EU NEWS

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UEVP

Union Européenne des Vétérinaires Praticiens – AISBL
Union of European Veterinary Practitioners – AISBL

This month, in terms of animal health, the European Commission has had to take various measures to limit the spread of epidemics such as avian influenza, African swine fever, sheep pox and goat pox. A report by the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) warned in particular of the risks of an avian flu pandemic currently being encountered, and recommended a number of measures to try to mitigate the threat.

The Commission is also continuing its work on legislation to regulate transmissible animal diseases, and has also adopted measures to implement the regulation on veterinary medicinal products.

All these issues, including the growing number of epidemic outbreaks and their spread, must be at the core of the actions taken by our profession.

In addition, the European Union has recently adopted free trade agreements or continued negotiations along these lines, including provisions on animal welfare: in particular with Chile, Canada, Kenya and the Mercosur member countries.

In regard to animal welfare, other significant steps have also been taken, including the traceability of dogs and cats and the fight against the illegal pet trade, the regulation on animal welfare during transport, alternatives to animal testing and methods in sciences, and the call for action on measures to phase out cage farming.

Volker MOSER, UEVP President

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PRIORITY ISSUES

Update on EMA activities

Meeting highlights from the Committee for Veterinary Medicinal Products (CVMP)

The Committee for Medicinal Products for Veterinary Use (CVMP) held a meeting from 12th to 13th March 2024.

The committee adopted a positive opinion for marketing authorisation for **Divence Tetra**, a vaccine for the active immunisation of cattle.

The committee adopted marketing authorisation applications for **Trilocur** and **Trilorale** treatment products for dogs, for **Nobilis Multriva RT+IBm+ND+Gm+REOm+EDS** a new vaccine for the active immunisation of chickens for reduction of egg drop caused by avian metapneumovirus, as well as for **Lotimax**, a product for the treatment of flea and tick infestations and demodicosis in dogs.

The committee adopted a variation requiring assessment concerning **Prevexxion RN+HVT+IBD**. It also adopted variations requiring assessment concerning quality-related changes for, **Respiporc FLUpan H1N1, Senvelgo** and **Bovela.**

The committee adopted variations requiring assessment to align the product information with version 9.0 of the QRD template for: **Aivlosin, Coliprotec F4/F18, Nobilis IB Primo QX, Purevax RCP, Purevax RCP FeLV, Respiporc FluPan H1N1, Suiseng Diff/A, Tulaven** and **Zulvac BTV.**

In addition, the committee adopted a **scientific advice for clarification** on a pharmaceutical product for dogs as well as **four scientific advices to requests** advice on:

- one immunological product for dogs,
- one immunological product for cattle and sheep,
- one pharmaceutical product for cats,
- one pharmaceutical product for dogs and cats.

The committee classified a product for wild boars as intended for a limited market and eligible for authorisation in accordance with the Regulation on veterinary medicinal products.

Finally, the committee open for a 5 month consultation the document on VICH GL61 on Pharmaceutical Development.

Latest news on animal health at EU level

Publication of two implementing decisions concerning new outbreaks of avian influenza

On 8th March and 21st Mach, the European Commission published two implementing decisions concerning new outbreaks of avian influenza. The regions affected by new zone and surveillance zone are as follows:

- in the regions of **Haskovo** and **Pazardzhik** (Bulgaria)
- in the regions of **Greater Poland** and **Warmian-Masurian voivodeships** (Poland)
- in the region of **Bratislava** (Slovakia)
- in the county of **Botoșani** (Romania)
- in the municipality of **Svedala** (Sweden)

Moreover, the European Food and Safety authority (EFSA) published a report on 3rd April concerning the risks of an avian influenza pandemic and possible measures to mitigate the threat.

In particular, the reports states that the virus continues to develop on a global scale, notably through transmissions from birds to mammal species. Although to date no human has been infected by avian influenza, its evolution and the migration of wild birds could cause new strains carrying potential mutations for mammalian adaptation to be selected.

The emergence if the virus, capable of infecting humans can be facilitated by various factors:

- **Intrinsic characteristics of the currently circulating virus**;
- **Risk of reassortment**: the risk of a new pandemic persists as a result of antigenic change, i.e. reassortment between seasonal influenza viruses and avian influenza or other animal viruses of the same species;
- **Farmed mammals** especially, fur animals as minks or pigs can be exposed or represent a vector for the disease for intrinsic reasons;
- **Domestic animals** can be a vehicle for transmission because they have access to dead infected birds, other companion animals as well as feral cats and human;
- **Certain farming practices** such as farms with an open-air production system and/or poor external biosecurity help to spread the virus;
- **Wild mammals** (especially synanthropic and peri-urban species) might serve as bridge hosts facilitating viral evolution;
- **Climate and environmental drivers**: weather events, climate change and habitat destruction can impact wild bird ecology, demography, biodiversity and migration and bring the virus to new areas and/or closer to domestic poultry or mammals.

Thus, the report suggests some mitigation measures and action to reduce the human spread, including:

- Enhance the surveillance and data sharing of the avian influenza;
- Implement health monitoring, rapid testing and quarantine for people exposed to the disease;
- Strengthen laboratory capabilities and capacities;
- Implement personal protection measures;
- Raise awareness, communication and public education;
- Implement additional control strategies, like vaccination, to avoid the spread;
- Biosecurity measures for agricultural production and the entire production chain;
- Develop vaccinations for seasonal influenza and avian influenza;
- Better wildlife management;
- Use of anitvirals.

Publication of three implementing decision concerning new outbreaks of African swine fever

On 13th March, 21st March and 2nd April, the European Commission published tree implementing regulation about new outbreaks of African swine fever in Europe. Countries concerned by new surveillance, protection or restrictions zones are the following:

- in the region of **Central Macedonia** (Greece);
- in the regions of **Pomorskie, Zachodniopomorskie** and **Opolskie**(Poland);
- in the regions of **Nitriansky, Trenčiansky** and **Žilinský** (Slovakia);
- in the regions of **Lombardy** and **Emilia Romagna** (Italy);
- in the region of **Liberec** (Czech Republic);
- in the districts of **Kelmė** and **Šiaulių** (Lithuania);
- in the counties of **Madonas** and **Krāslavas** (Latvia);
- in the county of **Plovdiv** (Bulgaria).

However, improvements have been observed in Poland, where the **Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Mazowieckie** and **Podkarpackie** regions have been upgraded from a protection zone to a surveillance zone. As well as certain areas of the **Śląskie** and **Małopolskie** regions which are to be removed from the list of ones affected by the disease.

Publication of an implementing decision concerning new outbreaks of the sheep pox and goat pox in Greece

On 14th March, the European Commission published an implementing decision about new outbreaks of the sheep and goat pox in Greece. **The region of Phthiotis** has been hit by new cases of the disease in several establishments where ovine animals are kept, which results in the implementation of surveillance and protection zone in the region.

EFSA report on residue levels of veterinary medicinal products in animals and animal products in the EU

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has published its latest report **on residues of veterinary medicinal products in animals and food of animal origin in the European Union**. The report shows that residue levels of veterinary medicinal products and other substances remain low.

The analysis covers various groups of substances, including:

- Hormones;
- Antibiotics,
- Environmental contaminants;
- So-called "banned" substances;
- and other veterinary medicines.

Note that all the data, which includes around 13 million analytical results, will be accessible via the EFSA Knowledge Junction platform, with the aim of improving the transparency and reproducibility of risk assessments relating to food and feed safety.

A public consultation on animal health legislation launched by the European Commission

The European Commission has launched a public consultation to evaluate animal health legislation, **in particular the rules on transmissible animal diseases,** which is open until 3rd April 2024.

The aim of this initiative is to examine whether the rules in force since 2016 are achieving their objectives, are proportionate, respond to and are adapted to existing and emerging needs, are aligned with other EU actions and offer European added value.

As a reminder, this legislation aims to prevent and control transmissible animal diseases (both for animals and humans) to implement the "One Health" approach recognising the interconnection between human, animal and environmental health, and finally, to establish clear animal health priorities, in particular by defining the responsibilities of operators and competent authorities.

On the basis of the results obtained, the European Commission will draw up an evaluation report, scheduled for **April 2026.**

Adoption of an implementing Regulation for new abbreviations and pictograms for veterinary medicinal products

On 21st March 2024, the European Commission adopted an implementing regulation adopting a list of abbreviations and pictograms common throughout the Union to be used on the packaging of veterinary medicinal products in link with the European Regulation on veterinary medicinal products.

This implementing act will specify the information to be contained on the labelling of the packaging of veterinary products (in article 10(2) and 11(3) of the Regulation). New rules will simplify and make clearer pictograms, in order to avoid misunderstanding and proliferation of pictograms for the same information. The meaning of each pictogram used on the labelling of a veterinary medicinal product will have to be explained in full text in the package leaflet accompanying the veterinary medicinal product concerned.

OTHER ISSUES

Latest news on international trade

Free trade agreement between the European Union and several third countries: Chile, Canada, Kenya and the Mercosur member countries

a. Free trade agreement with Chile:

On 18th March, the EU-Chile trade agreement was approved by the EU Council. As a reminder it had been validated by European Parliament in plenary session on 29th February.

b. Free trade agreement with Canada:

On 15th March, the European Commission launched a public consultation on the free trade agreement with Canada (CETA). This consultation (open until 12th April 2024) aims to gather information on the first five years of provisional application of the free trade agreement.

On the basis of the results of this consultation, the European Commission will publish an assessment, expected in the 2nd quarter of 2025, which will examine the economic, social and environmental impact of the agreement.

c. Free trade agreement with Kenya:

On 29th February, MEPs voted in favour of the free trade agreement between the EU and Kenya. This agreement aims to abolish customs duties and quotas for Kenyan products entering the EU market, while Kenya will have to open its market to 82.6% of EU imports within 15 years.

In response, Eurogroup for Animals deplores the fact that the agreement "*does not go far enough*" in terms of animal welfare. In their view, the intensification of trade relations between Kenya and the EU could lead to an intensification of livestock farming in Kenya, without any specific clause on animal welfare.

The agreement does, however, contain certain provisions that are beneficial to animals, such as :

- Appropriate capacity building to improve Kenya's access to animal production services (including veterinary services);
- Cooperation on the development of sustainable agriculture, including animal disease control;
- Cooperation on SPS (Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures Agreement), to improve Kenya's participation in the World Organisation for Animal Health (WAHO).

d. Free trade agreement with Mercosur:

On 6th March, during Spanish Prime Minister Pedro SANCHEZ's visit to Brazil, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio LULA DA SILVA declared his readiness to sign the free trade agreement between the European Union and Mercosur.

However, the signing of this agreement seems to have been at a standstill for several months, due in particular to the opposition of certain Member States and several MEPs to signing it as it stands, calling into question the respect for environmental policy since the arrival in power of Argentine President Javier MILEI. Most recently, between 26th and 28th March, French President Emmanuel MACRON on a visit to Brazil, called for a new agreement "*that is responsible from a development, climate and biodiversity point of* view. *A new generation agreement with mirror clauses*."

The agreement has also been criticised by representatives of civil society, such as Eurogroup for Animals, which believes that the agreement risks intensifying livestock farming without guaranteeing effective mechanisms to protect animal welfare, and the NGO Friends of the Earth Europe, which denounces a lack of transparency in the negotiation process.

e. Free trade agreement with New Zealand:

On 25th March 2024, New Zealand ratified its free trade agreement with the EU. This agreement will come into force on 1st May 2024, and is one of the "*most ambitious*" reports ever concluded, according the European Commission in terms of commitment to sustainable development. Indeed, the Free trade agreement (FTA) liberalizes trade in most animal products and should therefore further stimulate animal agriculture in the EU and New Zealand.

The FTA only covers grass-fed animals, which explicitly excluding feedlots. This condition is motivated by animal welfare and sustainability concerns. It is also the first to include sanctions in its Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapter and the first to include a chapter on animal welfare cooperation.

At the same time, on 22nd February the European Commission published an impact study on the consequences of the accumulation of free trade agreements (FTAs). The study stresses that FTAs offer new trading opportunities, but also recognises that certain "*sensitive*" sectors (such as beef, poultry and sugar) require "*systematic protection*".

Latest news on animal welfare at EU level

Animal welfare and traceability of dogs and cats: Meeting of the Animal Welfare Intergroup and exchange of views in the European Parliament's AGRI Committee

On 29th February, the Intergroup on Welfare and Conservation of animals held a meeting on the **European Commission's proposal for a regulation on the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats** and on the conclusions of the EU action plan on **the illegal pet trade.**

During this exchange, the Head of Unit Andrea GAVINELLI and the Deputy Head of Unit Lucie CARROUEE, from the European Commission's DG SANTE, were invited to present their work.

The main points discussed were as follows:

- The proposal for a regulation on the welfare of cats and dogs was presented as the first European initiative to specifically address the welfare of cats and dogs.
- However, in view of the concerns expressed, the European Commission wished to clarify certain points:
    - **Concerning traceability**: The issue of the traceability of ALL dogs and cats was highlighted by the organisation *Four Paws*, which explained in particular that any dog or cat could potentially be part of an economic activity at any stage of its existence.
        - In response, the European Commission clarified its objective: to ensure that all animals (cats and dogs) are microchipped and that their details are reliably registered, in accordance with Article 114 of the proposal.

        - However, the Commission highlighted the EU's lack of competence in the management of stray dog and cat populations, as well as legislation on the management of pet owners, while emphasising the notable achievements in introducing an "innovative" approach to responsible pet ownership.
    - o Concerns have also been raised about the risk that certain breeding establishments are not sufficiently controlled to avoid any violation of animal protection.
- The European Commission stressed the need for proportionality between animal welfare and farmers' rights.
- Finally, the debate focused on:
    - Fraudulent activities linked **to illegal trade** compromise animal and public health, in particular the recurrent trends observed in Serbia, requiring cooperation between authorities. The European Union has therefore set up a research and development aid programme to remedy the lack of interoperability between customs, police and veterinary authorities.
    - The possibility for the European Commission to draw up a **positive list**.
- However, the Commission only referred to the impact study currently underway, which will determine the feasibility of implementing such a list.

Subsequently, on 18th March, the European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI) organised a debate in the presence of the co-rapporteurs appointed for this text and representatives of the European Commission (DG SANTE).

The rapporteur on the dossier, Veronika VRECIONOVÁ (ECR, Czech Republic), stressed that this legislation should ensure that it did not impose an "*unnecessary burden*" on dog and cat owners. She called for greater awareness of the treatment of animals and the protection of animal welfare, particularly in profit-oriented establishments where abuses are reported.

Overall, all the MEPs who took the floor supported the rapporteur's statements, highlighting the importance of this text, the need to protect pets and the urgency of putting an end to illegal practices.

More specifically :

- The shadow rapporteur Marlene MORTLER (EPP, Germany) and Tilly METZ (Greens/EFA, Luxembourg) stressed the importance of micro-chipping for more reliable traceability, including for stray dogs and cats.
- Martin HLAVÁČEK (Renew, Czech Republic) questioned the lack of levers and resources for effective implementation of the regulation's provisions.
- The shadow rapporteurs Anja HAZEKAMP (GUE/NGL, Netherlands), Rosanna CONTE (ID, Italy) and Achille VARIATI (S&D, Italy) also welcomed the European Commission's proposal. However, the ID group raised concerns about the requirement for a veterinary visit for establishments where a veterinarian is already present. The European Commission replied that such establishments would be exempt from this provision.

On the EU Council side, work has begun, and the Belgian Presidency has expressed its expectation that the Member States will be able to reach a common position before the institutional renewal (which includes the European Parliament elections to be held on 9 June), even if this seems rather ambitious.

Next steps:

- The European Parliament and the EU Council, as co-legislators, will now have to adopt their respective positions on the text.
- The timetable for the European elections seems to compromise the possibility of reaching an agreement before the re-election of the European Parliament.

Exchange of views in the European Parliament's AGRI and TRAN committees on the proposal for a regulation on the welfare of animals during transport

On 19th March, an exchange of views on the proposal for a regulation on the **welfare of animals during transport** was held at the European Parliament, bringing together the two parliamentary committees responsible for the dossier, AGRI and TRAN.

Among the highlights of the meeting, we can mention the following:

- **Concerning maximum temperatures and taking account of national differences**: The majority of MEPs advocated basing temperature limits on those inside the means of transport rather than on outside temperatures. Some also stressed the importance of taking account of national or even regional temperature variations, and the inequalities this could create for Member States if the text remains unchanged.
- **Concerning journey times**: Some MEPs, in particular Marianne VIND (S&D, Denmark), supported a reduction in the maximum journey time – to 8 hours instead of 9 - for so-called "short" journeys.
- **Concerning reciprocity rules with third countries and control measures**: While several MEPs called for reinforced control measures to ensure compliance with the legislation, Daniela RONDINELLI (S&D, Italy) also stressed the provision for reciprocity with third countries.
- **Concerning the risk of increased costs**: Co-rapporteur Daniel BUDA (EPP, Romania) expressed concern that these new provisions could lead to increased costs for farmers on the one hand, and higher prices for consumers on the other. He also underlined the funding required for vehicle equipment and the costs associated with the prolonged rearing of animals.
- **Concerning sea transport**: The co-rapporteur Anna DEPARNAY-GRUNENBERG (Greens/EFA, Germany) deplored the lack of clear limits for sea transport of animals (not included in total transport time).

Following this, the representative of the European Commission, Andrea GAVINELLI (DG SANTE), was invited to react to the various comments. In particular, he stressed the importance of reciprocity of animal welfare rules with third countries, saying that these should apply from the beginning to the end of the journey, for both exports and imports. He also mentioned the introduction of a welfare certificate for animals and announced that delegated regulations would complete the proposal concerning aquatic animals. With regard to the maximum duration of 9 hours for short journeys, he explained that this choice had been made to harmonise the rules with those imposed on carriers.

Several stakeholders have also expressed their views on the proposed regulation:

- The Organisation of European Road Transporters (OTRE), which reacted by submitting a list of objections against the text on 27th March. The comments concerned in particular:
    - The increase in the space reserved for animals in vehicles, which would lead to an increase in the number of lorries on the roads, "*aggravating greenhouse gas emissions*" and generating costs for carriers;
    - The risk for small animals of being given too much space.
    - The organisation also considers that it impossible to implement the text concerning measures relating to the respect of rest periods during transport.
- Eurogroup for Animals and the French environmental organisation Robin des Bois published a report on the state of sea vessels carrying animals, concluding that they should no longer be used due to their damage and non-compliance with animal transport regulations. In particular, the report highlights the conditions under which animals are transported on these ships, where they must stand in their own excrement and are exposed to high temperatures, rough seas, overcrowding or diseases.

Next steps:

- The European Parliament and the EU Council, as co-legislators, will now have to adopt their respective positions on the text.
- The timetable for the European elections seems to compromise the possibility of reaching an agreement before the European Parliament is re-elected.

Complaint lodged with the Court of Justice of the European Union concerning the lack of legislation led by the European Commission on phasing out the use of cage farming

On 18th March 2024, a complaint was lodged by around thirty organisations - including Eurogroup for Animals - with the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) to force the Commission to respect its commitments regarding the missing legislation on animal welfare.

Already the subject of an enquiry by the European Ombudsman since December 2023, the European Commission was questioned during a plenary debate in the European Parliament. In particular, it was criticised for failing to honour its commitments to the "End the Cage Age" citizens' initiative published in June 2021, namely to present a legislative proposal by the end of 2023 to phase out the use of cages. This citizens' initiative is aimed at banning cage farming, and has collected almost 1.4 million signatures.

While the European Commission is not required to respond favourably to citizens' initiatives, it did commit in 2021 to publish by the end of 2023 a legislative proposal to phase out the use of cages. This legislation has been postponed, with no new date specified to date.

The CJEU will now have to examine the complaint and rule on whether the European Commission has failed to fulfil its obligations. If so, the European Commission could be forced to take specific measures.

Opening of the scrutiny phase for the draft delegated directive by the European Commission on the Animals used for scientific purposes

On 13th March, the European commission opened a scrutiny phase of two months about the delegated directive on the welfare of animals used for scientific purposes, and more specifically to adapt standards of care, housing and killing.

The purpose of this delegated act is to adapt two annexes to the Directive on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes. The changes will apply to species currently not covered by the annexes but falling within the scope of the Directive.

As a reminder, a public consultation had been opened by the Commission in last January.

A scrutiny phase last two months and aims to collect positions of the experts representing member states and of the European Parliament. If there are no objections for the delegated act approval, it can be published on the Official Journal of the European Union and enter into force.

Publication of a report by the European Commission concerning the alternatives to animal testing and methods in sciences

On 12th March, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission published a report on the alternative to animal testing in sciences. This report is issued by researchers at the European Union Reference Laboratory for alternatives to animal testing (EURL ECVAM) and offers a summary of the 2023 achievements of the EURL ECVAM.

As a reminder, the European Directive on the protection of animals used in scientific purposes of 2010, as well as the Regulation on the alignment of reporting obligations in the field of legislation related to the environment of 2019, have for ambition to improve animal welfare, improve transparency and establish the "Three Rs principle" (replacement, reduction and refinement) in all use and care practices when animals still needed in research and testing, the ultimate goal of the EU being to completely phase out the use of animal testing in science.

Globally, the report indicates a strong commitment in developing the regulatory application of no-animal methods in scientific research and testing. The report highlights several elements:

- **Building trust in innovative methods for assessing chemical safety:** EURL ECVAM emphasizes the importance of innovative methods as a key step to ensure they meet the rigorous standards required by regulatory bodies.
- **Faster progress through collaboration**: strong partnerships are needed between different communities and scientists to introduce new non-animal methods and maximize their impact.
- **Educating the next generation**: The report also mentions the relevance of providing education about non-animal methods to students and new generation. They created in this purpose a virtual reality application for students between 14 and 18 years old as well as JRC summer school on non-animal approaches in Science.

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