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UK Foot & Mouth Disease update 2007

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Report Highlights:

A second case of Foot & Mouth Disease (FMD) has been confirmed a very short distance from the first case and within the original Protection Zone set up to limit further spread of the disease. The UK Government's investigation into the source of the FMD outbreak is now firmly focused on the Pirbright Laboratory site, co-occupied by the publicly-funded Institute for Animal Health (the world reference laboratory for FMD) and Merial Animal Health Ltd (a private pharmaceutical company with U.S. and French owners). Although the site has not yet been confirmed as the source, investigations are concentrating on the possible release by human movement, be it accidental or deliberate.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Annual Report
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On August 7, 2007 the UK Government's Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) announced that laboratory tests had confirmed a second case of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD). This second case is very close to the first, and is within the original 3 kilometer (1.8 mile) Protection Zone that Defra had put in place around the first case on August 3, 2007. Both cases are around 5-7 kilometers (3-4 miles) from the Pirbright Laboratory site, the focus for the possible source of the outbreak. Per GAIN UK7017, that site is shared by the publicly-funded Institute of Animal Health (IAH) and Merial Animal Health Ltd (a pharmaceutical company with U.S. and French owners).

Prior to laboratory confirmation, the Chief Veterinary Officer, Debby Reynolds ordered the slaughter of the cattle on the second farm on suspicion of disease, based on clinical symptoms. In addition, footpaths and bridleways have been closed within the Protection Zone, and minor changes have been made by Defra to the Protection Zones and Surveillance Zones to take account of the second outbreak¹.

While the source of the disease has yet to be confirmed, as indicated in GAIN UK7017 the investigation is focusing on the Pirbright Laboratory site. At the request of the UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, the UK's Health and Safety Executive (HSE) published an initial report² on August 7, 2007 into potential breaches to bio-security at the Pirbright site. The main findings of the report are:

- The Foot and Mouth Disease strain (FMDV) found at the first outbreak was being worked on at both IAH and Merial during the period July 14 – 25, 2007. This involved large-scale production at the Merial site (10,000 liters) and a series of small-scale experiments (less than 10 milliliters in each case) at the IAH site.
- Further studies intended to provide additional molecular information on the virus type are being undertaken, and the results are expected within a week.
- Airborne contamination is thought to be an unlikely source of the outbreak from the Pirbright site since no evidence has been found of a breakdown in air filters, working practices or incidents that could have led to this form of release of the FMDV.
- Waterborne release from the Pirbright site remains a possibility. However, the inquiry team found no evidence of malfunction of effluent or other water systems between July 14 – 25, 2007. Issues related to the possible transport of surface water from localized flood water are being investigated further.
- Release from Pirbright by human movement is considered a real possibility. There are various potential routes for accidental or deliberate transfer of material from the site. The inquiry team is continuing to investigate this avenue.

Reacting to the HSE report, and following early praise from the National Farmers' Union (NFU) on the UK Government's swift response to the crisis, the NFU President, Peter Kendall, has now indicated that it is considering legal action "if it turns out to be a commercial company that has been and can be shown to have been careless in any way". According to the NFU, such a claim could amount to millions of pounds given the consequential losses associated with the domestic movement restrictions and the restrictions on exports, the latter expected to last for several months.

¹ The Protection and Surveillance Zones can be viewed at: www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth

² The HSE report can be found at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/news/archive/07aug/pirbright.pdf>

Other key developments:

- On August 6, 2007, the EU Commission adopted a Decision identifying Great Britain (England, Scotland & Wales) as a high risk area from which no live animals susceptible to FMD, or products from these animals, can be exported to other Member States. Certain products are still allowed to be exported, including animal products produced before July 15, 2007, those treated in a way which would inactivate any possible virus (such as heat treatment), or those which were manufactured in Great Britain but derived from animals reared outside its territory. The Commission Decision allows the export of live animals and animal products from Northern Ireland to other Member States to continue, so long as they carry the appropriate health certificate and the responsible veterinary authority in the country of destination is given 3 days advance warning.
- As of August 8, 2007, the national movement, imposed last Friday, has been partially relaxed in Scotland. Announcing the move, Scotland's Chief Veterinary Officer, Charles Milne, explained that on the basis of a veterinary risk assessment, licenses are now being issued on a case-by-case basis to allow slaughterhouses to receive animals that have been transported to them directly from farms. Albeit under strictly controlled conditions, this will ease some of the pressure on retail supply chains that have seen no replenishment since last Friday. Pending no further confirmed cases, a similar move is expected in England and Wales to allow farmers outside the Surrey surveillance zones to take animals for slaughter.