

ACHIEVING THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF ANIMAL HEALTH

Section 15.3 of 2010 Report refers

COMMENT

Ireland has a high animal health status which underpins food safety and ensures that our agricultural products have access to the most discerning markets world-wide. This island is free of the major exotic diseases, including the 18 diseases notifiable to the EU, with the exception of BSE and Newcastle Disease. As consumer confidence and trade are of paramount importance to Irish agriculture, it is vital that our overall current health status is protected. Diseases, once established, can be immensely difficult and expensive to eradicate and control. The onus for protecting and improving the high health status of our individual and national herds is shared between farmers, processors, veterinary practitioners, DAFRD and all other parties in the agri-food sector.

DAFRD is involved on a continuous basis in active animal disease surveillance through a combination of compulsory testing, routine inspections and investigations, mandatory and voluntary reporting and codes of practice, such as the salmonella code of practice in the poultry industry.

Active disease eradication and control programmes are in place for a number of existing diseases including Brucellosis, TB and BSE. The measures taken since 1997 have reversed the upward trend of Brucellosis, and this improvement is expected to continue. Additional resources are required to address the current incidence of TB. The objective is to eradicate these and other diseases of importance within the shortest possible timescales. In the context of the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF), all parties agreed to the adoption of a range of measures to reduce the incidence of TB by 50%, and to make significant progress towards the eradication of Brucellosis, within the next four years. With the active support of all the parties concerned for the required measures, these targets can be achieved.

Likewise the measures that have been introduced and intensified since the emergence of BSE are designed to eradicate the disease as soon as possible. It is expected that BSE cases will continue at their present level until the full effect of the measures taken in 1996 and 1997 are seen during and after the year 2002. This is due to the long incubation period for the disease. Thereafter, the number of BSE cases should decline.

In association with administrations in other countries, DAFRD is engaged in ongoing research and development programmes concerning these diseases and in developing further disease control and eradication programmes to enhance our animal health standards. As regards research, work on the development of a TB vaccine for possible use in bovines and wildlife is on-going in both the UK and Ireland, while the development of earlier and more rapid additional diagnostic techniques for animal diseases is a priority objective. In addition, an effective cattle identification and tracing system is in place. Further enhanced arrangements are envisaged in relation to identification of sheep and pigs.

ACTIONS

In the context of meeting future consumer needs and achieving the highest standards of animal health, the following measures will be taken:

- Measures adopted since the early 1990s, and intensified since 1996, will be kept under on-going review and adapted where necessary, with the objective of eradicating BSE from the national herd at the earliest possible date.
- A targeted active BSE surveillance programme will be launched in Autumn 2000 following evaluation of the pilot system, currently underway.
- A programme of measures to address scrapie eradication has commenced and will be intensified during 2000.
- Work will continue on the development of additional laboratory based tests and more rapid diagnostic techniques for various diseases, and in particular to make such tests more suitable for general use.
- The measures foreseen in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness in relation to TB and Brucellosis will be introduced from 2000 onwards. Monitoring of progress in reducing the incidence of these diseases will be undertaken at local and national levels through the Animal Health Forum and various committees.
- Research on the development of a TB vaccine for use in wildlife will be enhanced. Close liaison will be maintained with administrations elsewhere on developments in relation to a TB vaccine.
- An eradication programme for Aujeszky's Disease will be introduced during 2001.
- A feasibility study is currently being undertaken on PRRS eradication and decisions on further action may be taken on completion of this study. This disease, which can significantly reduce the fertility of sows, is currently present on a small number of pig farms.
- On-going qualitative improvements in the various programmes for the control of zoonotic agents in food animals will be introduced. Further measures will be adopted on the basis of the evolution of scientific knowledge and developments in this area.
- Tagging arrangements for sheep and for pigs will be introduced in 2001.
- As IT systems are enhanced, consideration will be given to introducing a more comprehensive system for reporting back to producers on the disease status of slaughtered animals.
- A review of the structures and resources for disease control will take place in the context of the review of the overall structure of DAFRD, as provided for in the PPF.

ACHIEVING THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF ANIMAL WELFARE

Section 15.4 of 2010 Report refers

COMMENT

Improvements in farm animal welfare are of paramount importance in order to provide adequate safeguards for the protection of animals, and also to maintain public and consumer confidence in farm products. Ireland has always been very supportive of improvements in animal welfare in a variety of fora, both international and domestic. As a member of the European Union, Ireland has been involved in the formulation of a number of Directives, including legislation on the protection of laying hens, pigs, calves, animals at time of slaughter and animals during transport.

Given the increasing focus by consumers on animal welfare issues, it is accepted that the current animal welfare standards in Ireland, which are generally high, must be maintained and where possible improved, both by legislative means and through vigilant Departmental monitoring.

ACTIONS

- DAFRD will continue to ensure that the highest welfare standards are maintained in relation to transport of animals by land and sea, as well as at the production and slaughter stages.
- Sow tethering will be eliminated in line with proposals enacted at EU level.
- Legislative provisions agreed at EU level on the protection of laying hens will be implemented by January 2002.
- An advisory forum on farm animal welfare, which will be representative of the relevant interests, will be established within the next six months.