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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Ministerial Conference on lumpy skin disease (8-9 September 2016, Sofia, Bulgaria)
- Information from the Bulgarian delegation, supported by the Austrian delegation

Delegations will find attached a revised information note received from the Bulgarian delegation on the above mentioned subject to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the meeting of the Council ("Agriculture and Fisheries") on 14-15 November 2016.

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON LUMPY SKIN DISEASE

8-9 SEPTEMBER 2016, SOFIA, BULGARIA

Information from the delegation of Bulgaria

A ministerial conference on the Lumpy skin disease of cattle was held in Sofia on September 8-9, 2016.

The conference was organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency in close cooperation with the European Commission. The conference was attended by the Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Mr. Vytenis Andriukaitis, and representatives of the Directorate-General “Health and Food Safety” of the European Commission, high level representatives from 19 countries (Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey and Ukraine), the European Food Safety Authority and scientists.

The main objective of the conference was to facilitate a discussion with a view to reaching a common approach to fighting the disease at national, regional and European level.

The measures against the disease are extremely important not only for the affected countries or for those who are in immediate risk, but for the EU as a whole. The emergence of such an exotic disease necessitates an assessment of the readiness of each country, respectively of the EU, to meet the threat, coupled with reassessment of the protective measures (for live animals and products) in connection with the disease, implementation of a modern policy for disease control, guarantees for sustainability and reduction of the disease’s impact on trade, without compromising the safety or endangering the health of countries which are free of the disease.

The delegations of Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey and Israel presented their experiences in the fight against this disease, which is not dangerous to humans but causes serious economic losses to the affected farmers.

At the end of the conference participants agreed on the following conclusions:

1. Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD) is clearly a regional problem that requires high level of awareness at technical and political level, involving many countries and can only be dealt with through coordinated international efforts triggered by swift international initiatives. Contribution of the OIE in this effort will be of paramount importance.
2. There is a need for close coordination at international level, coupled with transparency and regular exchange of epidemiological information between countries. To this end we must all continue our efforts to maintain and further promote regional cooperation and exchange of information between LSD affected and at risk countries through a structure able to put together information and resources for the countries in the region.
3. The main risks of LSD transmission are associated with transfer of virus by blood-feeding vectors and possibly direct contact between infected and naive animals as well as non-controlled animal movements. More research is needed on the level of the risk that other indirect routes of transmission may pose.
4. LSD represents no risk for human health as it is not a zoonosis. Meat and milk for human consumption are not considered to be significant risk factors for transmission and the risk posed by milk destined for animal consumption, can be mitigated by pasteurization. Hides are more likely to be contaminated with virus than meat or milk and require specific risk mitigating measures.
5. Healthy animals that have been vaccinated in accordance with EFSA's suggestions and the vaccine manufacturer's directions, at least 28 days earlier, complying with certain additional risk mitigating requirements, carry a low risk for spreading LSD, particularly if originating from an LSD free area.
6. Priority actions to prevent transmission are immediate culling and safe destruction of infected animals, safe mass vaccination to reduce disease spread, and movement controls to avoid long distance spread via direct contact with affected animals.

7. The delegations take into consideration the EFSA's urgent advice on lumpy skin disease that when safe mass vaccination against LSD has already been applied and protection of livestock has been established, partial culling of only affected animals is as effective in eradicating the disease as whole-herd culling, which is currently required under EU legislation.
8. As highlighted in the above EFSA advice, vaccination of cattle is the most effective option for controlling the spread of LSD especially if applied before the virus enters a region or a country. To reach this effect vaccination must be implemented upon the entire susceptible population and high vaccination coverage should be achieved. For this purpose, the EU will continue to complement, when needed and proportionate to its own capacity, national resources as regards the availability of vaccine.
9. Before the necessary revision of current EU legislation on LSD, there is a need to refine the protective measures (for live animals and commodities) in relation to the disease in order to provide for an advanced disease control policy, ensuring sustainability and minimising the disease impact on trade, without actually compromising safe trade or jeopardising the health status of the disease free countries. In that sense there is an imminent need to:
 - establish specialised and proportionate rules for products that represent a low risk for disease transmission (e.g. meat , milk) as well as for higher risk commodities (live animals, semen, ova , embryo, animal by-products...);
 - establish rules for the movements of live animals, semen ova and embryo as well as animal by-products between regions of the same sanitary status (e.g. between LSD affected countries);
 - establish specific, sustainable trade rules and proportionate (lighter) restrictions for countries not affected by LSD who decide to implement vaccination against the disease as a precautionary measure;

- establish rules that will allow countries implementing an LSD control strategy involving vaccination, to move live animals and commodities in the framework of intracommunity and international trade according to EFSA's risk analysis and scientific based, recommendations and updated standards of the OIE;
 - establish appropriate rules for transit through restricted areas;
 - reconsider the minimum size of surveillance and protection zones for LSD;
 - reconsider the regionalisation rules for LSD (restricted areas);
 - reconsider the minimum conditions, using all available tools and the appropriate time and the surveillance required to declare a country or a region free from LSD and revert to freedom under different circumstances.
10. Further research on LSD transmission, the role of the vectors and the environmental factors in the epidemiology of the disease, the diagnostic methods, the differentiation between vaccinated and naturally infected animals, the duration of immunity conferred by vaccines and the development of DIVA vaccines should be supported. The EU Reference Laboratory for capripox viruses is a valuable instrument for these purposes.
11. The current disease evolution suggests that we are far from the total eradication of LSD from Europe and we have to be ready for an intense and long fight against this disease. As a result we must all work together to develop long term, sustainable strategies to manage its direct and indirect impact at all levels (animal health, trade, farming sector etc.).
12. All countries and the European Commission should continue to support regional cooperation and coordination for LSD in the area through active participation and promotion of international meetings organised under the umbrella of EU, GF-TADS, OIE, FAO. A regional plan describing a long term strategy should be developed, in particular in the context of the GF-TADS meetings.

13. All countries and the European Commission should work together to secure additional financial support and other resources needed for the combat against LSD. The EU has already provided during 2016 substantial support and in particular will continue its efforts and explore all possible options to maintain its leading role as a provider of multiple support (expertise, training, vaccines, reimbursement of some specific costs, coordination) against LSD for all countries in the area.
