

Vaccinating instead of Killing?

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International experts present recommendations on the eradication of classical swine fever

Scientists, experts from veterinary administration, representatives from agrarian associations and the meat industry as well as experts on politics in the EU Member States discussed the eradication of classical swine fever by emergency vaccinations at the University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover on 25 and 26 September 2007. The conference took place as part of a coordination action for classical swine fever and foot and mouth disease within the 7th Framework Programme of the European Community.

Background to this event are the high losses of the previous years through classical swine fever and other dangerous diseases of animals such as fowl pest and foot and mouth disease (FMD). These diseases are controlled in the European Union by eradication measures, which may include preventive culling of live-stock populations. During the epidemic of foot and mouth disease in Great Britain in 2001 alone, approximately six million animals had to be killed and destroyed in order to eradicate the disease. The total economic damage then amounted to 13 billion Euros. The outcome from epidemics of classical swine fever in the last 15 years looks similar: nearly 20 million pigs were killed and destroyed with an estimated total damage of five to six billion Euros.

Among the experts at the conference there was agreement that the latest developments in disease control, such as the availability of marker vaccines and new and highly sensitive diagnostic tests, should be considered for their suitability in eradication strategies for classical swine fever. Furthermore, incentives should be created for the industry to bring new and improved marker vaccines (live vaccines) to the market. To estimate the dangers that a changed eradication strategy could conceal, they would have to be compared to the present eradication strategies in a scientific risk analysis. The experts expect that such a science-based integration of new technologies would generate the confidence of all involved parties in fighting diseases. And it was agreed upon that mutual trust and transparency have a key function in the eradication of diseases. Thus, they also advise to use disease-free times to get rid of the uncertainties concerning the trade of products from vaccinated animals so that eradication strategies that include the use of emergency vaccines would be possible without delays in a crisis situation.

With the experience of high damages, but also under the enormous public pressure, the majority of which rejects the preventive culling of live-stock populations, experts increasingly favour a change of the present eradication strategies. Although the European Animal Diseases Legislation allows the use of emergency vaccines in case of a disease, this option has never been used up to now for two main reasons:

- A vaccination with traditional vaccine allows no laboratory diagnostic differentiation between vaccinated and infected animals. Hence, vaccinated animals and their products are excluded from markets in the whole of Europe. This would result in a ruinous price collapse.
- Although according to European law new marker vaccines could be used, thus differentiating vaccinated animals from infected ones, and although the products of these animals would be marketable Europe-wide under certain conditions, enormous scepticism exists in view of acceptance of these products by European and especially non-European trading partners.

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The University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover, Foundation stands for long standing competence in the field of veterinary medicine. It was founded in 1778 as the Royal School of Equine Medicine. It is the only veterinary medicine educational establishment in Germany which has kept its independent status. Since the beginning of 2003 the TiHo has been a public foundation. With its transformation into a public foundation the TiHo has gained autonomy and increased its flexibility.

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