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Update on UK's foot-and-mouth disease outbreak 2001

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Report Highlights:

This report offers an update on the UK's foot-and-mouth disease outbreak, confirmed cases of which have now passed 900 establishments with nearly 1 million head of livestock already or soon to be slaughtered.

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

At 19:00 GMT on 1 April, the total number of confirmed cases of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in the UK stood at 909, with in excess of 955,000 animals affected by the disease. Of this total, just under 610,000 livestock have been slaughtered, of which 178,000 remain to be disposed of. A further 345,000 animals are awaiting slaughter. Over 1,300 vets, administered by the UK's State Veterinary Service, are now deployed in controlling the disease.

Although a decision has yet to be made regarding the use of vaccination, the UK government has been keen to stress that it has always been an option. Vaccination can be used in two quite different ways. One approach is to use a national policy of vaccination as the protection mechanism against FMD. This is not a policy adopted or favored by any EU Member State, or by the European Commission. It is also opposed by most farmers, the livestock industry and food producers. Use of the vaccine in this way would mean long-term loss of disease free status and cripple exports worth £1.3 billion a year. The alternative is the use of vaccination to establish zones of protection between infected areas and the rest of the country, or to reduce the number of cases in disease hot spots. The Commission has already agreed to the possible temporary use of vaccination in such circumstances by the Dutch authorities. The UK government's representative in the EU Standing Veterinary Committee (SVC) sought a contingent decision permitting the use of vaccination during the present outbreak, so that it can be deployed immediately if it is concluded that it is the right approach. The SVC agreed that emergency vaccination of cattle in Devon and Cumbria could be carried out if applicable. The government is expected to announce today (Monday) whether or not vaccines will be used to control the disease spread.

The UK government has again stressed that the countryside is not closed. With new guidance issued to local authorities on opening up rights of ways in low risk areas, the hope that tourists will return to the countryside and give a much needed boost to the rural economy in areas which are not infected. Prime Minister Blair has also appeared on American television to tell U.S. tourists that Britain is still open for business. In an interview with NBC's News of America, Mr Blair said quote any tourist attraction, virtually, that anyone in the United States will have heard of and wants to come and see, is open. Britain is open for business, you can go to any town, city and village that you want unquote. However, tourism representatives in Cumbria's Lake District remain unconvinced that the U.S. \$1.5 billion per year tourism industry is retrievable. With most people visiting the area to walk on the hills and fells, the prohibition of walking in infected areas will likely lead to considerable losses as tourists stay away completely.

The UK government's priority with FMD continues to be to cull all animals on infected farms within 24 hours of the disease being identified. This target is reportedly being met in all areas except Cumbria where the intensity of the disease is at its worst.

Over the past week, the UK's army has supplied resources to help contain the FMD spread, with over 800 soldiers now deployed at the government's request. These include around 100 in Scotland and 50 in Wales in addition to over 600 in England. They are providing logistical support in the disposal process, thereby freeing up vets to concentrate on veterinary matters. Also, military liaison officers will be joining all major disease control centers.

The UK government has proposed a ban on the use of swill feeding having concluded that the potential risk of swill feeding introducing disease to livestock farms where swill is not used - and

to the wider community - is now greater than the benefits to the relatively small number of premises that continue to adopt this practice. A public consultation document seeking the views of all interested parties on the principle and detailed application of such a ban has been issued.

A further consultation document has been issued containing a proposal to introduce a 20-day standstill period, after movement, for sheep, goats and cattle. There are already rules on the identification and movement of pigs, including a general requirement that no pigs should be moved off premises within 20 days of any pigs moving on to those premises.

Indications that the FMD outbreak could change the shape of UK agriculture are already apparent, with the news that the National Trust could abandon the traditional system of renting farms to tenant farmers in the Lake District. In a radical move which would mean the end of the landlord-tenant system, the Trust may have to pay farmers to stay on the land and manage its farms. The Trust has 89 Lake District farms on 23,808ha (59,000 acres).