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THE HEMISPHERIC PROGRAMME FOR THE ERADICATION OF FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE – CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

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Foot and Mouth disease (FMD) has been known since 1514, when Fracastorius described the occurrence of an outbreak of a disease in bovines, probably identical to FMD. Since then, this disease has affected all continents, though it never occurred in New Zealand, probably due to its' geographical isolation and strict surveillance. Today, the disease has been controlled and eradicated from several countries in all continents.

In North America, FMD occurred for the last time in 1929 in the USA, in 1952 in Canada and in 1954 in Mexico. Both in the US and Canada, the disease was eradicated by the implementation of drastic contingency measures (stamping out), whereas in Mexico the disease was first controlled by the use of vaccination and then by stamping out. In South America, the disease prevailed in most of the countries until the 1990's, with the exception of Chile, which succeeded in definitely eradicating the disease in 1987.

In retrospect, both the role of the productive ecosystems in the occurrence of FMD in the Southern hemisphere, as well as the specific technologies for FMD control were widely known since the 80's. This knowledge allowed for the beginning of a strategic plan for the effective control of FMD in the region. This situation was a determinant factor in the establishment of the Hemispheric Plan for the Eradication of FMD (PHEFA) in 1988, which has provided the framework for national programs of FMD control and eradication in the affected areas up to the present.

Despite the progress achieved, there are still various regions in South America where FMD has not been effectively controlled. These areas include Venezuela, Ecuador and the Chaco region, which includes various countries of MERCOSUR and a large and unknown area not yet developed for animal production in Brazil.

Nonetheless, the access of meat from these regions to international markets, based on strict and reasonable international norms and an adequate use of vaccination for the liberation of zones and/or countries has allowed the development, in most of South America's continental territory, of a productive market with guaranteed sanitary qualities, particularly regarding FMD and other significant animal diseases. Since FMD does not respect international boundaries, and the productive systems are getting integrated into large productive regions, which include more than one country, in order to continue advancing in the progressive elimination of the disease, it will be necessary to incorporate a regional and/or sub-regional approach, regional and/or sub-regional binding legislation, the participation of the private sector and the effective support of international or bilateral organisms for those countries which are without the resources needed to control and eradicate FMD in the southern hemisphere.