

**International Conference on Control and
Prevention of Foot and Mouth Disease**

Brussels 12 – 13 December 2001

Final Report

Organised by

**The Belgian EU Presidency
The European Commission
The Netherlands
The United Kingdom**

1. Introduction

The international conference on Control and Prevention of Foot and Mouth Disease was held in Brussels, Belgium, from December 12th – 13th, 2001. This conference was organised by the Belgian EU Presidency, the European Commission, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The 15 European Member States, the candidate Member States, a large number of Third Countries and many European and world-wide organisations, notably the OIE and FAO, attended this conference. Also representatives of the agricultural sector, agribusiness, animal welfare organisations and consumer organisations as well as representatives of national parliaments and the European Parliament attended the meeting.

Background

Foot and mouth disease (FMD) has been a serious threat to the health of livestock for centuries. The consequences of a FMD epidemic are dramatic for the agricultural sector and the whole economy, although FMD is not contagious for humans.

After the Second World War, vaccination was introduced in a number of European countries and proved to be very effective. By the end of the 1980s, FMD had disappeared in Europe and a common non-vaccination strategy was agreed upon. Recent outbreaks in the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, France and also in Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina once again demonstrated the enormous consequences of the introduction of a very infective virus, not only for agriculture but for the whole of society.

The present EU strategy, which is based mainly on "stamping out", in other words the culling and disposal of infected livestock and the preventive killing of animals that were in contact with infected farms or were on contiguous farms, proved to be very expensive. Severe questions and criticism were raised by farmers and the general public concerning in particular animal welfare. The temporary trade restrictions imposed on live animals and animal products caused severe losses for the agricultural and food sector. The outbreaks and the related control measures had significant negative consequences for other sectors like tourism. Due to this considerable impact of the recent FMD epidemic and major social concerns, the Belgian Presidency and its partners wanted to provide an opportunity for a broad discussion on prevention and control of FMD with representatives from all the interested parties from the agriculture sector and society as a whole.

Conference

The first part of the conference gave an overview of the present situation by political representatives. Prevention and control measures were then shortly presented in plenary session followed by discussions in four working groups. The second day focussed on socio-economic consequences for the agricultural sector and for society. The morning plenary session was followed by discussions in working groups. The conference ended by the panel discussion.

Plenary sessions consisted in presentations by speakers for all the participants. These were presided by the Belgian Minister in charge of Agriculture, Mrs Neyts-Uyttebroek, assisted by Mr De Cuyper, General Secretary of the Belgian Ministry of Agriculture.

For the discussions, participants were divided in 4 parallel working groups with a particular topic to study. After each session, conclusions and recommendations were summarised in a report and presented at the beginning of the next plenary session. Final conclusions were presented in a panel discussion.

The program of the conference is attached at annex 1. The reports of the morning sessions are attached at annex 2. The texts of the presentations are available on the website <http://www.cmlag.fgov.be/eng/conference>.

2. Summary of the opening session

In her opening speech, the Minister in charge of Agriculture, and President of the Agriculture Council of the European Union, Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, stressed that, in a most painful way, the FMD virus did not observe national boundaries. At any time the virus could affect a sensitive population anywhere, after either deliberately or accidental introduction.

Any evaluation of the Foot and Mouth policy had not only to include the technical veterinary aspects but also the social, economical and ethical aspects. The Minister suggested the conference should address the following questions :

Is there no choice but to destroy millions of healthy animals to bring an outbreak of FMD under control?

Are the disadvantages of emergency vaccination so strong that we prefer to fight the virus with our bare hands?

What is the outcome of the costs benefit analyses of an eradication strategy versus a vaccination strategy? Should such an analysis take account of all consequences, i.e. the social consequences as well?

Are better vaccines available nowadays than 10 years ago, are there better laboratory tests allowing making a distinction between infected and vaccinated animals?

How can we avoid a similar situation in the future?

How do we handle the possible threat of a deliberate introduction of the virus into a sensitive population?

Finally, the images of burning animals and overcrowding of animals had turned the European consumer away from meat, intra-Community consumption had decreased and we had become increasingly dependent on exports. How could we escape this vicious circle ?

Commissioner Byrne highlighted the importance of the conference which had been triggered by the outbreak of FMD in the EU this year. Although the outbreak appears to have been eradicated, its impact will live with us for a long time, we have to learn the lessons from this painful experience and ensure that similar damage is not done in the future.

Mr. Byrne continued that the measures taken during this epidemic had been taken in accordance with the rules in force, which had been undisputed until now. These measures included severe restrictions on movement of animals and untreated products from infected Member States and were in all affected Member States aimed at eradication of the disease. In the case of the Netherlands the measures taken included also the use of emergency vaccination. He underlined the very competent handling of the crisis by the Commission services in close co-operation with the Member States. The Community's trade interests with third countries were strongly defended with varying degrees of success. The main weaknesses, which contributed to the crisis, are well known. These are some of the issues which are currently being addressed or which will be taken up in further proposals which will follow this conference.

The proposal which the Commission will present shortly for a new Directive on the control of FMD will provide the opportunity for a debate on prophylactic vaccination. Full discussion of this proposal not only in the European Parliament and the Agriculture Council but also strong interest from civil society and our international partners is expected. It is planned to reach agreement by mid 2003 at the latest.

The crisis and its aftermath cannot be seen only as an issue for the EU. Mr. Byrne expressed his hope that it will also lead to a fundamental rethink of the approaches towards FMD in key international organisations like the FAO and the OIE and also in third countries.

The Director General of the 'Office International des Epizooties' (OIE), Mr. Bernard Vallat, gave an overview of the standards, guidelines and recommendations of the OIE regarding FMD. He referred furthermore to the recommendations, which were drawn up at the OIE/FAO International Scientific Conference on FMD, which was held in April 2001 at the OIE Headquarters in Paris, France.

In summary, Member Countries were asked to conduct risk assessments on FMD taking into account the recent progress made in various fields, to review their national legislation accordingly and to be better prepared for emergency intervention, to take appropriate measures in an emergency situation to protect rare breeds of domestic animals, wild animal of endangered species kept in zoos and animals kept for research purposes, to encourage research into new diagnostic tests, improved vaccines, disease surveillance and control systems, risk analysis and economic research ; to increase awareness at the political and professional level and in the case of industrialised countries, to help the least developed countries to set up Veterinary Service capable of controlling epizootics. Recommendations for international organisations were aimed to strengthen the co-operation and awareness raising world-wide.

The Minister of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, Mr. Laurens Jan Brinkhorst, gave an overview of the experiences of the recent FMD outbreak in The Netherlands. He underlined the fact that The Netherlands has taken many strict measures in combating the disease, of which stamping out was the most important instrument. Emergency vaccination was carried out in a zone around infected farms. Furthermore, to contain the disease wholesale vaccination of all susceptible animals was carried out in an area of about 1200 square kilometres. He underlined the enormous social and economic impact of the measures. The limits of feasibility of the strategy were reached. The mass slaughter of healthy animals led to public outrage. Not only the agricultural sector but also large parts of society were severely damaged. Total costs were estimated at 280 million Euro.

Looking to the future he stressed the need for an integrated European policy, which should adapt to incorporate animal friendly behaviour, socially responsible enterprises and the maintenance of the sector's position on the internal market. As a first step he proposed to adopt a policy of ring vaccination, without the compulsory slaughter of vaccinated animals. To implement this policy reliable and discriminatory tests, differentiating between vaccinated animals and infected animals, are necessary. This test is available, as he said, and should be accepted both in the EU for the internal market and by the OIE for the international market. For the long term he underlined the need for a fundamental discussion of the non-vaccination policy. This policy may looking to the trends of liberalisation of the global market and animal transport over even greater distances not be able to contain the risks of infectious animal diseases, as he said.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural affairs of The United Kingdom, Mrs. Margaret Beckett, gave an overview of the experiences of the recent FMD outbreak in the United Kingdom.

She emphasised that the UK outbreak was unprecedented, involving over 2000 infected farms and culling on over 9000 premises. Thanks to intensive efforts from agencies across the UK,

the epidemic had been controlled, but at a massive cost to individual farmers, the agriculture sector, rural businesses and the taxpayer (around 4bn Euro).

The Conference should consider issues of principle ; was eradication the right policy? The UK public expressed revulsion at widespread culling, but it was not clear that they were willing to eat meat from vaccinated animals. There were strong animal welfare reasons for FMD eradication as it was an extremely unpleasant disease, which can be fatal to young animals. Previous efforts to eradicate the disease should not be lightly set aside. Any alternative approaches must be scientifically verified and internationally recognised. Vaccination is not a cheap or simple solution – it requires clear objectives, a well-defined trigger point, support from farmers, the food chain and consumers, and proper pre-planning. The UK actively considered vaccination throughout the outbreak. Ring vaccination had not been practicable in the early stages due to wide spread. EU authorisation was obtained for preventative vaccination of cattle in Cumbria but was not implemented due to lack of support from farmers and others.

Continuing, Mrs Beckett argued that EU import controls needed to be tightened. The UK had set up independent inquiries into the lessons to be learned from the outbreak; into scientific means of preventing and controlling future outbreaks; and into the future of farming. The findings would be useful for the UK and for the EU as a whole, and would help answer key questions on what more can be done, whether eradication is right and what methods should be used, whether there is a greater role for vaccination, and what new science can be brought to bear on the problem.

The Director General of the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), Mr. Jacques Diouf, addressed animal disease in relation to food security world-wide. Supporting developing countries to better control and eradicate transboundary animal diseases is in the mutual interest of agriculture and livestock in both rich and poor countries, he said. He added that the European Union is in a privileged position to promote international action against this disease. Amongst other measures, he urged the international community to establish an effective global information and early warning system on transboundary animal disease. He gave an overview of the outbreaks of FMD world-wide the last 10 years. Transboundary diseases affect the livelihoods of millions of farmers in developing countries and hamper their possibilities of benefiting from the rapid increase of animal production and trade expected, which would offer them an opportunity to escape from hunger and poverty.

A recent risk analysis, conducted by FAO, showed that 50 percent of the risks of introducing FMD to Europe was accounted for by illegal movements of livestock or animal products ; foodstuffs carried by tourists or immigrants and legal trade in animal products. Against this background he stressed the need for a global plan for the containment and progressive control of FMD. A global information and early warning system should be established, as he sad. Furthermore he underlined the need for the international capacity for providing support in early detection, contingency planning and strengthening of initial containment of suspected new outbreaks of transboundary diseases in developing countries as well as the improvement of veterinary inspection services. He concluded by stressing strengthening the international regulatory and standard system of the OIE to provide for science-based, fair trade regulations.

The opening sessions was concluded by the Chairman of the Agricultural and Rural Development Committee of the European Parliament, Mr. Friedrich-Wilhelm Graefe zu Baringdorf. He gave the viewpoint of the European Parliament. He stressed the political

dimension and the important role of the European Parliament for reviewing the current FMD-policy of the EU and discussing new policies in this regard.

Against this background the EP has installed an inquiry Committee into FMD. He underlined the social and animal welfare aspects. In his opinion the mass slaughtering of animals and pyres are no longer acceptable. Also from the perspective of food security and food safety it is unacceptable to continue the current policy. In that respect he reflected on the consequences for developing countries and rural communities.

Furthermore he asked for a review of the trade policy within the EU. To his understanding, the current policy prohibits to bring on the EU-market products of vaccinated animals, but on the other hand it allows the import of those products from third countries. For the long term he made a plea for a review of the agricultural production systems within the EU. Against this background he underlined the need for a new FMD-policy, containing the following elements. The EP is not favouring a large-scale prophylactic vaccination. A clear and offensive strategy is necessary, in which emergency vaccination without the slaughtering of animals is a cornerstone. In this respect he stressed the need for internationally recognised and validated tests to allow vaccinated animals to be distinguished from infected animals. Also the obstacle to overcome is the marketing of products of vaccinated animals. The retail sector as well as consumer organisations play an important role in that respect. Furthermore there should not only be a ban of swill feeding of catering waste to animals, but those products should be destroyed. Also stricter provisions on animal transport are needed, as well as the introduction of animal feed from ruminants.

3. Conclusions and recommendations of the working sessions

3.1. Preventive and control measures

There have been four working groups discussing the following items:

1. Prevention of FMD
2. Management of outbreaks of FMD
3. The role of vaccination in the prevention and control of FMD
4. The influence of the structures of European animal husbandry on the prevention and control of FMD

Each working group formulated its own conclusions and recommendations, which are attached at annex 2, however, there are common conclusions of all four groups as follows:

Measures to prevent and control FMD

- must be proactive ;
- must be based on an integrated view on the whole food production system and must in particular take into account the transport of animals as a potential animal health risk and welfare problem ;
- cannot be effective without good policy of information and communication to the public and stakeholders ;
- must involve all stakeholders, notably livestock keepers, with a view to support a shared exercise of control and surveillance measures at all levels in particular the provision of veterinary assistance to producers in association with private and official veterinarians promoting the effective joint efforts between the public and private sector ;
- can only be carried out effectively by veterinary services and competent authorities which possess of the necessary powers, mechanisms and resources to respond adequately to the emergency.

The specific conclusions and recommendations can be summarised as follows:

Prevention of FMD virus introduction onto EU territory

- EC import policy to be reviewed, in particular in fields which may not be adequately or completely controlled at present, including an examination of the conditions for introduction of such products destined for ship chandlers and free warehouses ;
- Imports of small quantities of products should be prohibited, unless such products conform to EC standards and are declared at the point of introduction.
- Import checks and controls need to be improved.
- Risk communication in respect of virus introduction must be improved.

Management of outbreaks

- The ultimate goal should be to remain FMD free without vaccination. Mass prophylactic vaccination is not a viable option for countries that have achieved infection-free status.
- Stamping out of infected herds must remain the basic tool in the EC eradication strategy, however in certain circumstances additional methods could be used, including emergency vaccination. The OIE criteria for regaining FMD-free status after using vaccination as an aid to eradication need to be reviewed.
- Rapid diagnosis and information on the epidemiology of each outbreak are key elements of effective disease management. Each outbreak is different and its characteristics will determine the most appropriate response. In all circumstances effective biosecurity measures and movement restrictions are essential.

Prevention of Spread between Holdings

- Strengthening of animal movement control systems and traceability including animal transport conditions, for example cleansing and disinfecting of vehicles, duration of transport, use of staging points, and collection of animals.
- Improvement of biosecurity in individual holdings including the reduction of contacts to other holdings and a standstill period after such contacts.
- Densely populated livestock areas are considered a major risk factor in the spreading of FMD, in particular where, in combination with specialisation of livestock production involving transport, there is an increased risk of spreading virus over long distances.

Veterinary services

- Strengthening veterinary services to ensure that these services are capable of carrying out their tasks and have the necessary powers and resources
- It must be ensured that the veterinary services have the necessary powers, mechanisms and resources available in order to detect and respond rapidly to an emergency or suspicion of any significant disease such as FMD.
- It must be ensured that contingency planning covers all the elements related to prevention and control i.e. to ensure that laboratory facilities can gear up in an emergency, that an adequate antigen, reagent and vaccine bank is operational and provisions are in place to carry out emergency vaccination and subsequent surveillance.
- In the framework of contingency planning biosecurity on holdings, training and awareness of all the stakeholders needs to be improved.

International Dimension

- There needs to be a global view on FMD, as this is not just a European issue, and for mutual benefit technical assistance could be provided to countries where FMD is endemic or appears sporadically.
- The EU and other developed countries could help third countries, where necessary, to establish improved information systems and effective veterinary services with sufficient legal power, mechanisms and resources to ensure adequate disease control and eradication measures.

Research and Development

- Research in the field of the development of vaccines and diagnostic tests should be encouraged and financed adequately. Priority should be given to the development of high quality vaccines and the development and validation of diagnostic tests, with special emphases on discriminatory tests capable of differentiating vaccinated from infected animals.

Review of EC legislation on FMD

- The forthcoming revision of the EU FMD Directive should provide for greater flexibility in the control options available to Member States to manage future FMD outbreaks including emergency vaccination as a tool to reduce the numbers of animals destroyed without compromising the trade in animals and products.
- There is a need to assess how non-commercial animals fit into the overall policy in particular with regard to FMD.
- Scientific developments in particular internationally recognised and validated discriminatory tests must be incorporated into future EU disease management policy as quickly as possible.
- Consensus should be sought at the international level within the OIE framework.

3.2. Socio-economic consequences of FMD for farmers, agribusiness, consumers and society

The recent FMD outbreaks in Europe have had a major impact on society. FMD cannot be seen as purely a veterinary and agricultural problem ; socio-economic factors also need to be considered. Improvement in the methods used for the prevention, control and eradication of disease will be required in the future.

The four working groups discussed the socio-economic consequences of FMD for the following:

- Farmers and Agri-business ;
- Animal Welfare ;
- Consumers and the Public ; and
- Society as a whole.

Each working group developed specific conclusions and recommendations which are set out at Annex 2. There was common agreement that the measures taken to control outbreaks of FMD have had a serious impact across all sectors of society.

These control measures had :

- given rise to emotional and ethical doubts with regard to the mass culling of animals, the methods used for carcass disposal and the waste of resources this entailed ;
- adversely impacted on the environment ;
- created a negative image of farming ;
- cast doubt on the safety of food and a misunderstanding of the safety of products from vaccinated animals ;
- interfered with the everyday life of the public and consumers ;

The specific conclusions and recommendations can be summarised as follows:

Overcoming the Knowledge Gap

Many of the concerns identified arose from a lack of understanding of the nature of the disease from an animal health and human health perspective, the methods available for its control and eradication and its importance in relation to international trade. Many of these problems were due to poor communication with the public.

The discussion on control and prevention of FMD highlighted the need for flexible but comprehensive contingency plans which take into account the interests of all stakeholders. If we are to overcome the lack of understanding of the disease, it is essential that all stakeholders are included in the planning process.

Experts in disease control have a duty to ensure that the messages they convey to the public are as clear and consistent as possible. Authorities should ensure that all facts are made publicly available in an open and transparent way.

Future Policy Considerations

Future FMD policy must take into account the social consequences of outbreak.

Authorities should ensure that disease control and carcass disposal policies are sufficiently flexible to meet the concerns of consumers and the public without compromising the control and eradication of disease.

A high priority should be given to animal welfare during an eradication campaign.

4. Conclusions and recommendations of the panel discussion

The conference ended with a panel discussion. The panel was chaired by Mrs Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, Minister in charge of Agriculture of Belgium, and consisted of Mr. Reimer Böge, member of the European Parliament; Mr. Laurens Jan Brinkhorst, Minister of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries of The Netherlands ; Mr. David Byrne, Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection of the European Commission ; Mr. Romano Marabelli, Chairman of the 'Office International des Epizooties', and Rt. Hon. Alun Michael, MP, Minister of State for Rural Affairs of The United Kingdom.

Mr David Byrne said in his reaction to the presented conclusions and recommendation of the working groups that the conclusions were clear and not unexpected. He highlighted the aspect of the concerns of the consumers and society. Furthermore, he welcomed the clear recommendations on the prevention and control, including emergency vaccination, the ethical and animal welfare aspects and the sensitivity of the consumers. In this respect he stressed the need for a clear marketing strategy for products from vaccinated animals. He concluded his remarks by stating that the conclusions and recommendations will be considered in the proposals of the European Commission for a revision of the FMD-policy of the EU.

Mr Laurens Jan Brinkhorst was in his remarks positive about the conference and the presented conclusions and recommendations. He welcomed the fact that the conference has made it clear that a FMD strategy is not only related to veterinary policies, but has to include the ethical and animal welfare aspects as well as the concerns of consumers and society. The conclusions about emergency vaccination were clear and promising. He stressed the need for the validation and registration of the already existing discriminatory tests in the European Union as well as by the OIE. Referring to the marketing of products from vaccinated animals he was of the opinion that the consumers should be better informed. The whole food chain should be involved in the marketing of these products. He concluded by stating that the trade policy of industrialised countries has to be changed. From a world-wide perspective it is unacceptable that healthy food is destroyed.

In his reaction Mr. Alun Michael said that the conference had address the real issues. He underlined the inquiries, which are taking place in the United Kingdom, and the results of these inquiries will be shared with the EU Member States. He welcomed the consensus about eradication of FMD and noted that vaccination could be a tool. He was sympathetic to the points made about the mass slaughtering of animals. But the implementation of those recommendations need better testing, purer vaccines and better trade rules. In his opinion it was very difficult during a FMD outbreak to convince the public to consume products from vaccinated animals. He concluded by stating that the international co-operation should be strengthened, especially related to fast tracking of the validation process of tests and the review of trade rules.

Mr Romano Marabelli welcomed the conclusions and recommendations. Adequate resources should be made available for surveillance systems and veterinary services, especially for developing countries. The period between outbreaks should be better used for awareness raising and review of policies at the national and international level. We have to invest in developing countries where FMD is endemic and present, he stated. In the last 10 years the OIE policies give more impetus to consumer concerns and trade policies. He stressed the need for new vaccines and accurate tests. Referring to vaccination it is, in his opinion, up to the national governments to decide on the right strategy. Depending on the scientific evidence a shorter period of restrictions for trade after the use of emergency vaccination could be implemented. He concluded by stating that we have to look into the trade policies for products from vaccinated animals.

In his reaction Reimer Böge stated that the European Parliament was extremely content with the conference. He welcomed the conclusions and recommendations. They are in line with the concerns of the EP. He referred to the resolution of the EP, stating that the European Commission should present as soon as possible an action plan for a more effective FMD strategy. In his opinion we should not speak about vaccinated products, but only of vaccinated animals. In this respect he underlined the need for better marketing strategies. There has to be an agreement between all stakeholders for a precautionary strategy. He concluded by stating that a new FMD policy has to keep the destruction of animals to a minimum. The OIE codes should be more flexible.

During the discussions with the participants the need for a swift review of the FMD policy was emphasised. Stricter rules for animal transport were underlined. Also the need for the incorporation of animal welfare aspects in the FMD policy of the EU was stressed. Furthermore the marketing strategy for products from vaccinated animals and the responsibilities of involved stakeholders was discussed. In reply to questions Mr. Byrne stressed that EU policy on FMD must take account of international trade rules and that there was choice between vaccination and the consequences for trade as compared with non-vaccinating.

Mrs Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck concluded the panel discussion by stating that the conclusions and recommendations of the conference will play an important role in the forthcoming discussions about the proposals of the European Commission for a revision of the FMD-policy in the Agriculture Council.

5. General conclusions

During the Conference all representatives of national and international governmental bodies and international organisations discussed the issues in an open and constructive manner. The Conference considered not only technical issues on the prevention and eradication of foot and mouth disease, but also the broader welfare, environmental and socio-economic aspects. The Conference came to a number of conclusions and recommendations that were for the main part largely accepted by all participants.

Any large epizootic of foot and mouth disease, in whatever part of the world it occurs, has serious consequences on many levels of society. Such outbreaks need to be avoided as much as possible in the future. Different actions need to be taken to control and ultimately eradicate the disease in countries where it is still endemic ; to take appropriate additional measures to prevent the introduction of the disease in foot and mouth disease free countries ; and to eradicate the disease from countries where it has been introduced.

Additional measures related to transport of animals must be considered taken into account the impact on spreading of diseases.

The Conference did not favour the reintroduction of general prophylactic vaccination throughout the European Community. However, the European Community needs to be able to respond rapidly and flexibly to any future outbreaks. The appropriate response will depend on the circumstances and may include emergency vaccination in addition to compulsory stamping out of at least the infected herds. The use of emergency vaccination under the condition of strictly applied regionalisation and movement control is an option to eradicate foot and mouth disease. However the use of emergency vaccination in order to limit the massive culling of animals needs to be assessed in the framework of the European Community and the 'Office International des Epizooties' taking into account the consequences for trade in products from vaccinated animals. The Conference stressed the need for validation, registration, and international recognition of reliable discriminatory tests.

The European Community competent authorities and the relevant international organisations need to take urgently adequate actions according to the conclusions of the conference and to ensure that the appropriate means are available to achieve the objectives highlighted during the Conference. In particular, the needs and means of the veterinary services allowing an early detection of the disease and the response to it must be assessed.

Finally psychological aspects towards society in general and farmers in particular during an eradication of FMD should be taken into account.