

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

# GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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## **Bulgaria**

**Post:** Sofia

### **FMD outbreak**

**Report Categories:**

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

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**Report Highlights:**

On January 4, Bulgarian Ministry of Agriculture and Foods reported a case of FMD in Southeastern Bulgaria, near the Turkish border. The EU reference laboratory determined the FMD virus strain found as typical of Iran and the Asian part of Turkey. Local Vet Office reacted quickly and professionally, and the outbreak was successfully confined. Only Ukraine and Moldova, which are not major Bulgarian livestock/meat trade partners banned imports from the country.

## **Executive Summary:**

### **General Information:**

#### **FMD Outbreak**

On January 4, Bulgarian Ministry of Agriculture and Foods reported a case of FMD in Southeastern Bulgaria, village Kosti, near the Turkish border.

This FMD case has been the first for the last 14 years (the last outbreak was in October 1996). The country had a “free of FMD without vaccination practice” OIE status.

The FMD virus was identified on a wild boar shot on December 29, 2010. According to the CVO, this is the first time when the local vets identify FMD on wild carrier. Local vets think that they discovered the infection in a very early phase. The EU reference laboratory in England determined the FMD virus strain found as typical of Iran and the Asian part of Turkey. According to the Vet Office, the FMD could emerge through migration of wild boars between Turkey and Bulgaria; or it could be introduced with meat or products from hunted wild boars; or through indirect contacts with wild boars. See the chronology of the outbreak in Annex 1.

The Vet Office reacted quickly and professionally. After the first positive results on Jan. 4, the MinAg established an emergency task force, and restrictions were imposed on the region where the boar was shot (Bourgas) and in 2 neighboring regions. On Jan. 6, the Ag Minister visited the outbreak location to inspect if all the necessary measures were properly imposed. Following EC decision defined the high-risk area (Bourgas district) and low-risk areas (the surrounding provinces of Yambol, Sliven, Shumen and Varna). None of these regions are major players in livestock or meat trade, but the EU decision aimed to convince overseas customers that the infection has been confined to the region so that there is no risk for EU's meat export trade.

The following emergency measures were introduced: control of wildlife reservoirs; stamping out; quarantine; movement control inside the country; screening; zoning; disinfection of infected premises/establishment(s); no vaccination; no treatment of affected animals. Authorities have started reconstructing the fence along the border where it had fallen apart, to prevent any other animals slipping in. See details about the measures in Annex 2.

The MinAg reported 37 positive cases on domestic animals out of 1600 samples, all in Kosti village. No positive samples were found in other regions. Livestock in the village (250 sheep/goats, 200 head of cattle and 80 pigs, or total 530 animals) were culled. This includes domestic animals from backyards and two commercial farms with 100 cattle each.

On its meeting on January 12, EC Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health decided that only the coastal district of Bourgas shall stay in quarantine. On January 13, the restrictive measures over the FMD spreading, adopted in the districts of Varna, Shumen, Yambol, Sliven, Haskovo and Kardzhali, have been lifted.

#### **Economic Impact**

## **Trade**

Foreign trade: Only Ukraine and Moldova, which are not major livestock/meat trade partners, banned imports from Bulgaria.

Domestic trade: At the beginning of the outbreak, the Vet Office decided to add 2 more (Chaskovo and Kurdjali) districts to those 5 districts already restricted by the EC (see above). This decision caused a lot of turmoil in the food industry.

Total 64 milk processing and 92 meat processing establishments were located in these 7 districts. They could not trade their products with the other districts even if the raw materials they used were not originating from the outbreak (high-risk) area, or from a low-risk restricted area. For example, a dairy farm at 200 km from the outbreak could not sell milk to a processor in a non-restricted district; or a dairy processor who uses Hungarian milk and is located in a restricted region could not sell its product to a non-restricted region. Similarly, a meat processor from a restricted region which processes only EU origin meat (not local meat) could not sell it to a buyer in a non-restricted region. This led to massive violations of suppliers' contracts. Supermarkets chains became to panic since they could not procure enough local products and some had no quick alternatives. Discounters were affected more since many of them had a limited selection of private label products, often produced at the affected plants.

The Association of Meat Processors estimated the capacity of the establishments in restricted regions at 25% of total industry capacity. Companies began to suffer losses and to lose their buyers/markets. At an emergency meeting between the food industry and the MinAg on January 11, the industry evaluated restrictions on trade as not well thought, extreme and too stringent. Industry was concerned that some of affected companies/farmers would bankrupt. Lifting the measures on 6 out of 7 affected districts on January 13, was a welcome relief for the industry.

## **Financial Compensations**

The MinAg tried to negotiate with EC 100% compensations for the culled animals as well as to include incurred business losses. However, the EC did not approve the request since the regulations allow maximum 60%. As a result, the GOB decided to provide the remaining sum from the national budget. According to the MinAg, the costs for handling the outbreak could run to about half a million Euro. As an immediate help, the GOB will pay 150 Euro/ person, the total compensation will include the cost of animals plus estimated lost benefit from not produced animal products in the future 3 months.

## **Animal Health and the Role of Private Vets**

Since 2010, there has been a growing tension between the Vet Office and the private vets.

To date, surveillance and mandatory prophylactics of domestic animals have been done by private vets on contacts with the MinAg Vet Office, so their services were paid by the government. In 2010, Vet Office delayed or was unable to pay on these contracts. According to the private vets, the government supply of the necessary diagnostic tools and vaccines was irregular or insufficient. Private vets protested publicly a few times during the year. They became lousy in their work since they were not paid and were not supplied with the necessary materials. At the end of 2010 the tension escalated. The Union of Private Vets sent an open letter to media which stated that despite the good will and desire of the private vets, they would not be able to perform their duties from January 1, 2011 since they had no contracts.

Due to the FMD emergency situation, the Vet Office urgently started closing contracts with the private vets which, however, do not include animal health duties. According to the Vet Office, EC regulations do not allow the government to pay to private vets (art.10 of EC 1857/2006). Bulgaria had derogation in this respect which expired on January 1, 2011. According to new draft legislative changes, private vets have to close contracts with farmers for animal health services. However, these changes are not yet approved by the Parliament. In this situation, the Vet Office thinks that private vets will be able to perform their animal health duties after April 1. This means that no surveillance and mandatory prophylactics of domestic animals will be done in the first quarter which increases the risk for animal health issues.