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Captain Bryn Wayt
Email: request-450160-61f2bbef@whatdotheyknow.com

Our ref: RFI 9571
4 January 2018

Dear Captain Wayt,

INFORMATION REQUEST: CONTINGENCY PLAN – EXOTIC NOTIFIABLE DISEASES OF ANIMALS IN ENGLAND 2017

Thank you for your request for information, which we received on 6 December 2017 about the contingency plan for exotic notifiable diseases of animals in England 2017. As you know we have handled your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

We enclose a copy of the information you requested:

Question 1

What scientific pen-side test device/s have been invented by Defra in the 17 years after FMD2001 and how many are ready to use today?

Over recent years pen-side test equipment has been developed by commercial organisations for the diagnosis of Foot-and-Mouth Disease. These are not currently used as a field diagnostic tool in GB, as the current equipment is not sufficiently reliable particularly in the case of negative results. Therefore any samples taken from suspect animals will always need to be submitted for testing by the National Reference Laboratory.

The potential benefit of using pen-side tests in the future is recognised and being kept under review as the technology advances.

Defra does not invent diagnostic tools but has invested significantly in these technologies via research funding to the Pirbright Institute.

In terms of outputs:

Antigen detection:
Pen-side lateral-flow devices (for FMDV antigen detection) are now available (see http://www.svanova.com/products/bovine/bp11.html. This test format suffers from a reduced analytical sensitivity and while it is readily able to confirm positive cases, it is not so suitable to rule out FMD suspicion on a farm.

Molecular tests:
The Pirbright Institute has evaluated a wide range of different technologies and equipment platforms (via research projects funded by Defra and EU [see: http://cordis.europa.eu/result/rcn/51773_en.html and http://www.rapidia.eu/) that have potential to provide test results with high analytical sensitivity and specificity. A review on

the current capabilities of these assays has been recently published (see: Howson et al., (2017) Revue Scientifique et Technique 36 (2), 479-498).

We keep the policy under review as new evidence becomes available.

Question 2

What written precautions are available within DEFRA, to ensure no vet mis-identifies the presence of FMDv by assuming "clinical signs" are the Gold Standard, and thus reduce the chances of "over reporting FMD" when it strikes again?

In the Foot and Mouth Disease Control Strategy for Great Britain, Section 6.1 states FMD will be confirmed if the laboratory tests indicate the presence of FMD virus. The law provides the powers to confirm cases on clinical signs alone and this is something we may adopt in a large scale outbreak in order to prioritise the use of resources.

(https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69456/fmd-control-strategy111128.pdf)

Question 3

Why is there NO MENTION of "pen-side" testing in the latest FMD Contingency Plan (28 Nov 2017) as clearly these kits are available?

Our position has not changed since our response to you on 28/09/16:
We keep this policy under review as new evidence becomes available.

Question 4

Why is there no mention of, "Vaccination to Live" as a method of control in the new FMD Contingency Plan more than NINE YEARS down the line or 16 years?

The GB Foot and Mouth Disease control strategy includes information on possible vaccination strategies, and vaccinate to live is one of several options set out in the strategy

(https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69456/fmd-control-strategy111128.pdf)

Questions 5-9 - I will answer the following questions together:

5. **On Page 39 of the latest FMD Contingency Plan (28 Nov 2017) it mentions a, "Large outbreak" and what actions are required thereafter - what is DEFRA's definition of a "Large Outbreak" in terms of animal numbers of PROPERLY diagnosed and authenticated presence of the FMDv?**
6. **On Page 50 para 4 it mentions, "Large scale outbreaks". What is DEFRA's definition of another type of, "Large scale outbreaks" (note the plural case).**
7. **On Page 58 para 58 there is mention of another description of an outbreak, this time it is called, "an outbreak of significant size". What does that mean exactly? How many proven infected animals to make it a "significant size"? If the actual numbers of animals involved are not attached to "an outbreak" then further action/s become dominated by numbers.**

8. **On Page 59 para 59 we have the next vague description of an outbreak as, "where an outbreak is small". Any Plan that purports to be 'fit for purpose' should not have so many types of "outbreaks". What is a, "small outbreak"? What numbers of animals, Laboratory proven with FMDv please?**
9. **There's Large/Large-scale/Significant/and small outbreaks. Define precisely what DEFRA means by all these different catch-words please, and where are the dovetails for each outbreak?**

The document published on 28 November 2017 is Defra's Contingency Plan for Exotic Notifiable Diseases of Animals in England. It is a generic plan covering the response to exotic notifiable diseases including Foot and Mouth Disease, Avian Influenza, Newcastle Disease and all other exotic notifiable diseases of animals.

The descriptors used in the Plan are qualitative descriptors and not linked to formal definitions, all outbreaks are different and the complexity is not solely linked to the number of infected premises. Other factors include the disease and whether there are public health or food safety impacts, geographic spread, duration, number of species affected, media interest, etc.

Question 10

Why is it now necessary to Clean and Disinfect TWICE after a farm has been, "depopulated" of suspected FMD infected animals?

During and subsequent to FMD 2001 the policy has remained to undertake preliminary and secondary cleansing and disinfection, which are necessary steps to eradicate contamination and are required by EU law and OIE chapters. This is detailed in the Foot and Mouth Disease Control Strategy for Great Britain, Section 6.11 states:

After the carcases have been disposed of, preliminary disinfection of the premises is carried out by APHA officials or contracted staff and at the cost of Government. This involves a full cleansing and spray down with approved disinfectant of the areas in which infected animals have been and the areas used for culling.

Section 10.1 details that restrictions will remain in place until either:

- The occupier has undertaken secondary cleansing and disinfection in accordance with the directions of APHA and sentinel animals have been placed on the premises and shown no signs of disease on clinical inspections and from laboratory tests on samples taken from them. Secondary cleansing and disinfection is the responsibility of, and at the cost of, the occupier of the premises. Sentinel restocking of the premises may be permitted under licence and cannot take place until at least 21 days after APHA is satisfied that secondary cleansing and disinfection has been undertaken to the required standard;

or

- A period of time has elapsed for virus to decay naturally and no longer pose a threat of infecting animals. This is usually one year for FMD virus.

Question 11

Why is the owner now required to pay for this second C&D?

Animal keepers are compensated for animals culled and preliminary cleansing costs are born by government to ensure the immediate disease risk is mitigated. Industry need to take business decisions on whether to seek commercial insurance against such risks. This is a long standing policy.

Question 12

I have read that a simulated FMD Exercise WILLOW was carried out in December 2016. I cannot find any post-exercise Report; can you give me a link to this Report please?

This was not a national simulation exercise and a report has not been published.

Question 13

I see on Page13 that samples can be taken from a farm that is under Condition "WHITE" and without positive verification by the Pirbright Reference Laboratory the vet on-scene can elevate the Condition to RED with no further deliberations, i.e. NO laboratory examinations/tests. What lawful authority exists to Slaughter on Suspicion like this?

The powers are given in the Animal Health Act 1981, in Schedule 3 part 2A:

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/22/schedule/3

The lack of virus being detected through blood sampling does not necessarily indicate that animals have not been exposed to infection and are in the early stages of infection as it takes a few days for virus to multiply at point of entry and appear in detectable levels in the blood. Farms may be depopulated where there is either a clear epidemiological risk to an infected premises, or where there are clear clinical signs suggestive of FMD.

(a) What does it take to activate the Lessons Learned from FMD2001?

Defra undertakes a lessons identified review after each significant outbreak of disease, these are published via GOV.UK. The last review for FMD was completed after the 2007 outbreak. The document 'Foot and Mouth disease 2007: a review and lessons learned' details the lessons learned from 2001.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/foot-and-mouth-disease-2007-a-review-and-lessons-learned

Question 14

Suspicion Level 4 is mentioned in this new FMD Contingency Plan (Nov 2017). Where is there an up to date definition chart of what that means, and of course what does Suspicion Level 1,2,3 mean as well?

We will make this clearer in future versions of the plan. This means if the clinical signs or other epidemiological link mean the likelihood of FMD or any other exotic notifiable disease being present is near certain and it is necessary to cull immediately to prevent the spread of disease.

Question 15

On page 65 para 61 there is brazen mention of, "pre-emptive depopulation" - has DEFRA learned nothing from 2001? Slaughter, is the real word to use is it not?

We assume you are referring to paragraphs 22 and 23 on page 65.

We have adopted the definitions used throughout Europe to describe the different circumstances that animals are killed. These are set out in COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009R1099&from=EN

The definitions are:

'depopulation' means the process of killing animals for public health, animal health, animal welfare or environmental reasons under the supervision of the competent authority;

'slaughtering' means the killing of animals intended for human consumption;

It is therefore appropriate to use the term pre-emptive depopulation. The Contingency Plan clearly sets-out that this is a power that remains available to Defra but is not a default option.

Question 16

On page 71 para 61 mention is made of "Pre-vaccination" visits by vets, why are these necessary at all?
Time is of the essence in these matters, why is it being wasted with such visits?

As stated the paragraph (page 71 paragraph 61); the visits will check animal handling facilities and will also inspect animals for clinical signs of FMD. The visits will ensure that we do not start vaccinating animals which are showing clinical signs. Such a visit would not be necessary if we were adopting a suppressive approach.

Information disclosed in response to this FOIA request is releasable to the public. In keeping with the spirit and effect of the FOIA and the government's Transparency Agenda, this letter and the information disclosed to you may be placed on GOV.UK, together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context. No information identifying you will be placed on the GOV.UK website.

We attach Annex A explaining the copyright that applies to the information being released to you, and Annex B giving contact details should you be unhappy with the service you have received.

If you have any queries about this letter please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Marie Taylor
Information Rights Team
InformationRequests@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Annex A

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Annex B

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If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision under section 17(7) of the FOIA or under regulation 18 of the EIRs, as applicable, within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to Nick Teall, Head of Information Rights, Area 4A, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR (email: InformationRequests@defra.gsi.gov.uk) and he will arrange for an internal review of your case. Details of Defra's complaints procedure are on our website.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, section 50 of the FOIA and regulation 18 of the EIRs gives you the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for a decision. Please note that generally the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure. The ICO can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
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