

## **Bluetongue in North West Europe; A position paper of the European Livestock Association - ELA**

When Belgium, The Netherlands and a small region of Germany last year experienced the first outbreak of Bluetongue in NW Europe, many feared that the disease was here to stay. These fears became reality when BT reappeared on a scale not seen the previous year and also spreading to France and Luxembourg as well as in large areas of Germany. On 22 September '07 BT was diagnosed in the UK as well. At this moment only three animals have tested positive, have subsequently been culled. However the midges responsible for these three cases (as yet) cannot be controlled. More cases are to be expected.

It is clear that all livestock keepers, commercial and non-commercial, are desperate for vaccination, in particular the farmers in the sheep sector, where mortality is higher than in the cattle sector. Fortunately the European Committee has already declared itself to be positive on the issue of vaccination against BT.

A vaccine for the current strain (serotype 8) is still under development. It is therefore of utmost importance that all countries concerned consent to BT vaccination in spring next year, in order to stimulate vaccine producers to go full speed ahead with the registration and approval of the vaccine. Breeders and keepers of susceptible livestock must have a suitable vaccine for their animals available.

### ***What should be the vaccination strategy for BT?***

It appears that the EU Commission and most Agriculture Ministries of affected countries are leaning towards compulsory vaccination of all domestic ruminants, in which case the EU will cover the costs for the vaccine and up to 50% of vaccination costs. The goal of massive compulsory vaccine application is the eradication of BT in the foreseeable future, because it is not realistic to assume the EU will support such payments for very long. The likelihood that BT can be eradicated is questionable because infected midges and wildlife constitute a permanent BT virus reservoir unaffected by the vaccination of domestic species.

A more prudent strategy is BT vaccination on a voluntary basis even though there won't be funding from Brussels. This strategy does not aim at eradication of BT, but only to control the disease, in order to minimize losses and animal suffering. Individual livestock keepers will thus be able to protect their animals and the behaviour of the vaccine under field conditions could then be evaluated.

Powerful special interest stakeholder groups that are against massive vaccination will have no reason to oppose this more limited vaccination option.

Considering that:

1. An inactivated BT vaccine is not yet fully available;
2. The potency and field efficacy of the vaccine is still to be determined;
3. BT is widely disseminated in Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, The Netherlands and parts of France
4. BT is likely to become established (endemic) in these countries;
5. BT vaccination prevents much animal suffering;
6. BT vaccination does not cause additional restrictions of animal movement or export problems;
7. BT vaccination does not endanger food safety.

It is therefore proposed:

1. BT vaccination must start with the voluntary BT vaccination of susceptible species as soon as sufficient approved inactivated vaccine is available;
2. Epidemiological and serological evaluations of the vaccination results require a centralized register of all vaccinated premises;
3. After the results of these evaluations are available further comprehensive control and eradication programs can be formulated;
4. In advance agreement must be reached that vaccinated animals are not discriminated.

The members of the European Livestock Association (ELA) strongly request on behalf of all those in favor of vaccination, that the member states, where BT is now endemic, support voluntary vaccination of all ruminants and give the right signals to vaccine manufacturers to speed up development and production of a safe, suitable vaccine.

Sincerely,

Peter King, Chairman ELA