

Report on the public hearing 'The Community Animal Health Strategy and Vaccine Technologies' February 13, 2008

Introduction

A European Parliament hearing on 13 February hosted by Mrs. Avril Doyle, Member of the European Parliament, debated the Community Animal Health Strategy and EU scientific innovation. The hearing was a unique opportunity for experts in the veterinary and agricultural field to learn about efforts of the European Commission and the R&D community to fight infectious animal diseases. On the other hand experts from international and European organisations gave a thorough overview of current issues regarding infectious animal diseases.



The motto of the Animal Health Strategy is “prevention is better than cure”, referring to the fact that it is far more cost-effective to prevent the outbreak of animal diseases than dealing with outbreaks in a reactive way. The participants agreed that vaccination proved to be an effective tool to fight infectious diseases in the past as the examples of rinderpest and polio illustrate. However, the emergence of new diseases and the re-emergence of existing diseases, as well as climate change and increasing globalisation, make it necessary to develop new vaccines and strategies for reducing the spread of these diseases.

The hearing was attended by experts from the member states and international organisations, commission officials, policy makers from EU and member state level and stakeholders from the veterinary,

agricultural and R&D field and the private sector.

Overview

In the welcome address Mrs. **Avril Doyle**, MEP highlighted the need to support innovation in the animal health field on an international level. “Infectious diseases do not stop at borders and there is no reason why international R&D expenditure to fight infectious diseases should do so” Mrs. Doyle said.



Additionally the EU must transfer innovations in the animal health sector from other regions more effectively. Mrs. Doyle emphasized that collaborative R&D in particular with the US is paramount to achieve this. She also stressed that the current regulatory framework (for veterinary medicines) is the biggest obstacle to innovation, together with a decline in the social acceptance of risk in Europe towards the animal health industry.



“The availability of veterinary medicines has decreased to an extent that creates adverse effects for public and animal health and animal welfare” Mrs. Doyle said. She therefore supports the creation of a legal basis for the Commission to lay down the principles for applying extrapolation, the inclusion of maximum residue levels (MRLs) set at Codex Alimentarius to reduce additional and unnecessary assessments and the creation of reference points for action for substances detected in food from third countries.



The Rapporteur on the Animal Health Strategy Mr. **Janusz Wojciechowski**, MEP and Vice-Chairman of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee expressed his positive opinion about the Animal Health Strategy. He stressed the importance that animals should not be transported for more than 8 hours at once because that has a strong effect on the spread of infectious diseases.

Mr. **Bernard Van Goethem**, Director Animal Health and Welfare, of the Commission’s DG for Health and Consumer Protection gave an overview of the Animal Health Strategy, explaining the importance of a new strategy, including the new challenges such as climate change, increased trade in animals etc. but also the new opportunities such as improved understanding of diseases and new technologies.



In addition Mr. Van Goethem underlined why the strategy focuses on prevention instead of cure. Namely the reduced costs of having a pro-active instead of a reactive approach. He then outlined the underlying principles of the strategy: prioritisation of EU interventions, a modern animal health framework, improved prevention and crises preparedness and the support of science, innovation and research. Mr. Van Goethem concluded that a collaborative approach with all stakeholders (NGO’s, consumers, practitioners, farmers, industry and public bodies on member state and international level) is needed in order to fight infectious animal diseases effectively.



Mr. **Timothy Hall**, acting director of biotechnologies, agriculture and food of DG Research, explained how the research and technology programmes, the framework programmes in particular, support animal health and the fight against infectious diseases. He gave examples of past actions in FP6, stressing the activities to improve the coordination between the different countries and stakeholders such as the technology platform for global animal

health. The technology platform brings together the stakeholders from industry in order to identify the research needs and opportunities in the animal health sector. He then moved on to show activities in the current seventh framework programme (FP7) in support of animal health.

For 2009 topics for the development of new generation vaccines are to be expected. Main lines for the future include the contribution to the animal health strategy and to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), early involvement of industry and an improved transition from research to application. Finally Mr. Hall explained the need to exploit new “omics” technologies to support animal health and to tackle this issue in a multidisciplinary approach.

Mrs. **Riita Maijala**, Director of Risk Assessment of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), outlined the role of the EFSA as regards the European animal health sector ranging from scientific advice, support for surveillance programmes, development of indicator for welfare of food producing animals and the improvement of methods of risk assessment.



Mrs. Maijala pointed out that collaboration between the public bodies and all the stakeholders are a cornerstone for the work of EFSA. She concluded that high quality risk assessment is imperative to tackle challenges such as climate change, change in consumption patterns, changes in agriculture and increasing trade.

The following presentation by Mr. **Klaas Johan Osinga**, Vice-Chairman of the Animal Health and Welfare Group of

COPA-COGECA showed the perspective of the farming community on infectious animal diseases. Mr. Osinga explained that animal health is important in order to ensure food security and that sick animals have a negative impact on the farm and rural economy.



He stressed that controlling animal health is a shared responsibility, from border controls at state level to good husbandry practices at farm level also including cost sharing. In order to maintain the exports from the EU it is necessary to cooperate with international organisations such as the OIE and to develop standards and policies on a sound scientific basis.

Mr. **Joseph Domenech**, Chief of the United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Office (FAO) Animal Health Service, gave a comprehensive overview of infectious animal diseases globally and explained why diseases such as avian influenza are occurring more frequently in recent years.



Main reasons are the strong increase in animal production, in particular birds held in open farming systems as regards the example of avian influenza, but also globalisation and global warming. Mr.

Domenech showed the global development of several infectious diseases and how the fight to eradicate them proceeded. According to Mr. Domenech surveillance, early detection, early warning and reporting, early response and a high degree of transparency are crucial elements in the fight against infectious animal diseases. These must be based on strong veterinary services, strong regulations, public private partnerships and participatory approaches at the village level. At the same time Mr. Domenech emphasised that a global approach is necessary to ensure the effectiveness of measures such as surveillance, stamping out, biosecurity, movement control and vaccination. He concluded that networking on a global level is necessary to successfully eradicate infectious diseases.

The coordinator of the European Technology Platform Global Animal Health (ETPGAH) Mr. **Declan O'Brien**, demonstrated how the networking approach is being undertaken by the ETPGAH together with other organisations on the European and global level.



Mr. O'Brien emphasised the national mirror groups which aim to integrate the member states into the European network. He also explained the main actions of the ETPGAH including the development of a public disease database, an analysis of the gaps in our ability to control particular diseases, a prioritisation of diseases and the identification of new technologies in various sectors which can be used for animal health.

Finally, Mrs. **Jennifer Rice**, Animal Health Global Product Development Leader for Dow AgroSciences illustrated how vaccination was used successfully in the past to eradicate human and animal diseases and showed why the availability of improved vaccines is so important.



In addition to the reasons stated in some of the previous presentations such as globalisation and negative impacts of mass culling, these also include the growing resistance against antibiotics caused by the consumption of meat. She then explained the criteria for an ideal vaccine. These are effectiveness, safety, stability, possibility to distinguish vaccinated from non-vaccinated animals (DIVA) and cost-effectiveness. Mrs. Rice demonstrated in how far new vaccine technologies such as recombinant vector vaccines, DNA vaccines and plant cell expressed subunit vaccines have the potential to fulfil the requirements of an ideal vaccine. She finally presented the plant-cell technology used by Dow AgroSciences which has excellent attributes regarding efficacy, DIVA strategy and stability and whose only shortfall is that the protective immune response is still not understood and that further research is required. Jennifer Rice concluded that the ideal vaccine is possible but further research is still necessary.

The panel discussion was followed by questions and comments from the audience.

Mr. **Vandeputte**, Director of Trivarop, asked what the efforts are to avoid

duplicity of R&D projects. Mr Hall replied by referring to the ERA-Net Animal Health set up under FP7, the stimulation of common infrastructures and the use of structural funds.

Mrs. **Wills** from the EU Food Information Council asked whether there are any studies on the perception of consumers of the risks related to vaccination of animals. Declan O'Brien replied that it is necessary to communicate better in order to avoid misconceptions about vaccines among consumers. The participants agreed that vaccination is safe and cause no risks for the consumer since vaccines are merely stimulating a natural reaction. It is necessary to overcome the negative perception and convince the consumer about this fact.

To the question what is being done to improve the situation in developing countries, Mr. Domenech replied that it is still difficult to provide access to vaccines in remote areas in least developed countries.

The event was concluded by a reception which offered the opportunity to exchange views on the most recent developments in the animal health sector.

The presentations are available under [presentations animal health](#)

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