

GROUP ON MEATS AND FEEDS

Monday, June 2nd 2008, Krakow

REPORT OF THE IFAP-OIE INFORMAL CONSULTATION 18th of March 2008

For the first time, IFAP held an informal consultation with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) in Paris on Tuesday March 18, 2008. Farmer leaders discussed a broad agenda of animal health issues with the Director General and senior staff of the OIE, including guidelines for production systems, food safety in animal production, the use of antimicrobials in agriculture, the concept of compartmentalisation and/or the integration of farmers in animal health programmes.

OIE Director General Dr. Bernard Vallat said that he welcomed close contact with farmers, as they are essential to meeting the OIE's objective of improving the health status of animals. It was important that farmers played their full role as the first sentinel of disease control, that governments worldwide provide adequate funds to control animal diseases, and that the industrialized countries help the developing countries to do this.

IFAP President Jack Wilkinson thanked the Director General for opening OIE to producer participation. He said that governments should partner better with farmers in preventing animal disease outbreaks and in collaborating on standards to govern animal health in international trade. Wilkinson was pleased that Dr. Vallat would address the IFAP World Farmers' Congress in Warsaw in June.

Animal Welfare

IFAP Vice President Peter Gaemelke stressed that farmers are responsible for the care of their animals, and that good animal welfare practices usually reward farmers with good profitability. He called for more funding for research, so as to create the best scientific basis for elaborating animal welfare standards. The OIE should succeed in developing minimal standards for animal welfare worldwide that should be a reference for international trade rules.

Food Safety and Quality

IFAP Meats and Feeds Group Chairman Lourie Bosman stressed the importance of having reliable food safety systems throughout the supply chain, from farm to fork. He said that the management of risk should remain in the hands of national governments, and that development assistance was needed by both governments and livestock producers to ensure food safety and consumer confidence in animal products.

Use of Antimicrobials

The IFAP delegation was informed about the collaboration between the WHO and FAO on dealing with antimicrobial resistance, including the development of critical lists of veterinary and human medicines, and discussions to manage the overlaps. Speaking for IFAP, Klaas

Johan Osinga said that pharmaceutical companies need to be encouraged to produce new products, since those in use are almost twenty years old. He also called for an impact assessment before any ingredients were removed from the list.

Traceability

IFAP President Jack Wilkinson said that the ability to trace food throughout the system is critical to building consumer confidence. However, he drew attention to the cost element and lack of resources in developing countries to run reliable traceability systems. Wilkinson called for discussions with the OIE on questions of confidence, cost, compatibility and tolerance levels.

Compartmentalisation

OIE explained to IFAP the concept of compartmentalisation. Whereas a 'zone' is a geographic area, a 'compartment' could be as small as one farm unit, which has a strict biosecurity management system. Delegates agreed that it was much easier to introduce compartmentalisation in a vertically integrated company than on small family farms. Per Olsen from Denmark explained that IFAP was concerned about consumer confidence in this system, and needed more convincing figures about the benefits.

Integrating Farmers into Animal Health Programs

IFAP Vice President Raul Montemayor said that small farmers in developing countries were often poor, scattered, and working in a difficult environment, and therefore were unable to adopt new technologies. Also, they were working with weak government quarantine and technology transfer systems. He called for capacity building, especially in transfer of technology to small farmers, and said that farmers' organisations could help with programs in cases where governments have pulled out.

Catherine McLaughlin of the NFU of the UK reported on the success of the animal health and welfare strategy implemented in the UK in 2004. It involved farm health planning, which was a team effort between farmers and veterinarians to improve the performance and productivity of their livestock. She gave several examples in success of this scheme in improving fertility, improving nutrition, and reducing infectious diseases.

Private Standards

Both the OIE and IFAP representatives were in complete agreement that international health standards should be developed by intergovernmental organisations, such as the OIE, Codex Alimentarius, the FAO and the WHO. Such standards are adopted using a scientific basis and democratic procedures. OIE and IFAP were concerned about the emergence of private standards decided by retail distribution chains without negotiation, and only based on commercial interests. They said that supermarkets must respect OIE standards in the case of animal health, and where these do not exist, use a science-based risk assessment. Of course, the more standards that OIE is able to develop, then the less incentive there will be for the use of private standards.

IFAP will now follow up on this first very valuable informal consultation with the OIE in a structured way.