

CLASSICAL SWINE FEVER AND FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE FREE STATUS

Statement by Belize at the meeting of 24-25 June 2008

The following communication, received on 24 June 2008, is being circulated at the request of the Delegation of Belize.

I. CLASSICAL SWINE FEVER

1. In accordance with Article 2.6.7.2 of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), Belize declares itself free from Classical swine fever (CSF). Belize last reported the occurrence of CSF in 1988. Infection is not known to be established in wildlife within the country. Since 1988, appropriate measures are in place to prevent disease/infection introduction and to enable early detection. Classical swine fever is notifiable in the whole country, there is an on-going awareness programme in place and all notified suspect occurrences of CSF are subjected to field and, where applicable, laboratory investigations. Vaccination is prohibited. The feeding of swill is also prohibited, unless the swill has been treated to destroy any CSF virus.

2. A Classical Swine Fever Programme was initiated in 1998 with funds provided by OIRSA PREFIP I and II Projects and the EU-CARIFORUM CSF Project.

3. Epidemiological surveillance following international guidelines provided by the OIE, OIRSA and the University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada included the implementation of two national surveys in 2000 and 2004. The Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan was developed in 2000 and updated in 2004. The Plan was activated in 2002, following a positive laboratory diagnosis of CSF at a regional reference laboratory. The positive laboratory diagnosis was not confirmed by an OIE Reference Laboratory thus the suspect CSF was invalidated. As pigs have not been vaccinated for CSF since 1990 and the vaccine is not registered for use in Belize or has not been imported into the country since 1990, the use of serological techniques are appropriate to detect evidence of the virus. Samples collected from active and passive surveillance are tested at the Central Veterinary Laboratory in Central Farm, Cayo, using antibody detection ELISA, an OIE prescribed test.

4. The surveys undertaken in 2000 and 2004 resulted in the collection of 3390 and 2523 samples, respectively, all with negative results to CSF. The survey was repeated in 2004 and the negative results obtained invalidated the hypothesis that there was a mild strain of the CSF virus circulating in Belize, given the false positive result reported in 2002. Sampling is on-going using the methodology obtained from the University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada.

5. Achievements of the Classical Swine Fever Programme include:

- The conduct of two national surveys;
- A science-based sampling plan for maintenance of free status;
- On-going public awareness campaigns. As a result of the EU-CARIFORUM Project in Belize, many information brochures and manuals including DVDs were prepared;
- Capacity building: our staff is well-trained in laboratory techniques and epidemiological surveillance for CSF, including risk analysis and disease response. All the veterinarians in the Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA) have been trained in the United States on foreign animal disease diagnosis;
- A "live" CSF simulation was held in Belize's in 2002 in response to the false positive laboratory result. Our staff has participated in a regional CSF simulation;
- An Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan for CSF was prepared in 2000 and updated in 2004;
- The technical and scientific support to Belize's CSF-free status has been reviewed by international experts from Spain and Argentina with positive results;
- An information system including farm registration, GIS and database is in place;
- There is enabling legislation for epidemiological surveillance and the control of diseased or suspected animals;
- There is public recognition of the CSF-free status of Belize both regionally and internationally;
- There is strong political will and regional support for Belize's CSF-free status.

6. In summary, Belize is free from Classical swine fever. This status is internationally recognized and there is science-based documentation to support this declaration.

II. FREE OF FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

7. In 2007, Belize applied to the OIE to be recognized as free of foot and mouth disease (FMD). Its application was studied following a very democratic process that involved renowned international experts and the elected members of the OIE Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases. The Scientific Commission concluded that Belize fulfilled the conditions to be considered free from FMD without vaccination in accordance with Article 2.2.10.2. of the Terrestrial Code. Member countries were given 60 days to request any information substantiating this decision should they wish to do so. As there were no objections, the Scientific Commission submitted the recommendation to the International Committee, comprised of 172 delegates, who then approved the official recognition. At its 76th General Session held in Paris, France from the 25-30 May 2008, the International Committee of the OIE approved the official OIE recognition of Belize's sanitary status as free of FMD without vaccination.

8. The Scientific Commission for Animal Disease had recommended that Belize receive that recognition based on its ability to provide scientific justification to prove its historical freedom from FMD. In that regard, Members may recall that in the elaboration of what is now document G/SPS/48: "Guidelines to Further the Practical Implementation of Article 6 of the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures", Belize and other Caribbean Countries proposed that paragraph 32 (d) be included under the Expedited Process for Recognition of Free Status:

Paragraph 32 (d) "when there has been no previously notified occurrence of the pest or disease and the importing Member agrees that the surveillance procedures and activities implemented by the exporting Member have shown the non-existence thereof, the territory of the Member in question shall be considered free of that pest or disease."

9. Belize would like to encourage Members to comply with the provisions of the SPS Agreement and the standards, guidelines and recommendations as set by the international standard-setting organizations recognized by the SPS Agreement.

10. In conclusion, Belize is free of food and mouth disease without vaccination and has also received that recognition from the OIE; it has been an active Member of the OIE since 2001 and presently serves as the Secretary General (2007-2009) of the regional OIE commission for the Americas; and has recently had its veterinary service evaluated by OIE experts using the OIE Performance of Veterinary Services instrument.
