

## The OIE alongside WHO<sup>1</sup> to ensure food safety

In 2015, as every year, the World Health Organization (WHO) is celebrating World Health Day on 7th April, to commemorate the foundation of WHO by the World Health Assembly in 1948. The OIE is delighted to join in this event alongside its international partner, on the theme chosen for 2015: food safety.

In this era of globalisation, ensuring the safety and wholesomeness of food is more than ever a key issue for all countries. World demand for animal protein (milk, eggs, meat) is set to rise by an estimated 70% by the year 2050<sup>2</sup>. To be able to meet this demand while ensuring the safety of food of animal origin, it is crucial to control pathogens at their source in animals. Eliminating or controlling food hazards at source (i.e. a preventive approach) is a more effective and less costly means of eliminating the risk of unwanted health effects than relying on control of the final product (i.e. a final 'quality check' approach).

To this end, since 2002, the OIE has been developing, adopting and publishing standards on 'animal production food safety'. These standards are primarily aimed at eliminating potential hazards existing prior to the slaughter of animals or the primary processing of their products (meat, milk, eggs, etc.) that could be a source of risk for consumers. The OIE's Reference Centres for food safety also provide essential expertise for the development of science-based standards.

Synergies between the standard-setting activities of the OIE and those of the Codex Alimentarius Commission are ensured and further strengthened by a permanent OIE Working Group on Animal Production Food Safety, which operates in coordination with senior representatives of the Codex, FAO and WHO.

Food safety and quality are best assured by an integrated, multidisciplinary approach all along the food chain. It is essential to create links between the food production, processing and consumption phases, within the framework of a 'farm to fork' approach.

The education and training that veterinarians receive, which cover both animal health (including zoonoses) and food hygiene, make them well-equipped to play a central role, in collaboration with other professionals, in ensuring the sanitary safety of food of animal origin. The Veterinary Services are therefore often responsible for food safety controls at national level, throughout the food chain. The Veterinary Services are present at farm level to ensure that animals are kept under good conditions of hygiene and welfare and they play a role in the early detection, effective surveillance and rapid treatment of animal diseases. They are present at abattoirs to inspect live animals (ante-mortem) and the carcasses (post-mortem). They are involved in sanitary certification, to attest that products for national consumption or for export meet animal health and food safety standards, and they may also carry out inspection activities related to transport, distribution and catering.

Yet, many countries, especially developing countries, still lack the necessary legislative framework and financial and human resources to maintain fully functional animal health systems and Veterinary Services. This is an alarming situation, as in many parts of the world animal production is the main source of income for the majority of the rural population, many of whom meet the criteria for poverty. In recently published papers<sup>3</sup>, available for consultation in the OIE *Scientific and Technical Review*, Volume 33(3), the OIE provides evidence of the link between improving animal health, improving livestock productivity and reducing poverty. They emphasise the need to allocate

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization

<sup>2</sup> Source FAO: <http://www.fao.org/animal-health/en/> au 28/02/2015

<sup>3</sup> Pradère J.-P. (2014). – Improving animal health and livestock productivity to reduce poverty. *Rev. sci. tech. Off. int. Epiz.*, 33 (3)

Pradère J.-P. (2014). – Links between livestock production, the environment and sustainable development. *Rev. sci. tech. Off. int. Epiz.* 33 (3)

additional resources to animal health systems to improve animal health management worldwide. Such support would have a direct impact on the economic situation of poor livestock keepers and their access to healthy food in sufficient quantities but also on the political and economic stability of countries.

Furthermore, animals (whether wild or domestic, terrestrial or aquatic) act as sentinels of the health of the ecosystems in which they live. Animal production food safety is also directly impacted by the quality of inputs of production systems, such as water quality, the composition and sanitary safety of animal feedstuffs, and good farming practices. Prudent use of antibiotics, vaccines, antiparasitics and other veterinary medicinal products is also an integral aspect of good management of food-producing animals to ensure that food of animal origin is healthy and of good quality. It should be noted that veterinary supervision is essential to prevent antimicrobial resistance, as about 70% of the antimicrobials used in food-producing animals on farms are administered directly by non-specialists.

Against this background, the OIE supports its Member Countries day after day through programmes to strengthen national competencies and through the PVS Pathway, which includes the evaluation of the performance of the Veterinary Services. These tools are made available to Member Countries and are intended to strengthen animal health systems worldwide, thereby promoting sustainable food security and food safety, from a public health but also an environmental health perspective. Furthermore, each the OIE's 180 national Delegates is encouraged to designate a Focal Point on Animal Production Food Safety, to support them in this field and help them to monitor more closely the preparation and implementation of international standards at national level. Together, these national Focal Points on Animal Production Food Safety form a high quality global network on this topic.

WHO's choice of food safety as the theme for World Health Day 2015 therefore provides an excellent opportunity to highlight the importance of the much needed strengthening of animal health systems, and especially the Veterinary Services, to enable them to prevent health hazards linked to food products of animal origin by eliminating them at the primary production stage. This preventive approach must be accompanied by close collaboration with the various professionals in the food chain, from the producer to the distributor. The launch of this year's theme is being celebrated on 7th April, but related international, regional and national activities and events will continue throughout 2015.

Dr Vallat

*OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code:*

- The role of the Veterinary Services in food safety (Chapter 6.1.)
- Control of biological hazards of animal health and public health importance through ante- and post-mortem meat inspection (Chapter 6.2.)