



Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

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United Kingdom

Livestock and Products

Foot and Mouth Disease scare in UK

2002

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Report Highlights:

Initial results of tests on sheep from a Yorkshire farm suspected of possibly having Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) have shown negative for the disease. However, full confirmation will not be available for four days after further tests have been undertaken. If FMD were to be confirmed, it would be the first case in the UK since September 30, 2001.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
London [UK1], UK

Initial results of tests on sheep from a Yorkshire farm suspected of possibly having Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) have shown negative for the disease.

Concerns over a possible outbreak of FMD were raised on the afternoon of February 26 when the UK Government's Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) took the precautionary measure of banning livestock movements in an 8 kilometer (5 mile) radius around a farm at Hawnby, near Thirsk, North Yorkshire after suspect lesions were found in the mouths of two sheep.

Following last year's FMD outbreak, which saw 2,026 confirmed cases of the disease and almost 10,000 farms depopulated, restocking is now underway subject to strict procedures designed to highlight any residual infection. So-called sentinel herds are the first to be put on a premise following its cleansing and disinfection and these animals are subject to close veterinary supervision. The two sheep involved in this scare are part of just such a 450-strong sentinel herd on a farm which neighbored an infected premise and as a consequence was slaughtered out last August as part of a contiguous cull. Both farms are reportedly under the same ownership. The suspect mouth lesions were spotted during a routine inspection of the farm.

Following the discovery of the suspect lesions, samples were taken from all of the sheep in the herd and, as a precautionary measure, the two suspect sheep were slaughtered. The farm was also sealed off, tracing of the farms which supplied all of the sheep to the suspect farm commenced and all livestock movements within an 8 kilometer (5 mile) radius of the farm were halted. This latter measure preempts any EU movement restrictions which would be imposed should FMD be confirmed.

The samples were sent for urgent testing for FMD at the Institute of Animal Health laboratory at Pirbright in Surrey. The initial results of these tests, made public early on the morning of February 27, have shown negative for the disease but full confirmation will not be available until further tests have been made. These may take up to four days.

This incident, which has been widely reported in the UK media, highlights the work being undertaken by DEFRA post-FMD. Most importantly, it highlights the mechanisms in place in the event of a suspect case of FMD. The results of the initial tests have raised hopes that this incident is nothing more than a scare. Indeed, the fact that DEFRA has chosen not to slaughter the entire sentinel herd as a precaution is, perhaps, indicative that DEFRA, although unable or unwilling to discount the possibility completely, does not believe this to be a case of FMD. False alarm or not, with the UK still reeling from the effects of the 2001 outbreak and sensitivities raised, it is unlikely that this will be the last suspect case. DEFRA, the agricultural community and the country as a whole will be hoping that any such scares continue to come up negative.