



Towards global foot and mouth disease control

23/12/2011 Foot and mouth disease (FMD) remains one of the world's most widespread epizootic animal diseases. More than 100 countries are not yet recognized as officially free of FMD by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

FMD is a disease of large domestic and wild animals. While it does not cause the same heavy mortalities as other epizootics, it generates significant economic losses worldwide, in particular by sharply reducing milk and meat production in infected farms. Most affected animals fail to return to normal productivity even when cured. Furthermore FMD also deprives infected countries of valuable export opportunities for many of the animal products that could potentially be sold in lucrative markets.

Even when, at great expense, countries have rid themselves of FMD and been accorded official FMD-free status by the OIE, they remain under constant threat of it being accidentally or intentionally reintroduced and so are obliged to maintain costly systems of border protection and nationwide continuous field surveillance.

The global effort spearheaded by the OIE and the United Nations (represented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO]) aiming at the global control of FMD is therefore particularly timely and ties in perfectly with the OIE objective of improving animal health and welfare worldwide. This global programme is also expected to have a major impact not only on poverty reduction in developing countries and countries in transition, most of which are currently infected with FMD, but also on world food security by reducing the milk and meat production losses associated with the disease.

In addition, the organisation of vaccination campaigns could provide an opportunity to control other priority animal diseases and creates economies of scale.

Sixty-five countries have already had official approval from the OIE World Assembly of Delegates for their status as FMD-free countries where vaccination is not practiced. Although this proves that the goal of global control is not out of reach, everyone knows that achieving it will be costly, protracted and difficult because of the large number of continuously evolving viral strains and high cost of good-quality vaccines or lack of political will in some countries.

That is why, following their successful first global conference in Asunción (Paraguay) in 2009, the OIE and FAO will be holding the second Global Conference on Foot and Mouth Disease Control in Bangkok (Thailand) from 27 to 29 June 2012, for Member Country Chief Veterinary Officers, top international experts and representatives of

relevant regional and international organisations and the global community of potential donors. This will be a key event for the OIE and FAO to launch a three-pronged attack using their joint FMD Global Control Strategy.

The OIE has already amended the Terrestrial Animal Health Code to allow its Member Countries to submit their national FMD control programmes voluntarily to the OIE World Assembly of Delegates for formal endorsement. Such endorsement will undoubtedly safeguard their governments' future investment decisions and facilitate negotiations with donors to secure the required resources for this long, drawn-out task, which will eventually extend to all countries in the world not yet officially recognised by the OIE as FMD-free.

Countries still infected with FMD have the possibility of acquiring official status as an FMD-free country practising vaccination before going on to apply for that of an FMD-free country not practising vaccination. It is also possible, and even desirable, for them to acquire official FMD-free status for selected priority zones within the country before eventually applying to the OIE for recognition of FMD freedom for the entire country. This approach has already been used successfully by many OIE Member Countries.

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