

**FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE**

Statement by Paraguay in the Meeting of 7-8 November 2002

1. The delegation of Paraguay requested the opportunity to make a statement on the national programme to maintain the country's status as free from foot-and-mouth disease with vaccination, a request based on the fact that Paraguay is an important producer and exporter of high-quality bovine meat. This has been achieved on the basis of programmes and projects supported by public policies and by private initiative in my country and with the participation of foreign investors based in Paraguay and engaged in the production of bovine meat. These efforts directed towards genetic improvement, hybridization, and the introduction of the most advanced technologies for the reproduction and breeding of cattle represent decades of work. Accordingly, large-scale commercial cattle raising has a very high priority in Paraguay's economic and social development.
2. Paraguay initiated the programme to control foot-and-mouth disease during the 1960s, and on the basis of that highly successful programme a further step was taken with the introduction of the programme to eradicate foot-and-mouth disease in 1992. This led first of all to the eradication of outbreaks in 1994 and then to Paraguay obtaining in May 1997 international certification from the International Office of Epizootics (OIE) as a country free from foot-and-mouth disease with vaccination. That sanitary status was successively certified in 1998 and 1999, until on 1 August 1999 vaccination was terminated with a view to obtaining certification a country free from foot-and-mouth disease without vaccination.
3. However, owing to several outbreaks in our region in August 2000, in the area of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, and in Argentina in the northern and central provinces bordering Paraguay, and in view of the risk of the reintroduction of the virus into the country, the vaccination of cattle was reintroduced for technical reasons since it was considered to be the best and most appropriate technical alternative as a means of maintaining the sanitary status that we had achieved through so many sacrifices.
4. In view of the situation in the region a programme of strategic vaccination was introduced in August and September 2000 to vaccinate all the cattle affected in the area bordering the neighbouring countries.
5. On 22 October 2000, regulations were introduced for compulsory vaccination against foot-and-mouth disease throughout the national territory for a period covering the years 2001 to 2003, and on account of these measures we continue to be certified as a country free from foot-and-mouth disease with vaccination. This programme is being maintained in a controlled form with supplementary vaccinations and also with strategic vaccination in the areas of Paraguay bordering the State of Matto Grosso, Brazil, and the departments in Paraguay which share a border with Argentina.
6. On 26 September 2002 a Brazilian veterinary surgeon, called by a Brazilian farm owner, Fernando da Rosa Junqueira Netto, who has a ranch partly on Paraguayan territory bordering Brazil and partly on Brazilian territory in the State of Matto Grosso do Sul, Brazil, and who also has ranches

called San Francisco and Corpus Christi in the Department of Canindeyú, Paraguay, and Lapachos in Brazil, entered Paraguayan territory without the knowledge of the Paraguayan sanitary authorities and, acting irregularly, reported a suspected case of foot-and-mouth disease in the above-mentioned establishment on the Paraguayan side. That report, which was the result of an irregular action without the involvement of the Paraguayan veterinary service (SENACSA) and which thus violated specific international regulations and agreements, led to the recent and regrettable adoption of unilateral measures without consultation that involved the immediate closure of the Brazilian frontier to exports of Paraguayan meat and animal products.

7. The effect of this measure was that Argentina also prohibited the entry of all Paraguayan agricultural products, as well as the transit to third countries of Paraguayan exports, such as maté which we export to Uruguay, furniture and processed wood, dog chews for the United States, wet blue hides, haemoglobin, powdered blood and plasma, all of which involve no danger. They also prohibited the transit of Paraguayan exports of high-quality deboned and maturated beef in sealed trucks to Chile. These disproportionate measures taken on the basis of one suspected case of foot-and-mouth disease meant that for over two weeks all Paraguayan agricultural exports were halted. We felt the isolation imposed by these measures and, since Paraguay has no outlet to the sea, this was equivalent to a forced blockade of agricultural exports. We believe that these measures were disproportionate and unfounded and have caused serious damage to the Paraguayan economy.

8. It was only on 4 November that it became possible to reach an agreement with the Argentine Government to lift the restrictions on Paraguayan agricultural exports to third countries which present no danger of transmitting foot-and-mouth disease.

9. Following this report of a suspected outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease the procedures established in the Regional Agreement of the River Plate Basin were immediately put into effect, with the establishment, first of all, of a multinational evaluation group which set itself the task of obtaining samples of biological material, blood and oesophageal fluid from animals of the establishments directly or indirectly suspected of having foot-and-mouth disease. The samples were sent to the Pan-American Foot-and-Mouth Disease Centre (PANAFTOSA), which on 28 October 2002 stated that the reactivity profile in the I-ELISA 3 ABC/EITB system obtained from the 102 serums collected did not present a profile compatible with recent viral activity relating to foot-and-mouth disease in those animals.

10. Despite this report, which appeared to be conclusive, on 31 October 2002 PANAFTOSA stated that additional tests of viral isolation carried out on the samples had identified the presence of the type O foot-and-mouth disease virus by means of probang tests on two animals from the above-mentioned farm on the Paraguayan side. Faced with this situation, the Paraguayan National Animal Health Service (SENACSA), with a view to maintaining transparency despite the confused situation, immediately put into effect, in strict conformity with the internationally recognized rules of the River Plate Basin Agreement, the "Animal Health Emergency System", which had already been established by Law 808/96 and regulated by Decree 4452/99.

11. These measures included the sanitary slaughter of 719 animals involved on the affected farm of San Francisco, the emergency vaccination of all the animals that might be susceptible within a radius of 15 kilometres and a complete ban on the movement of animals, means of transport and persons within a radius of 25 kilometres. That is what is happened on the Paraguayan side, but it must be borne in mind that the property in question also has the same owner on the Brazilian side and the cattle have the same brand on both sides, although in Paraguay the brand is on the left haunch of the animal while in Brazil it is on the right-hand side. In fact, one of the two animals suspected had the brand on the right-hand side.

12. Consequently, the SENACSA Press Communique stated in its final paragraph:

"It was with some surprise that we received this communication in view of the fact that the I - ELISA 3ABC/EITB tests, obtained from serums collected by the multinational group, did not present a profile compatible with recent viral activity relating to foot-and-mouth disease in the group analysed, and, in addition, that this communication only mentions the detection of the virus on one side of the border even though both sides have the same ecosystem."

13. As we have already pointed out, in the face of this confused situation Paraguay took, in the interests of transparency, all the measures laid down in the Agreement and, in addition, the Committee of the River Plate Basin Agreement was convened at PANAFTOSA in Rio de Janeiro with the participation of sanitary authorities from Chile, Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. The Paraguayan representatives, Dr Gerardo Bogado, Chairman of the National Animal Health Service (SENACSA), and Carlos Trapani, President of the Rural Association of Paraguay, the main private farmers' organization, requested an explanation from PANAFTOSA in view of the strange fact that the analysis of the blood sample did not present a profile compatible with recent viral activity relating to foot-and-mouth disease and, subsequently, an analysis of the oesophageal fluid by means of the probang test showed that the type O foot-and-mouth disease virus only appeared in two animals, since **despite the appearance of the virus there has been no explanation of the animals' lack of reaction to the blood tests.**

14. There is no easy technical or scientific explanation for this and they themselves (PANAFTOSA) were surprised by the result of the report and, consequently, decided to carry out further tests on the blood samples of the animals that had already been examined, even though they had already been eliminated by sanitary slaughter. In these new studies, at Paraguay's request, the Paraguayan Director of the SENACSA laboratory, Dr. Natalia Vergara, will participate.

15. The fact is that serious harm has been done to the Paraguayan economy and we have been obliged to take all the necessary sanitary measures, such as informing the International Office of Epizootics (IOE) and all those countries which normally purchase Paraguayan meat, and taking such internal measures as isolating the Department of Canindeyú, which is on the Brazilian border and 80 and 500 km away from the departments authorized to export meat to such markets as the European Union through the system of the regionalization of livestock production that applies for this market and for others.

16. We are aware of the zeal with which consumer protection services and veterinary surgeons operate so as to ensure the fullest confidence in the whole of the food chain. This includes, of course, animal health and they may be sure that Paraguay is also making the greatest possible efforts to meet its commitments to provide high-quality meat products whose safety can be relied on. At the same time, we are calling for an impartial study so as to prevent disproportionate measures that display a lack of sensitivity towards, and solidarity with, the agricultural producing countries.

17. We are continuing our conversations with Brazil and working together, since we share the same ecosystem on that dry border, and we are requesting Brazil to lift its export ban on deboned and maturated meat products from zones authorized for export, since in fact the passage of dairy and other products that present no health risk has already been authorized, and we hope to be able to arrive soon at a joint understanding so as to keep the whole ecosystem free from foot-and-mouth disease.

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