach is advisable.

The Herd Health Plan (HHP) should include good husbandry practices (housing, climate, water/feeding and management), guidelines for the use of veterinary medicinal products and feed additives, as well as a plan of preventative healthcare and guidelines for the prevention of epizootics and zoonotic diseases (EPRUMA Best Practice Framework for the use of Antimicrobials in Food-Producing Animals in the EU, September 2007). The HHP should include guidelines for farm visitation scheme. The HHP can also help the farmer to establish hygiene schemes and to fulfil the requirements on microbiological criteria for foodstuff (Regulation (EC) 2073/2005).

Protocols and a recording system (either in paper or digital format) to monitor herd health and welfare should be established and the plan should include an agreement about regular visits by the designated veterinarian ('health visitation scheme').

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Other important components of a Herd Health Plan are:

- Quarantine plan for new animals entering the farm
- Infectious disease control plan, isolation facilities, biosecurity, measures in order to prevent spreading of diseases from animal to animal as well as from farm to farm
- contingency plans
- Identification system for all animals, including systems for treated animals
- Recording system of movements and traceability of livestock
- Frequency of observations of animal health and welfare status by farmer
- Prevention and control of production specific diseases
- Vaccination plan
- Parasite control and treatment plan (not only in livestock but also in companion animals living on the same farm)
- Disposal of dead livestock (in accordance with national legislation and Regulation (EC) 1774/2002)
- Animal welfare checks

Aim of the HHP is to add value for the farmer: enhanced animal health and animal welfare will lead to an increase in high quality products and decrease in use of medicine and other treatments and therefore also reduce costs.

The designated veterinarian should also provide help to the FBO with record keeping (Annex I of Regulation (EC) 852/2004 Part A, III, 8 lays down the FBO's responsibilities with regards to record keeping). The records need to be always up-to-date, especially on the following items, which should be included into the Herd Health Plan:

- Nature and origin of feed, to include ingredients of the feed
- Applied veterinary medicinal products or other treatments, dates of administration, withdrawal periods
- Occurrence of diseases: e.g. food born diseases, zoonoses, mastitis, reproductive disorders, lameness, metabolic disorders.
- Results of analysis (samples taken from animals or their products) and consequences
- Any reports on checks carried out on animals or their products

All these informations can be part of the **Food Chain Information** (FCI, Regulation (EC) No 853/2004, Annex II, Section III, para 3), which needs to be provided to the slaughter facility.

The veterinarian is the expert best placed to interpret the results of analysis or checks including ante- and post-mortem findings reported from the slaughter facility. The expertise of the veterinarian therefore will not only give credibility to the FCI send to the slaughter facility, but also help the FBO to take the necessary steps in order to enhance animal health and/or animal welfare (e.g. treat remaining herd if parasitic infestation is apparent at slaughter plant).

Regular visits by the designated veterinarian should be established in the HHP depending on the size of the farm, the animal species, and the risk for introducing/spreading diseases, while also considering existing health problems on the holding. The HHP should be revised regularly (at least annually) in order to detect weak points or adjust to structural changes.

B) Common Procedures / Application

The following second part of this paper gives an overview of the important aspects to be included in the HHP. This list is not exhaustive and needs to be adjusted to the specific needs of every single FBO.

Record keeping: on feed, medicinal products and other treatments, occurrence of diseases, findings on health and welfare observations by the farmer, results and consequences of relevant analysis, relevant reports on checks (on animals or products) and on findings in slaughterhouses.

If new herd health problems arise they need to be described, including a proposal for improvement and/or treatment, and a follow-up needs to be performed.

Animals: species and category, source of animals and/or semen, numbers of animals in and out (reason for movement).

Identification + Registration: national and EU law needs to be fulfilled, additional system for identification of treated animals.

Biosecurity: disinfectants (where, when, what), special protective clothing (visitors), cars on farm (e.g. facilities for disinfection of cars/transporters), roadways, pest control, restrictions for domestic animals (e.g. no entry into stables), quarantine, controlled animal purchase, materials, equipment, disposal of carcasses and litter, farm location (e.g. new buildings), visitors on farms, visitor parking.

Prevention measures: e.g. vaccination, deworming.

Animal Housing: climate, light, materials, appropriate equipment (meeting animal welfare criteria).

Animal Welfare: handling of animals, housing of animals (e.g. density, enriched environment), transport.

Education and training of personal: relevant legislation, welfare, biosecurity, hygiene matters.

Feed + water supply: source (feed: supplier, water: e.g. own source), storage, hygienic management, list of ingredients of the composed feed.

Health facts such as: fertility, body condition score, claw/hoof health (including routine foot-care), number of animals culled for disease, clinical disease frequency (pinpoint which diseases are important for the farm depending on species and area: bacteria/virus/parasitic), performance (e.g. litter size, growth rate, milk production, cell count, mortality).

Participation in programs: depending on animal species and region.

Laboratory testing: e.g. serological tests, nasal swabs, sampling of feed, environmental tests.

Treatments: drug administration + documentation, drug storage, antiparasitic treatment, routine treatment (e.g. food additives), non routine treatment (e.g. antibiotics, anti-inflammatory).

Check list: Annex to Herd Health Plan document, facilitates use of the document by having bullet points which can easily be checked.