

Animal diseases are a global issue

Editorial

For more than a decade, animal disease outbreaks have made the headlines of newspapers and magazines. The public panicked as information was scarce, rumours on humans catching an animal disease spread faster than the disease itself and outlived the actual outbreaks by far.

My education as a veterinarian at the time focused on curing the single animal that had a problem rather than prevention. The term 'epizootology' (or 'veterinary epidemiology') was unheard of and certainly did not trigger any interest in the subject. Only when concentrating on how we may avoid or at least minimise possible diseases we thought of prevention. As a vet, you were called when the animal was sick and went out to help it. Since then, agriculture has made a big leap into different modes and methods, now easily integrating the fact that prevention is much cheaper than cure.

In most European countries the governmental veterinary services are responsible for animal and public health control. We have focussed outbreaks of Classical swine fever killing the majority of our pigs, Foot and mouth disease with the fatal death of millions of cows, sheep and pigs, closely followed by Avian influenza and Blue tongue. What had been an outsider issue was brought suddenly into focus by the media, often reported on emotionally- who doesn't remember the cute photographs of little lambs and calves left out in the cold to die of a terrible disease. Behind the headlines and the panic, the technical details had to be taken care of often causing distress not only in the animals and their owners involved but also involving neighbours and simple contacts such as the postman going from door to door.

Today, thanks to the costly experience of the past years, we are much more willing to focus and prepare on what might happen than before. The development of the internet has added a dimension to the speed in which information can be made available and passed on. Prevention has become a 'trendy' tool to control diseases.

Technical publications, available for anyone that has access to the net, play an important role in animal health control. Not only can we have speed data analysis but we also have the possibility to reach and teach technical and non-technical readers. Awareness is a very big word when talking about prevention and this should be in anybody's mind.

The new internet based Journal of Dairy, Veterinary and Animal Research will play its part when concentrating on what, how and when in the future we may be able to avoid a disaster simply by being informed and prepared. Having been involved in several of the outbreaks, also organising the logistical part, I have suffered from being isolated and unable to quickly exchange thoughts, reflections and information. Once an outbreak has occurred, there is no time to

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do research and prepare, we then have to react immediately. Therefore we cannot underestimate the role of timely research and publication of its results which gives us the option to be prepared and update our contingency strategies whenever feasible.

In the past, veterinary services focussed rather on their own part of the world than searching for the rest of it. With globalisation being part of everybody's daily routine that focus had changed drastically. Although there are regional aspects to any disease outbreak, such as climate, type of farms or infrastructures like access roads and the near-by availability of slaughterhouses, there are general rules that we can share and learn from each other and thereby avoid fatal disease outbreaks that may cause not only disastrous economical loss but also claim many lives of animals and should the food chain be deeply involved, ultimately also lives of humans.

As diseases do not respect artificial borders between countries, cooperation and even coordination may be necessary between countries that do not share the same language. To work efficient and effective, information and strategies need to be compared and adapted to mutual approval and convenience. Plans need to be developed and this is an aspect that often gets overlooked- regularly challenged and adequately updated to new insights and research results.

The Journal of Dairy, Veterinary and Animal Research with its many subjects will be of interest not only to the private veterinarian or the state veterinarian. As a platform contributing to various aspects of animal keeping, it will trigger the interest of anyone who is concerned about animals; their health and his/her very own health.

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Conflict of interest

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