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To promote prevention rather than cure: The farm visitation system UEVP contribution to the New Animal Health Strategy

The UEVP is in favour of the promotion of good farming and rearing practices and thus the development of a farm visitation system by veterinarians in order to control animal health and welfare. Regular farm visits would indeed help implementing on farm bio security measures, through close cooperation between farmers and veterinarians, and therefore constitute a very efficient prevention tool.

The implementation of such a system would help reaching the objectives of animal health and welfare pursued by the New Animal Health Strategy, given the fact that such a system would deeply contribute to promote “the prevention of animal diseases better than cure”.

What?

In practice, specific items would be given special attention during the visitation:

- **Item 1 - General information:** Type of production, Inventory and movements of the animals, milk production per cow, births,
- **Item 2 - Sanitary protection:** other species, risk management and assessment
- **Item 3 - Housing and facilities:** quarantine, calving facilities, nursery, dead animal storage, food storage and drinking facilities
- **Item 4 - Sanitary assessment and management of animals:** fattening status, abortion, records of diseases, isolation,...
- **Item 5 - Welfare assessment:** zootechnical parameters, transportation, animal handling,...
- **Item 6 - Management and use of veterinary medicines:** storage, prescriptions, withdrawal time, medicinal waste,...
- **Item 7 - Hygiene package:** milking hygiene, ante mortem examination, emergency slaughter..
- **Item 8 - Environment:** waste disposals, circulation of vehicles and people, ...
- **Item 9 - Book keeping:** herd register, laboratory results, veterinary visits, registration of treatments, foodstuff delivery receipts, ...

Guidelines based on commonly adopted documents like the OIE recommendations must be set up for these audits so as to be easily used by the veterinarians.

At the end of the visitation, an evaluation would be given for each item (good, to be improved, not satisfactory), and advice and recommendations written on the final report. One copy of this report would be given to the farmer or the animal keeper and another one sent to the competent authorities and the official veterinarians by the practitioner. The report can be handwritten or computerized and is available in a template ready to use (tick or cross or circle; only recommendations and advices need to be written).

These visitations can be implemented gradually and progressively. It would be possible to start with only 4 or 5 items, and add new items or replace old items every year according to the sanitary status of the farm and the national or European epidemiological situation.

These visitations should involve all type of productions, from milking cow to pigs, from exotic to dogs, etc, each one with its own specificity.

How often ?

The visitation should be performed at least once a year but would need to be adapted to the type of production concerned and problems encountered. For example, dairy farms would need a visitation once a year whereas for poultry, a visitation every two months might turn out to be necessary due to

the important rotation of lots. But, in this case, the content of the visitation must be adapted as it would certainly not be necessary to check each time all the items listed for the first visitation.

The UEVP stresses on the importance to grant sufficient time to these visitations so that both veterinarians and farmers can go properly through the different items and therefore fulfil this work in the most efficient way.

Who?

The farmer or the animal keeper or rearer is free to choose his own veterinarian. But our recommendation would be to choose the usual veterinarian, that is to say the vet who usually has the animals under his care. It also brings the guarantee that this practitioner has a clear and global vision of the farm, including its human aspects.

In case of several productions on the same place, which might require different veterinarians, only one veterinarian will deal with the general items common to all productions and will inform the other veterinarians. Afterwards, each practitioner will treat the specific items related to the production which he is in charge of.

Which financing?

The system of farm visitation could be co-financed by the European Union, the Member States as well as the farmers and other animal keepers. Funds previously intended for the BSE could be used, as well as from the European Regional Development Funds or the Common Agricultural Policy.

Among the many advantages arising from such a system, the UEVP believes that a farm visitation system would more specifically help :

- Implementing the CAHP and its main goal : Prevention is better than cure
- Implementing the food hygiene directive
- Improving food safety and public health
- Providing a good risk assessment and contribute to an adapted risk management
- Giving a clear picture of the situation in the fields and strengthen the link between the practitioner and the official vet or the competent authorities
- Strengthening epidemiological surveillance and prevention of animal diseases
- Maintaining an effective veterinary web throughout the EU territory
- Assuring that farms and any animal husbandries, even in remote areas, are regularly visited by the veterinarians
- Reinforcing the dialogue and the collaboration between farmers and breeders, and veterinarians
- Guaranteeing the quality of the farm products and bring added value
- Promoting the partnership between farmers, breeders and veterinarians, the first step of the food chain
- Acknowledging “good farmers” practices, through an EU recognition, and encouraging less good farmers

Therefore, the UEVP believes that farm visitation system is an efficient tool, already implemented in some of the EU Member States, which has proven its efficiency and which will help actually implementing the New Animal Strategy for the EU as defined by the European Commission and supported by the European Parliament.

By setting up this system, veterinarians and farmers would work hand in hand for the prevention of animal diseases and all the different stakeholders would therefore benefit from it, from the farm to the fork.