



Statement on Avian Influenza

Members

Austria
Belgium
Bosnia-Herzegovina
Bulgaria
Croatia
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
Estonia
Finland
France
FYROM
Germany
Greece
Hungary
Iceland
Ireland
Italy
Latvia
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Malta
Netherlands
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Serbia/Montenegro
Slovak Republic
Slovenia
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Turkey
United Kingdom

Sections

UEVP-
Practitioners
EASVO-
State Officers
UEVH-
Hygienists

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) is an alliance of 40 veterinary organisations in 35 countries. It also includes 3 specialist Sections, each of which represents a key group within the profession: veterinary practitioners, veterinary food hygienists and state veterinary officers. In total, FVE represents approximately 185000 veterinarians throughout Europe.

With regard to the current outbreaks of Avian Influenza, FVE wishes to issue the following statement.

Since the beginning of October, Europe has been startled by a series of outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. And although national bodies and the European Commission have taken a range of measures to control current outbreaks and to prevent 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. So further spread of the disease may cause both large economic loss in the agricultural sector and have a profound impact on human society. This newly identified 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.

FVE believes that, in order to reduce the risks for animal health and welfare, for public health and for socio-economic damage,

it is important :

- to put a major effort into the elimination of the disease at its roots. Even now, when migratory birds may have transported the virus long distances over Europe, it still is essential that infection sources in Asia should be eliminated as soon as possible. To this end professional advice should be offered - and heeded - and necessary funds should be allocated;
- to continuously monitor the health status of domesticated poultry and wild birds throughout Europe. To ensure effective control programmes rapid detection of infection is crucial. In the early stages of an outbreak, no time should be lost. "White areas on the map" - where outbreaks might be present without being noticed and adequately reported, but yet act as a source for further infection - must be avoided. Flock health surveillance programmes at poultry holdings are necessary.

President

Tjeerd Jorna

Vice-Presidents

Seán O Laoide
Gundega Micule
John Williams
Walter Winding

- to make sure that all people who work professionally with birds are well aware of the disease symptoms. Where necessary up to date information should be provided. Owners of birds, especially poultry farmers, must be informed about the measures they should take to improve bio-security (bio-containment and bio-exclusion) at the level of their holding.
- to avoid as much as possible all contacts between (migrating) waterfowl and domesticated birds. In case of an outbreak of avian influenza on a farm, pigs that are present at the same holding should be monitored and serologically screened.
- to consider the possible added value of vaccination in developing action plans to combat the virus. Despite the consequences it may have on international trade, vaccination can be a useful tool in stopping spread of the virus and preventing disease outbreaks. Vaccination should always be used in addition to other control measures and only DIVA-vaccines should be used. FVE welcomes the Commission decision to allow the vaccination of zoo animals;
- to avoid destruction of large numbers of healthy birds and their products which are fit for human consumption. Vaccination as such does not make an animal unfit for human consumption and is not a reason for destruction of the animal. Provided that vaccinated flocks are free of infection, they can be slaughtered for human consumption. This outlines the need for a reliable test to demonstrate the absence of wild virus, at farm level. The development, validation and acceptance of such tests must be stimulated and supported. Investments in this field should not only be dependent on a pharmaceutical company's expectation for the return on their investments. The European Community should take part in the necessary investments and /or the risks associated to it. A Community vaccine bank should be developed;
- to take into account that the risk of hobby or backyard flocks becoming infected with AI is negligible, even if they are situated within restriction zones. Mass culling of backyard or hobby flocks situated within these restriction zones is unnecessary (EFSA scientific report on Animal health and welfare aspects of Avian Influenza, September 2005);
- information that is spread to the media is correct and factual. Rousing of public sentiment and frightening people usually does not contribute to the introduction of proportional, well balanced, efficient and disease control policies.

For further information, you are kindly invited to contact the office of FVE. Contact details can be found at the bottom of the first page of this paper.

