

European farmers and agri-cooperatives' views on compartment and biosecurity

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Throughout the history of animal husbandry, it has been natural for farmers to ensure the welfare of their animals, and to keep them from suffering or pain and to provide adequate conditions for their animals. Animals are observed on a regular basis in order to ensure that the first signs of disease are detected and that appropriate action is taken at the earliest opportunity. In this context, farmers are very committed to prevent as much as possible outbreaks of diseases on their farms and their further spread into the environment. Good animal health is a significant part of animal husbandry and is also important for production reasons.

However, it is important to remember that disease prevention goes far beyond farmers' responsibility (e.g. avian influenza). Everyone, stakeholders and public authorities alike, has a role to play in ensuring healthy animals in Europe. Farmers, veterinarians, transporters, slaughterhouses and other input providers all play a role, together with consumers and travellers around the world. At the same time, public authorities both at EU and Member State level are also responsible when it comes to biosecurity at borders, awareness raising, surveillance programmes, early action and proper funding.

Differences between countries and regions in health statuses and the spread of diseases must be taken into account. Compartments, in line with OIE standards, may be a useful tool to address this specific point, provided that do not become a technical barrier to trade.

Furthermore, Copa-Cogeca is not in favour of extending HACCP principles for primary production or implementing very specific and strict rules. On the contrary, a more flexible and tailor-made system for biosecurity is favoured based on the 'type of production system' by taking into consideration any voluntary quality assurance schemes already in place at farm level, including any guidance documents of good practices. At the same time, cost and benefits of biosecurity have to be both taken into account. Improving biosecurity has to be promoted within a clear framework of incentives (e.g. the EU Veterinary Fund and rural development programmes, etc.), together with more awareness and knowledge on disease prevention.

It is important to guarantee that all relevant tools are available at farm level to ensure good animal health in Europe. Good hygiene, proper feed, an appropriate animal environment and good management are at the top of farmers' priorities. However, it is important to ensure the availability of veterinary medicines to tackle specific diseases, including new smart, effective and alternative tools to cure animals; the development of early warning systems; more on-farm tools for early, rapid diagnosis and control of diseases; together with more resistant breeds.

As part of the prevention strategy, Copa-Cogeca supports the need for an open dialogue and cooperation between farmers and veterinarians, including any other special advisors, when appropriate, if specific risks/irregularities are detected on the farm. However, Copa-Cogeca is very concerned when such dialogue and cooperation has to be based on fixed criteria, without taking into account concrete needs on the ground. The current scope of the animal health visits introduced by the European Commission in the animal health proposal has the great risk to turn into a costly and paper work exercise, without bringing any benefits to European farmers. Copa-Cogeca believes that it is the operators' responsibility to make sure that the establishment under their control is subject to visits with a frequency based on specific needs of the farmed animals. A desk office approach with static criteria will not deliver the expected results both in terms of prevention and control of disease. Building trust, knowledge transfer, and exchange of information between operators and authorities have proven to be more successful.