

**THE AVIAN INFLUENZA SITUATION IN EC MEMBER STATES**

Statement of the European Communities  
at the Meeting of 2-3 April 2003

**The Netherlands**

1. Since 28 February this year, several outbreaks of avian influenza have occurred in the centre of the Netherlands. The affected area, called "Gelderse Vallei", has a very dense poultry population. Since the start of the epidemic, the Dutch authorities immediately put in place stringent protective measures, which have legally been reinforced by the European Communities as foreseen in Directive 92/40/EEC. These measures include a nation-wide standstill for the transport of live poultry and hatching eggs and prohibition on dispatching any live poultry or hatching eggs from the whole territory of the Netherlands to other EC member States and third countries.

2. Meanwhile as of 31 March 146 poultry farms have confirmed outbreaks. On 36 other holdings there is a serious suspicion. Of these 182 farms, 179 are situated in the "Gelderse Vallei" surveillance area and three in the newly created Beneden-Leeuwen surveillance area (south of "Gelderse Vallei" across the river Rhine). Earlier suspicions in Breskens (in the south of the Netherlands) and in Laren (in the east of the Netherlands) proved to be negative and restrictive measures were lifted.

3. By 31 March, a total of 522 farms have been culled containing approximately 8.4 million heads of poultry. These include infected and suspected farms as well as, for preventive reasons, farms situated in a 1-km. zone around these farms and in the established buffer zones.

4. A serological survey was performed on poultry farms throughout the country in order to detect further presence of AI. Based on the favourable results of this survey and following intensive consultations with the European Commission and the other EC member States, the following decisions were made on 25 March:

- Since the areas north and south of the "Gelderse Vallei" surveillance zone are considered vulnerable in view of the possible spread of the virus to neighbouring poultry areas, two buffer zones were created. In these zones all poultry and hobby birds have been preventively culled.
- Since the first suspicion of AI an immediate ban of dispatch for live poultry and hatching eggs to other EC member States and third countries is in place and any derogation may only be granted after a further review of the AI situation by the Commission and EC member States at the meeting of the Standing Committee of 8-9 April 2003.
- No fresh poultry meat obtained from poultry originating in the surveillance zones may be dispatched to other EC member States or third countries.
- The measures currently in place will be reviewed at the next meeting of the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health, scheduled for 8 and 9 April 2003.

- The Commission, in close co-operation with the Dutch authorities, will continue to follow the disease situation in the Netherlands very carefully.

### **Belgium**

5. On 11 March there was a suspicion of an avian influenza outbreak in Belgium, in a municipality close to the Dutch border. The Belgian authorities took swift and thorough actions similar to the Dutch control measures in order to contain the threat of the disease. On 18 March, after laboratory and epidemiological test results indicated that there was no AI in Belgium, the restrictions for export and the nation-wide standstill for movement of live poultry and hatching eggs were lifted.

### **General**

6. The disease is only present in one region of one EC member State, representing a very small part of the European Communities. Moreover, all necessary steps have been taken by the Dutch authorities to limit the spread of disease out of the main affected area to other parts of the Netherlands and to other countries.

7. EC member States and third countries have been sent regular updates by fax on the development of the situation. Several countries imposed import bans for Dutch live poultry and hatching eggs. However, some of these restrictive measures affect also the importation of poultry meat, table eggs and other poultry products. Furthermore, the restrictions also include non-affected EC member States. The European Communities therefore urge Members to apply only measures that are consistent with the provisions of the SPS Agreement. The import restrictions should be proportionate and be limited to the items (live poultry and hatching eggs) that are actually relevant for disease transmission taking into account the concept of regionalization (Articles 2 and 6 of the Agreement).

8. The immediate and stringent implementation of disease control measures as described above clearly demonstrates that EC member States and the EC Commission reacted promptly to contain the disease and safeguard the health status of trading partners. There has been a worldwide recognition of the European Communities precautionary approach and responsible reaction to this epidemic.

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