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Bulgaria

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

New Veterinary Policies on Bovine Spongiform

Encephalopathy and Foot and Mouth Disease

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Report Highlights:

The Bulgarian Vet Service has restricted livestock, meat and feed imports from all EU countries due to fears of "mad cow disease"(BSE) and foot and mouth (FMD) contamination. New stringent veterinary measures and special programs were adopted to prevent these diseases domestically.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
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Domestic Vet Policies

The Bulgarian National Veterinary Service has good professional experience with infectious diseases. The last time the country was hit by FMD was in 1996 at the Bulgarian-Turkish border. The case was quickly isolated. However, Bulgaria suffered significant economic losses. In July 1999, Bulgaria was given the status of a FMD-free country. Since that time, the country has not applied any FMD vaccination program as it is prohibited by EU rules. The other serious animal disease in the recent years was blue tongue in sheep. Due to the proximity to Turkey, Bulgaria is viewed by the EU vet authorities as the most important entry zone for animal diseases coming from Asia. Therefore, the local vet service was granted PHARE funds to establish a buffer sanitary zone along the Bulgarian-Turkish border.

Local Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) regulations

Import Regime

The Vet Service reacted immediately after the first cases of BSE in EU and banned imports of beef, MBM and feed from all EU countries known to have BSE. In this regard, it strictly followed International Organization on Epizootic (OIE) policies. The first import ban (November 2000) was for Ireland, UK, Switzerland, Belgium and Portugal, followed by another ban which included Denmark, Spain and Germany (December 2000). Countries not known to have BSE such as Canada, Australia, Argentina and the U.S. were allowed to import beef to Bulgaria.

The first FMD ban on UK products was issued on February 23, 2001 and covered imports and transit of all cloven-hoofed animals, raw materials and products thereof, fodder and fodder components. Back in August 2000, the Vet Service banned imports of pigs, pork and offal from UK due to swine fever. The Vet Service issued two consequent import bans regarding FMD outbreaks in the EU in early March 2001. The first one, issued on March 2, banned imports of livestock, meat, and feed from France, Germany, Ireland, Belgium and the Netherlands. Products imported from these countries had to be heated/cooked before entering the market to guarantee destruction of the FMD virus. Imports of meat, feed, live animals, semen, embryos, animal protein and MBM, vaccines, cosmetics and pet food from the above countries were banned in Bulgaria. On March 6, the Vet Service banned all animal products imports from all EU countries, thus adding Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Denmark, Austria, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Switzerland to the first list of countries.

Most recently, the Vet Service made an official statement (related to the epizootic situation in the EU) in which Bulgaria was stated to be free of FMD as certified by the OIE, blue tongue, swine fever, fowl cholera and cattle plague.

Local Feed Policies and Meat-and-Bone Meal (MBM) use

Meat-and-bone meal was never extensively used in feed in Bulgaria. Over the last 15 years, it was imported in negligible quantities due to its relatively high price, so local cattle relied mainly on pasturing. In 1994, imports of MBM were banned. Since that time the ban has been updated several times. In 1996, locally produced MBM was banned for use in ruminant feed.

Since 1995, all incinerators in Bulgaria (a total of 11) were required to process all animal waste under 134 Cesium and 5 bar atmospheric pressure. Lately, the Vet Service became even more stringent in control and monitoring. Incinerators which are not able to perform at official standards were closed.

According to the Association of Local Renderers, their business is in collapse after the first measures against the "mad cow" disease. In February 2001, officials announced their intention to impose a ban on use of MBM in all types of animal feed (not only for ruminants). Over the last 20 years, MBM was used only in feed for poultry and swine. However, after the official statement --despite the lack of published official regulations-- MBM sales dropped dramatically which brought significant losses to renderers. According to the Association, Bulgaria annually processes about 60,000 MT of waste from slaughtering houses; annual production of MBM is 15,000 MT. Incinerators estimate their financial resources will be exhausted by the end of March, so they will not be able to take care of further liquidation and destruction of animal waste. According to the Vet Service, the MBM will be burned in metallurgical plants. However, the incinerators insist on having financial support, if they are no longer allowed to incinerate.

According to some local experts (not officially), a potential risk of BSE can come from imported fish meal. Often this expensive product is mixed in inexpensive MBM. Tests used to identify MBM content in fish meal are considered not sophisticated, and to a certain extent, to be dependant on professionalism of the laboratory staff. Reportedly, the Vet Service is seeking more modern tests.

Livestock and Beef Meat Imports

Bulgaria is not importing live animals either for breeding purposes or for other uses. Imports over the last ten years were negligible. Therefore, possible BSE risk comes mainly from imported beef from EU countries. Official statistical trade data shows that Bulgaria imported 12,000 MT of beef in 1999 and 2000. According to some German media reports, imports to Bulgaria in 1999 were 11,000 MT which ranked the country as the largest beef importer among central and east European countries (see Table #1). Imports in 1999 were 8,600 MT from EU origins. Germany and Spain were the biggest exporters with 3,220 MT and 2,200 MT respectively. The means Bulgaria is ranked first place in beef imports from EU among East European importers. In 2000, beef imports from the EU origin totaled 3,700 MT and again the largest exporters were Germany and Spain.

New Local Vet Policy Measures

In an effort to minimize BSE and FMD risk, Bulgaria adopted official policies as follows:

- 1/A special program for testing all cattle showing clinical symptoms; cattle aged 24 months bred for slaughter; dead cattle and cattle which are known to have been fed with MBM or may have been in contact with ill animals. The tests have already started. EU approved test kits will be used. While all cattle are being tested, the owners are not allowed to use any animal carcass parts/or manure for any purpose.
- 2/A special inter-departmental committee with representatives from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Environment and Vet Service will monitor the collection and disposal of high risk materials to prevent the spread of BSE. These materials will be collected from slaughter houses and incinerated. The disposal will be done in 5 local incinerators.
- 3/The health status of all cattle will be under continuous vet control. The program involves a comprehensive check of all live cattle in the country between March 1 and December 31, 2001.
- 4/ All live cattle and their offspring imported over the last 20 years from Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, France, Austria and other BSE known countries will be tested for BSE. Imports of live cattle since 1992 were 2,235 head, all from "BSE-free" countries. Half of them are still alive and will be tested using a histology method.
- 5/ All the above test records will be kept at National Vet Service for 7 years.
- 6/ The use of MBM will be banned from April 2001 forward in any type of animal feed - not only for ruminants but for swine and poultry as well.
- 7/ The most recent MinAg ordinance called for additional measures for internal and border veterinary control. Imports of foodstuffs originating from cloven-hoofed animals for personal consumption, the unloading of meat and meat-based food and scraps at border checkpoints is prohibited. Customs authorities must conduct compulsory checks of all travelers crossing into Bulgaria and if any animal-based foodstuffs are found, they are subject to confiscation. All transport vehicles and passengers have to pass special disinfection facilities at the border.
- 8/A ban was imposed on grazing local animals closer than 500 meters away from the border with Turkey. The mayors of municipalities located near the border with Turkey are instructed to designate the areas for grazing and to update the lists for numbers of cloven-hoofed animals. All cities must take measures to reduce the population of stray dogs.

Recently, the Bulgarian Vet Service started a new program, "Evro Vet - Bulgaria". According to this program, data for each animal will be recorded in a special individual animal passport under an identification number. It tracks the animal and the subsequent animal product from the farm to the table. The program is based on full ear-marking of all cattle, and on partial ear-marking of sheep. In the beginning, three regions will be covered in a pilot program - Sofia, Pazardjuk and Kyustendil.

Table #1. The EU Beef Exports to Central and Eastern Europe in CY1999 and CY2000 in MT

EU Beef Exports to Central and Eastern Europe in CY1999 and CY2000 in MT				
	1999		2000 (Q1-3)	
	Volume, MT	Percent of EU exports, %	Volume, MT	Percent of EU exports, %
Bulgaria	11,037	1.1	3,666	0.7
Hungary	4,727	0.5	4,200	0.8
Czech Republic	3,113	0.3	3,405	0.6
Poland	1,616	0.2	2,855	0.5
Romania	1,426	0.1	614	0.1
Slovakia	1,418	0.1	1,664	0.3
Bosnia	10,150	1.1	7,299	1.4
Croatia	3,540	0.4	4,120	0.8
Source: Agra Food, East Europe, February Edition, 2001				