



Northern Ireland Animal Health and Welfare Strategy



Department of
**Agriculture and
Rural Development**

www.dardni.gov.uk



Contents

*Click on red square
to go straight to
start of section*

	Page
■ Foreword	2
■ Executive Summary	5
■ Chapter 1 The Need for a Strategy	9
■ Chapter 2 The Strategic Drivers	17
■ Chapter 3 All-Island Context	27
■ Chapter 4 The Scope	31
■ Chapter 5 The Vision	37
■ Chapter 6 The Key Strategic Themes	43

Foreword



I am delighted to endorse the publication of this Strategy which has been developed to provide a clear approach to animal health and welfare in Northern Ireland and provide clear guiding principles for the way that we, both as individuals and as a society, meet the responsibilities of animal ownership.

The Strategy recognises the obvious benefits that ensuring high standards of animal health and welfare can bring in supporting industry profitability and in improving the welfare of animals themselves.

The Strategy sets out five key themes. These will direct animal health and welfare in Northern Ireland over the coming years and I welcome the framework that these themes provide.

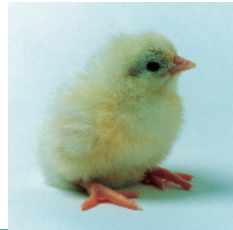
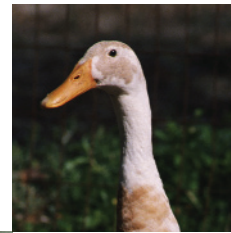
For example, few would disagree that the prevention of disease and welfare incidents is better than having animals suffering or having to deal with the associated costs with such problems. Of course, this and the other aspects of the Strategy, can and must only be taken forward on the basis of partnership, whereby all those with an interest in animal health and welfare have their role to play and responsibilities to fulfill. To this end, I am grateful for the active input of key stakeholders in the drafting process and it will be vital that the key non-government stakeholders work in partnership with the Department, and with each other, to ensure the clear benefits envisioned in the Strategy can be attained. As set out in the recent Strategic Plan for 2006-2011, the Department is committed to working with stakeholders to enhance animal health and welfare standards.

I further welcome the development of an Implementation Plan which will accompany the Strategy and which will demonstrate how the principles of the Strategy are being taken forward. The Plan will be reported on regularly to demonstrate progress towards attaining the Vision of a fully desirable future for all animals and their keepers, related professions and industries, local businesses, communities and individuals.

The development and implementation of this Strategy complement the ongoing work to develop a more strategic approach to animal health and welfare on an all-island basis, as well as the existing GB Strategy. As the Northern Ireland livestock industry relies on exporting animals and animal products, it is important that our approach to animal health and welfare is coordinated with our main trading partners as we face the challenges ahead.

Jeff Rooker







Executive Summary

It is widely agreed that we need a new approach to animal health and welfare in Northern Ireland. We need clear guiding principles for the way that we meet the responsibilities of animal ownership.

The Northern Ireland Animal Health and Welfare Strategy has been developed to respond to this need for a comprehensive, strategic approach to animal health and welfare. The Strategy has been drawn together following consultation with stakeholders through the Animal Health and Welfare Sub-group of the Rural Stakeholder Forum and following wider consultation in the autumn of 2005. It attempts to provide a clear vision of a sustainable future for animal health and welfare and the framework to help us meet this vision.

The Strategy also reflects Northern Ireland's geographical position within the island of Ireland and the corresponding work on seeking an agreed strategic approach to animal health and welfare across the island. The Strategy also addresses the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's (DARD) commitment to produce a strategy that is consistent, in terms of its principles and outcomes, with the GB Strategy published in 2004.

The Strategy is concerned mainly with farmed livestock. However, where there is potential impact on human health or on the health of farmed livestock it encompasses other animals including wildlife and companion animals. Further details are set out in Chapter 4 on **scope**.

Executive Summary

The Strategy adopts five **key themes**. Key theme 1, *understanding and accepting roles and responsibilities*, underpins the other key themes which are:-

- *key theme 2 - working in partnership;*
- *key theme 3 - a clearer understanding of costs and benefits of animal health and welfare;*
- *key theme 4 - promoting the benefits of animal health and welfare - prevention is better than cure; and*
- *key theme 5 - ensuring effective delivery and enforcement.*

The **Vision** for the future, as set out in **Chapter 5**, is:-

" For a Northern Ireland where the standards of animal health and welfare are amongst the highest in the world, and where all stakeholders fully understand and accept their roles and responsibilities".



Executive Summary

In meeting this vision:-

- Animals kept for food, farming, sport, companionship, entertainment and in zoos will be healthy and treated humanely.
- We will be able to freely trade our animals and animal products internationally.
- Key elements of infrastructure, such as APHIS, will be maintained and developed to facilitate rapid and effective response to disease emergencies, which will be dealt with using an agreed approach.
- The costs of livestock health and welfare will be appropriately balanced between industry and the taxpayer.
- Consumers will fully value the confidence they have in fully traceable food produced safely from healthy animals that are well cared for. Consumers and retailers will fully accept that higher standards of animal health and welfare are not cost free.
- Livestock keeping will be part of a competitive farming industry, which succeeds by meeting the needs of consumers at home and abroad, producing food safely and to high standards of health and welfare.

Executive Summary

Such a Vision cannot be delivered by Government alone. The Strategy needs to be comprehensive for animal keepers, Government and consumers. Government will be a partner in the process. Whilst much of the discussion of animal health and welfare in recent years has focused on the role of Government, clearly Government should intervene only where there is a clear public interest in doing so. Four primary reasons exist for intervention – public health, impact on the wider economy and society, trade and animal welfare – are

discussed in Chapter 6 in the context of Key Theme I, understanding roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in animal health and welfare. The role of Government and the principles of Government decision-making are defined in **Chapter 6**, which also provides details of the key strategic themes. These key themes will direct animal health and welfare policy and delivery over the next 10 years.



The Need for a Strategy

The Need for a Strategy

1.1 Introduction

Animal health and welfare issues have implications for a wide spectrum of our economic and social life.

The cost to the taxpayer of major outbreaks of animal disease, the animal welfare consequences and the loss in public confidence in our livestock industry following recent well publicised food scares and disease outbreaks have led to the need to reassess animal health and welfare policy. There is a well recognised need to review how and by whom it is delivered.

We have seen how animal diseases can be a threat to people's health, and the safety of food. The Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) problem, and other well-publicised food scares, have given greater focus to what was probably already a growing consumer concern with the potential impact on human health of animal health issues. In addition to the human health aspects,

diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) have the potential to impact adversely on the wider rural economy and society.

Some aspects of the current animal health and welfare position, such as tuberculosis and brucellosis (Tb/br), are unsustainable and it is therefore clear that we need to put in place measures in order:-

- to enhance confidence of the wider public and consumers;
- to actively protect them; and
- to restore our animal health status within the international community, highly regarded until it was called into question in recent years, both domestically and abroad.

Chapter

I

The Need for a Strategy

There is also increasing pressure for appropriate standards for the welfare of animals kept for farming purposes, companionship, sport and entertainment. It is clear that the responsibility for the welfare of animals rests with those who keep them, but there is also a role for Government in providing a framework of advice and law within which animal keepers can work. Advice and regulation is, in turn, bound by international treaties and EU legislation.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's (DARD) focus will of course remain on the welfare of farmed animals. However, the legal framework for the welfare of other animals is primary legislation for which DARD has the responsibility to ensure, through regular review, that this covers modern practices and provides sufficient degree of protection to all animals.

All stakeholders - in both the public and private sectors – have a part to play in addressing the challenge of securing improved standards in animal health and welfare. Engaging all parties will require co-operation and co-ordination of activities within a framework where the respective roles and responsibilities are clearly understood and accepted. The key challenge for Government will be to ensure that, where it intervenes, such action is proportionate, effective, and strikes the right balance on behalf of society. For animal owners the increasing effect of changes in support policies and funding require a significant change in the way animals are kept, and in the way in which risks to health and welfare are managed.

The Need for a Strategy

The Drivers for a Strategic Approach

Animal health and welfare is of increasing concern to a wide range of stakeholders including animal keepers, veterinarians and Government, as well as interest groups, consumers and the wider general public. It is the shared concerns of these different stakeholders that compel the need for this strategic approach. The main drivers are public health concerns, public interest, economic issues and environmental concerns, details of which are given below.

Public Health Concerns

A number of animal diseases and conditions are transmissible to man. These are referred to as 'zoonotic' diseases, or 'zoonoses', such as rabies. Depending on the disease these threats to public health can come from direct contact with an animal or from meat or other products derived from animals. A number of these infections may not result in clinical signs of disease in the animals concerned, for example some infections with bacteria like *Salmonella*. or some strains of *Escherichia coli* (E-coli).

High standards of food safety are essential for sustainable farming and food industries. Consumers need to have confidence in the food that they eat. This requires hazards to food safety to be controlled on farm, wherever practical, so they cannot cause problems further up the chain.

Chapter

I

The Need for a Strategy

Public Interest

The agri-food industry is coming under increasing challenges arising from changing consumer tastes and preferences, an increase in affluence, demographic changes and an increasing awareness of the links between diet and health. Consumers are demanding not only good value and guaranteed quality, but safer and more traceable food, which includes accurate information on food products.

Society's interest and concern for the welfare of kept animals is also a growing driver for strategic change. Concerned individuals and welfare groups play a major role in maintaining pressure for the highest possible welfare standards for kept animals. There is pressure to ensure that animal health and welfare policies do not simply ensure the absence of cruelty and disease but also ensure, through education and awareness, that anyone who takes

ownership of an animal for whatever purpose has a duty of care to meet acceptable animal health and welfare standards.

While there is a clear public interest in better standards of animal health and welfare and in food safety, this does not mean that they should be achieved entirely at public expense. As a general principle the taxpayer can only be expected to contribute where there is a need to ensure genuine public good. The taxpayer cannot be expected to pay for animal health and welfare costs and risks to farmers which affect only their own businesses, or which are incurred as a result of the industry's own practices giving rise to greater disease threats.

The Need for a Strategy

1.5 Economic Issues

Primary agriculture production remains an important economic activity in Northern Ireland attributing some 2.5% of Gross Value Added. This sector accounts for more than 5% of total employment in Northern Ireland. There is a strong reliance on trade in animals and animal products, with the major part of the output of the sector being sold outside the island of Ireland. The potential economic impact for Northern Ireland of a major disease outbreak is therefore clearly much higher in proportion than elsewhere in the UK.

Maintenance of a high animal health status is key to a sustainable agriculture industry in Northern Ireland. However, the issue goes beyond the direct impacts on the agriculture industry and associated export trade. As illustrated by the 2001 FMD outbreak,

there can also be serious effects on rural communities and on the environment and can involve an increased burden on the taxpayer.

Not all diseases have such obvious or dramatic affects, but their introduction and spread can, nevertheless, affect agricultural productivity by reducing output or raising costs, thereby undermining the competitiveness of the industry. For example, Tb/br continue to have both an impact on farms in terms of production efficiency and taxpayers through compensation.

Agricultural support in the form of direct payments to farmers is perhaps more transparent than ever before and it is inevitable that taxpayers will increasingly want to know what they are getting in return for the large amounts of public funding (including payments for public goods) that goes to agriculture.

The Need for a Strategy

1.6 Environmental Concerns

New legislation has been introduced concerning animal by-products aimed at seeking to ensure that disposal of animal wastes or by-products are inert as far as their environmental effect is concerned. This in turn will aid protection of public and animal health by ensuring the safe disposal of animal by-products (animal carcasses, parts of animal carcasses and products of animal origin which are not intended for human consumption). The feeding of waste food that contains infected meat has been implicated in a number of outbreaks of serious animal disease, most recently

Classical Swine Fever and FMD. Therefore these controls play a significant role in disease prevention.

The EU Animal By-Products Regulation also introduced a complete ban on the burial or burning on farm of animal carcasses and other animal materials.

Wildlife issues also act as a driver for a strategic approach to animal health in so far as there is a risk of diseases being transmitted from wildlife to livestock or people.

The Need for a Strategy

1.7 Consultation

In 2003 the Department sought comments and held a series of informal meetings with stakeholders aimed at seeking views on what key areas such a strategy might cover. Comments were sought and received from a wide range of groups with a stake in animal health and welfare issues, including environmental interests, community interests, animal welfare interests, producers and processors as well as veterinarians.

The key issues identified as part of that consultation, and on which the Strategy aims to deliver, were:

- Improved biosecurity
- Joint Government/ stakeholder approach
- Importance of animal welfare/animal husbandry issues
- Enhanced education/training of producers
- Prevention of illegal imports
- Comprehensive surveillance system
- Market focus
- Disease control strategies identified and prioritised.

Following further consultation with stakeholders through the Rural Stakeholder Forum's Animal Health and Welfare Sub-group, a draft Strategy underwent a formal 12-week public consultation. Formal consultation ended on 24 October 2005, with a total of 16 responses received.



The Strategic Drivers

The Strategic Drivers

2.1 Introduction

The Strategy is the context in which all animal health and welfare policy will be developed in the future. However this policy development cannot exist in isolation and must fit in with, and take forward, strategies and reviews that aim to support a sustainable livestock sector, such as the Vision Action Plan and the Review of the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak. There are also links to public health, food safety and sustainable development policies. The Strategy needs to be able to adapt to, and capitalise on, new circumstances, in particular those arising from

reform of the Common Agriculture Policy, which requires compliance with animal health and welfare legislation. Also relevant are changes to the EU food hygiene legislation designed to extend food safety and hygiene controls back to primary producers.

This chapter is aimed at ensuring that future policy development is consistent with relevant existing strategies and policy directives.

The Strategic Drivers

2.2 Sustainable Development Principles

The UK's Sustainable Development Strategy is underpinned by ten principles, which include a science-based approach and the application of the precautionary principle. The Northern Ireland Executive adopted the principles of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy which brought the environment, social progress and the economy alongside each other at the heart of policy making and underlined the need to protect human health and safety and to protect things which people need or value, such as animals.

The 'precautionary principle' is a response to uncertainty in the face of risks to health or the environment. In general, it involves acting to avoid serious or irreversible potential harm, despite lack of scientific certainty of that

harm. Since the United Nations Rio Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, the precautionary principle has been included in a number of international agreements signed by the UK in relation to its responsibilities for animal health.

The health and welfare of farmed animals can make a major contribution to the sustainability of the livestock sector, to the wider agri-food industry and, more broadly, to the rural economy. One of the aims of recent Common Agricultural Policy Reform is to contribute to achieving sustainable development by increasing emphasis on encouraging healthy, high-quality products, environmentally sustainable production methods, including organic production, renewable raw materials and the protection of biodiversity.

The Strategic Drivers

2.3 DARD Strategy – 2006–2011

The DARD Strategic Plan sets out a vision for Northern Ireland of a thriving and sustainable rural community. This encompasses a desire to see a significant improvement in competitiveness in the Northern Ireland agri food industry, further development of its competence, support for the expansion of sales and achieving a quality food product reputation. DARD is prepared to be a champion for animal health and welfare. However the Department also wants to ensure that all those with an interest accept a share of the responsibility for improving standards and for protecting society from the effect of animal disease.

2.4 Vision for the Future of the Agri-Food Industry ('Vision Report')

The Vision Report recommended a more strategic approach to the development and delivery of animal health and welfare policy in Northern Ireland. The recommendation was accepted by DARD in its response to the report in November 2002.

The Strategic Drivers

2.5 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak

The PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) 'Independent Review of the 2001 Foot and Mouth Outbreak' in Northern Ireland endorsed the Vision Report calling for the introduction of a Northern Ireland Animal Health Strategy as part of an overarching All-Island Animal Health Strategy.

2.6 The Animal Health and Welfare Strategy for Great Britain

The Department of Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Scottish and Welsh Devolved Administrations published, in 2004, a strategy setting out some of the principles and targets which would determine the strategic approach to animal health and welfare over the next 10 years. Recognising the need for a consistent approach within the UK and also the significant trade flows which exist between Northern Ireland and GB, there is a need to ensure that a Northern Ireland strategy is complementary to this, both in terms of principles and outcomes.

The Strategic Drivers

2.7 All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy

It is also clear that there is a need to ensure that the Strategy is taken forward in parallel with developments that are taking place on an all-island basis within Ireland given the importance of the island as a distinct epidemiological unit and given the natural advantage of being an island. Details of the all-island context are provided in **Chapter 3**.

2.8 European Union (EU) Requirements and International Obligations

As a member of the EU, and an international trading nation, many of our rules and practices governing animal health and welfare are set or influenced at EU or international level. The Strategy seeks to recognise this, and is directed to setting the scene for our discussions with EU and international partners as well as to domestic policies.

The EU white paper on food hygiene published in 2000 recognised the important link between food safety and animal health and made this, through the farm to fork strategy, a basic principle of new food hygiene legislation introduced in January 2006.

Central to the Common Agriculture Policy Reforms is agreement to “de-couple” subsidies from production. The new single farm payment requires farmers to

The Strategic Drivers

abide by a set of statutory management rules including rules related to animal health and welfare.

Finally, the UK Government is bound by a number of international treaties on animal welfare, such as the Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes. Many of these treaties define animal welfare in terms of the Five Freedoms as set out by the Farm Animal Welfare Council, which are:-

- Freedom from hunger and thirst;
- Freedom from thermal and physical discomfort;
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
- Freedom from fear and stress; and
- Freedom to express normal behaviour.

In addition to such treaties, much of the policy framework on animal welfare stems from the EU which sets the minimum standards for the protection of animals during transport, on farm and at slaughter.

The Strategic Drivers

2.9 EU Animal Health Strategy

To date, animal health policy at EU level has played a key role in facilitating the trade in animals and animal products by setting up animal health inspections at EU points of entry rather than at internal borders and by financing the eradication of many serious diseases which previously posed obstacles to trade. Much has also been done in the area of disease prevention, including extensive work on the identification and traceability of animals, helping to control animal movements and contain outbreaks of disease.

A new EU animal health strategy is being developed, which aims to strengthen the policy of disease prevention, make emergency FMD vaccination a more viable option, simplify legislation and set a framework for financing new actions.

2.10 Public Service Reform

The development of policy in respect of animal health and welfare must be set in the context of the ongoing reform of how Government services are provided. The reform programme aims to put priority front line services first, so that resources are focused on meeting the needs and aspirations of the community. To achieve this will mean, amongst other things, a smaller and more efficient Civil Service which is 'fit for purpose' - this in turn will inevitably impact on how policy is developed and services are delivered in the future.

The reform programme is part of a wider modernisation agenda, which also seeks to make Government more open and accessible to the public. In tandem with reform of the Civil Service, work is being carried out on the development of a range of IT initiatives which aim to allow members of the public

Chapter

2

The Strategic Drivers

to conduct a wide range of government business electronically themselves. Central to DARD's IT policy is the Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS) which must be developed to provide a range of e-services for a range of customers, whilst continuing to offer facilities for animal health and welfare and public health.

Animal health controls inevitably involve regulation, be it of the activity of owners or keepers of animals, those responsible for the movement or sale or those involved with their slaughter or marketing. Much of the regulation is driven by EU legislation though there is scope at times for interpretation and application of additional international measures. UK Government policy is to apply regulation in the most appropriate way in order to minimise the burden on the industry and avoid gold plating.



The All-Island Context

The All-Island Context

3.1 Introduction

As noted in Chapter 2, the Northern Ireland Strategy has been developed, and must be delivered, in parallel with developments in animal health and welfare taking place on an all-island basis. That the island is a distinct epidemiological unit and that there already is a substantial cross-border trade in animals, fully supports the need for a strategic approach to animal health and welfare on an all-island basis given the importance of the island as a distinct epidemiological unit and the potential competitive benefits inherent in being an island.

3.2 North South Co-operation

In order to build on the long-standing co-operation which exists between DARD and the Department of Agriculture and Food (DAF) on animal health and welfare matters, it was agreed to develop an overall strategic approach which would provide as far as possible for the convergence of the respective approaches to the prevention and control of animal disease.

While part of the focus of the approach to animal health and welfare on the island of Ireland is on programmes and action plans within the respective areas of jurisdiction, there will always be a common thread given that many of the rules and practices are set or influenced at EU or international level as noted in paragraph 2.8.

The ultimate objective of an all-island animal health and welfare strategy is a policy which facilitates free movement of animals on the island, subject to EU rules.

The All-Island Context

3.3 Guiding Principles of the Strategic Approach

In implementing an all-island strategic approach to animal health and welfare, both administrations are guided by a number of key principles (which parallel the principles in the GB Strategy referred to in Chapter 2), including consistently high standards of animal health and welfare, improved public health and an effective capacity to deal with emergencies within a policy framework which:-

- is based on sound veterinary and scientific evidence;
- ensures veterinary surveillance is targeted on agreed priority areas;
- does not impose unnecessary regulation or cost on the industry;
- facilitates joined-up working between the respective Veterinary Services and associated enforcement agencies;
- has high level monitoring arrangements.

These principles are closely linked to the principles for Government decision making outlined in Chapter 5 and are neither exhaustive nor exclusive. Stakeholders must be involved in the process of evaluation. The two administrations agree that there should be regular involvement of stakeholders in strategic decisions affecting animal health and welfare matters through regular meetings of the relevant interests via the respective stakeholder fora.

The All-Island Context

3.4 Development of the All-Island Strategic Approach

The need for a high level animal health and welfare status throughout the island therefore led the North-South Ministerial Council to commission, in late 2001, a programme of work to develop closer co-operation and joint strategies for the improvement of animal health and welfare within the island of Ireland.

In addition, and in support of, the all-island strategy work, DARD is represented on the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council with the aim of ensuring co-operation on animal welfare across the island of Ireland.

3.5 The North South Working Groups

The development of an all-island approach has been taken forward through a series of Working Groups which meet regularly. The work has focused on 3 main themes:

- common or equivalent controls at points of entry;
- convergence of internal animal health and welfare policies; and
- development of joint strategies for the control of animal disease.

The main achievements to date of the nine Working Groups are the development of a co-ordinated and complementary approach towards import policies and portal controls at points of entry to the island, the convergence of policies in regard to animal identification, Tb/br testing and scrapie monitoring and the strengthening of co-ordination and co-operation between both administrations on a variety of issues such as FMD, BSE and cross-border fraud.



The Scope of the Strategy

The Scope of the Strategy

4.1 Introduction

The Strategy is concerned mainly with those animals which are under people's control, and to a limited degree with wildlife, in so far as they carry disease of significance to animals and humans. The Strategy therefore concentrates on farmed livestock, and as far as welfare is concerned, those kept for pets or in zoos and circuses.

The Strategy does not address wider issues such as biodiversity and conservation, nor does it seek to address angling, shooting for sport, hunting or use of animals in research. The scope of the strategy therefore includes the following.

4.2 Farmed Livestock

The Strategy applies to all farmed livestock including beef and dairy cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, poultry (including egg production), and all other animals reared for food, breeding or other animal products, such as fleece or hides. Society's concerns include the welfare of these animals, their interactions with human health through the food chain or direct contact, and the far-reaching economic and environmental consequences of animal disease.

The Strategy also extends beyond the traditional farming sector to animals, traditionally reared for food, which are increasingly being kept as companion animals. These animals are included within the scope of this strategy, in respect of their own health and welfare and also because of their potential role in the spread of disease.

The Scope of the Strategy

4.3 Companion and other animals

The Strategy applies to dogs, cats, horses and other animals (including exotic species) kept by people, whether as companions or in zoos or various working or recreational contexts. In addition to caring for the welfare of these animals we must also have regard to the risk some non-farm animals may pose as transmitters of diseases to humans and farm animals and the risk of disease transfers to and from wildlife.

These animals are often well cared for and enjoy good standards of veterinary attention and welfare. However, this is not always the case. Owners have a responsibility to consider whether they can maintain adequate standards of health and welfare and recognise that doing so will involve a financial cost that they must meet.

4.4 Aquaculture

About 70 million salmon and trout are farmed in the UK each year making farmed fish the second largest livestock sector after poultry. The Strategy in relation to aquaculture covers the hatching and rearing of fish and shellfish not only for food but also for sale in the ornamental trade for eventual release into stocked fisheries. This sector raises important issues for the protection of public health, the protection of the wider aquatic environment and the promotion of fish health and welfare.

Although fish diseases are not communicable to humans, shellfish, in particular, can carry bacteria and biotoxins, which are potentially injurious and even fatal. Given the nature of the environment in which fish are farmed, aquaculture has the potential to

The Scope of the Strategy

adversely affect fish in the wild, not only by spreading disease but also by interfering with the genetic make-up of wild stocks. Also the controlled environments in which naturally wild fish species are farmed have major implications on their welfare.

4.5 Game

The Strategy extends to the game sector which lies – in animal health and welfare terms – between farmed livestock and wildlife. Game animals are often bred for recreational purposes which are an important component of many rural economies. This sector includes birds which are initially reared in captivity and then released for sporting purposes, as well as birds and animals such as deer which are not captive, but whose health and welfare may be influenced by land management practices. The Strategy extends to game, in recognition both of the attention which land managers and gamekeepers need to apply to animal health and welfare and to reflect the game sector's connections with the food chain.

The Scope of the Strategy

4.6 Wildlife

Although wildlife per se falls outside of the main emphasis of the Strategy, wildlife issues overlap with aspects of health and welfare and here the Strategy does have a legitimate role to play.

These areas are:-

- where there is a risk of zoonotic diseases being transmitted;
- where wildlife populations may pass on, harbour or recycle diseases of farmed livestock, for example bovine tuberculosis in badgers and avian influenza in migrating birds;
- where certain welfare issues arise involving protection from cruelty or the role of rehabilitation and rescue centres; and
- where disease controls for farmed livestock and other animals affect wildlife.



A Vision for Animal Health and Welfare in Northern Ireland

Chapter

5

A Vision for Animal Health and Welfare in Northern Ireland

5.1 Introduction

The Vision for Animal Health and Welfare in Northern Ireland seeks to reflect the main themes raised by stakeholders during initial consultation on the Strategy, and is a shared picture of where we want to be in 10 years time.

5.2 Vision for the future

"The Vision is for a Northern Ireland where the standards of animal health and welfare are amongst the highest in the world, and where all stakeholders fully understand and accept their roles and responsibilities".

In meeting this vision:-

- Animals kept for food, farming, sport, companionship, entertainment and in zoos will be healthy and treated humanely.
- We will freely trade our animals and animal products internationally.
- Key elements of infrastructure, such as APHIS, will be maintained and developed to facilitate rapid and effective response to disease emergencies, which will be dealt with using an agreed approach.

Chapter

5

A Vision for Animal Health and Welfare in Northern Ireland

- The costs of livestock health and welfare will be appropriately balanced between industry, and the taxpayer.
- Consumers will fully value the confidence they have in fully traceable food produced safely from healthy animals that are well cared for. Consumers and retailers will fully accept that higher standards of animal health and welfare are not cost free.
- Livestock keeping will be part of a competitive farming industry, which succeeds by meeting the needs of consumers at home and abroad, producing food safely and to high standards of health and welfare.

5.3 Delivering this Vision

To deliver this Vision, the Strategy sets out five key themes which will underpin all animal health and welfare activities. These are:-

- **understanding and accepting roles and responsibilities;**
- **working in partnership;**
- **gaining a clearer understanding of costs and benefits of animal health and welfare;**
- **promoting the benefits of animal health and welfare - prevention is better than cure; and**
- **ensuring effective delivery and enforcement.**

These key themes are discussed further in **Chapter 6.**

A Vision for Animal Health and Welfare in Northern Ireland

5.4 Delivering the Vision and the Key Themes

The key themes will be delivered through a significant amount of activity that will be set out in an Implementation Plan. This Implementation Plan will be placed on the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's web site at www.dardni.gov.uk.

In the Implementation Plan, the activities will be set out in terms of:-

- **'Context'** - how each work area fits into the Strategy and links to the rationale for Government involvement in animal health and welfare. As many animal health and welfare related policies are implemented on a UK basis, the context often reflects the relationship with the GB Animal Health and Welfare Strategy and the broader UK position.
- **'Activity'** - the main activities being carried out.
- **'Milestones'** - the anticipated achievements over the next few years.
- **'Delivery'** - who is primarily responsible and what they do.

Chapter

5

A Vision for Animal Health and Welfare in Northern Ireland

The plan, and its constituent activities and associated milestones, will be updated annually to explain how the Strategy is evolving over time and to reflect any changes in priorities. It will become part of the yearly cycle of governance and communication of the Strategy. It is anticipated that further activities will be identified that will be delivered by stakeholders for inclusion in this cycle in order to help communicate good practice and in keeping with the Strategy's principle of partnership. Where there is an all-island dimension, new activities and targets will be added that highlight the work being taken forward with DAF in the Republic of Ireland.

5.5 Managing and Communicating the Strategy

The guiding principle of the Strategy is one of partnership. It is necessary to ensure therefore, that the key themes within the Strategy are communicated to all those that have an interest in animal health and welfare to ensure everyone works together, to achieve much more than any individual party could achieve in isolation. Central to this process will be the Animal Health and Welfare Sub-Group of the Rural Stakeholder Forum, which will oversee the implementation of the Strategy. The Implementation Plan will be updated regularly and progress will be reported through the Department's website.



Key Strategic Themes

Key Strategic Themes

6.1 Key Theme 1 - Understanding and accepting roles and responsibilities.

Stakeholders should be aware of what they are expected to do, and be aware of the boundaries of others' responsibilities. This theme underpins the other key strategic themes. For example, it is up to **animal owners** to make a real difference to the health and welfare of their animals. They need to consider whether they have the means, skills and knowledge to accept the responsibility that being an animal owner entails. **Veterinary surgeons** must take a more proactive role in the future. They are a vital conduit for ensuring that animal owners are adequately informed and are aware of best practice and the latest research. Many **food chain businesses** depend on the supply of live animals, and as such they have the same duty of care to those

animals' health and welfare as any other animal owner. **Consumers** need to consider the implications of the choices they make in their food purchases, and retailers should facilitate this process. **Interest groups** have a role in raising awareness with policy makers and the public, but also have a responsibility to make sure the information they provide is fair and balanced.

Chapter

6

Key Strategic Themes

Traditionally the main responsibility for animal health and welfare has been assigned to, and accepted by, DARD. However, as in other industries, Government intervention can only be justified where there are strong public interest reasons to do so on behalf of society and where the market cannot on its own, deliver policy objectives. Broadly speaking therefore Government will only intervene in animal health and welfare for the following reasons:-

- **to protect human health** – a number of animal diseases are transmissible between vertebrate animals and man and it is necessary to intervene to protect the health of the public;
- **to protect the interests of the wider economy, environment and society** - some exotic diseases like FMD can spread rapidly through animal populations and the implications of these diseases appearing on

individual premises run well beyond the commercial interests of that single person or business;

- **to protect and promote the welfare of animals** – it is an appropriate role for Government to reflect society's concern about animal welfare by establishing acceptable welfare standards and enforcing these; and
- **for international trade reasons** – trade in animals and animal products is subject to internationally agreed rules including maintaining disease free status for some notifiable diseases. Government is best placed to represent interests internationally ensuring sustainable opportunities for trade.

These four basic principles are the starting point in considering intervention and underpin Government's role within a broadly agreed animal health and welfare strategy.

Key Strategic Themes

Government decision-making will be set against a set of clear principles. Such decisions will:-

- be based on sound veterinary and scientific evidence;
- ensure veterinary surveillance is targeted on agreed priority areas;
- not impose unnecessary regulation or cost on the industry;
- facilitate joined-up working between Veterinary Service and associated enforcement agencies;
- have high level monitoring arrangements;
- be consistent with EU and International obligations; and
- seek to promote NI interests within the UK and in turn within the EU and internationally.

When followed these principles of Government decision-making will lead to proportionate Government intervention in animal health and welfare. Animal owners can expect that legislation will be implemented in the most appropriate way to minimise the regulatory burden, ensuring that benefits outweigh costs and that all possible ways of achieving the desired outcomes are given full consideration before proposals for regulations are put forward.

Chapter

6

Key Strategic Themes

6.2 Key Theme 2 - Working in partnership

Historically there has been close contact between DARD and relevant industry interests and other stakeholders in developing animal health and welfare policy and in dealing with disease outbreaks. These close working partnerships were an important feature of the way in which the 2001 FMD outbreak was handled. Since then an important new initiative has been the development of the Rural Stakeholder Forum arrangements, which include a sub-group dedicated to animal health and welfare issues. Through this group the non-government stakeholders have taken the lead in developing the Biosecurity Code published in 2004 and in reviewing the Industry Codes of Practice for the Importation of Livestock.

Partnership is a fundamental underlying principle of the Strategy and is vital in achieving its aim of a sustainable future for animal health and welfare. Whilst all those with an interest in animal health and welfare must understand and accept their own responsibilities for delivering the Strategy, it is also important to recognise that so much more can be achieved by working together rather than in isolation. This does not just mean working with Government, but also stakeholder and interest groups, as well as individuals taking the initiative to work to address their own priorities.

Chapter

6

Key Strategic Themes

To this end, when developing policies, DARD will engage with all those affected industries and wider rural and environmental interests to ensure that all views are taken into account and that a balance is struck between the various interests. In addition, there is considerable scope for animal owners and veterinary surgeons to come together to identify common problems and solutions. Also it is important that groups with a common interest such as farmers, producers, processors and retailers work together to achieve shared goals such as better produce from healthy stock kept in appropriate conditions.

Chapter

6

Key Strategic Themes

6.3 Key Theme 3 – Clear understanding of costs and benefits of animal health and welfare

There are always competing calls for the use of public resources, and a range of interests in society who will be affected, positively or negatively, by Government action. There is usually a balance to be struck between the costs and benefits of Government intervention. For example, setting rules to identify animals, and to report or restrict their movements, has beneficial effects in terms of disease control, but clearly imposes costs on the livestock sector.

It is important to balance the Government's responsibility for the protection of public health, including ensuring disease free animals in the public interest, with the economic benefits to industry of high standards of animal health and welfare. There are good reasons to intervene in animal disease and its prevention but if that intervention is only or primarily in the interests of the farming community it is right in the future to expect that some or all of the costs should be borne by that community. However, one of the key components of the vision of the animal health and welfare strategy is for activities and priorities to be agreed in partnership between government and industry with the costs of livestock health over time appropriately balanced between industry and the taxpayer.

Key Strategic Themes

Some endemic diseases, such as brucellosis and Tb, impose significant costs. At present, both farmers and taxpayers bear a share of the costs of diseases and their prevention or control. Some Government costs are immediately recognisable, for example the compensation paid to farmers for culled animals; others, such as the costs of surveillance, testing, R&D, regulation and controls, are less visible but no less important. In other areas, such as environmental protection, the industry concerned is required to pay some or all of these costs, e.g. where the polluter pays principle applies.

Regulation is not the only way: sometimes Government's role might better be facilitation and communication, or contribution to research. The challenge is to seek proportionate interventions, which strike the right balance on behalf of society.

It is important that livestock keepers individually and collectively take responsibility for managing the disease risk and with that bear a share of the financial risks.

In the long run, Government would not expect to pay directly or subsidise indirectly the animal health costs and risks to farmers that affect only their own businesses. Government may have good reasons to intervene, but if that intervention is only or primarily in the interests of the farming community then it is right to expect that the costs should be borne by that community. For example, there are very good reasons why farmers should be compensated for culled animals, to encourage prompt notification, and the basic principle remains that there should be no motivation for a livestock keeper to conceal disease. However, there is no compelling argument for the costs of such compensation being borne wholly by the taxpayer.

Chapter

6

Key Strategic Themes

In many cases, Government would help and facilitate mechanisms to help farmers share in the management of animal disease risks and the associated costs. For example, it may be that there are aspects of disease control such as research into zoonoses or emerging disease problems where Governments are more able than individual farmers to put resources into activity at a meaningful level or useful scale.

Achieving a more appropriate balance between the taxpayer and the industry for the costs of animal health and welfare will not happen overnight and requires full consultation. It will also need to take full account of the economic impact on the industry of the overall burden of regulation and of cost recovery proposals in relation to future decisions.

Key Strategic Themes

6.4 Key Theme 4 - Promoting the benefits of animal health and welfare – prevention is better than cure.

The philosophy that disease 'prevention is better than cure' is fundamental to developing a sustainable food and farming industry, and to ensuring that anyone who keeps animals for any purpose meets his or her responsibilities of:-

- maintaining healthy animals;
- maintaining appropriate levels of animal welfare;
- preventing and controlling endemic diseases;
- recognizing, reporting and preventing spread of disease; and
- ensuring animal keepers and handlers have adequate levels of stockmanship and skills and competence levels as appropriate.

Disease prevention and control is too often thought of in terms of exotic disease such as FMD or endemic disease with existing control programmes such as Tb/br. There is a range of other diseases which also impact on livestock husbandry and farm profitability such as lameness and mastitis. Prevention of all these conditions leading to higher standards of animal health and welfare, will help reduce costs to both the industry and Government. Healthy animals which are appropriately cared for are likely to be higher yielding and more productive over a longer period of time.

Chapter

6

Key Strategic Themes

There are a range of activities that will help meet the key strategic theme of promoting the benefits of animal health and welfare. Each of these work areas seeks to prevent or reduce the impact of disease and poor welfare rather than incurring the costs of having to cure these problems. For example, herd health and welfare planning has been widely accepted as a proactive approach to improving health and welfare. Similarly, Veterinary Surveillance cannot be underestimated as a tool in the early detection of outbreaks of exotic disease, the identification of new disease which may have zoonotic potential, and for spotting changes in the incidence, prevalence or effects of known conditions.

These activities aim to deliver proportionate, practical and effective controls, together with non-statutory measures, that prevent or reduce the risk of the introduction or spread of diseases, in animals, which represent a danger to human health or an economic threat to the livestock industries. Pro-active use of farm health planning, via a partnership with and across the industry and veterinary profession, will also help to deliver economic benefits to the industry.

Key Strategic Themes

6.5 Key Theme 5 – Effective delivery and enforcement

It is essential that effective incentives and sanctions are in place to ensure improved standards of animal health and welfare, where the incentives or benefits to animal owners include:-

- better return for healthier animals;
- lower levels of inspection and control;
- ensuring eligibility for the single farm payment;
- consumer confidence in the safety of food; and
- reduced risk of major outbreaks of exotic disease.

The converse of this is that there are significant costs or disincentives of failure to meet responsibilities including:-

- unacceptable levels of animal disease incidence and poor animal welfare standards;
- potential disallowance of EU payments;
- poor international or consumer regard for Northern Ireland's animal health and welfare status; and
- prosecution or enforcement action.

Chapter

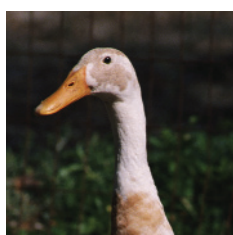
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Key Strategic Themes

For those who consistently fail to comply with animal health and welfare legislation there is a clear consequence. Enforcement action in terms of increased inspection or supervision and, if necessary prosecution, will be targeted at them.

It is clear that whatever policy initiatives are agreed between DARD and stakeholders there must be a process whereby these are consistently delivered and enforced. Animal health and welfare is an area where there has been a history of under regulation or enforcement simply because the resources have not been available. However, there is an onus on Government to ensure that regulatory requirements are effectively enforced. Animal keepers can expect that legislation will be implemented in the most appropriate way to minimise the regulatory burden while ensuring that EU and local legislation requirements are effectively applied.

Inevitably, for both animal health and welfare legislation, this will involve some degree of prioritisation to achieve an integrated system of controls and preventative measures. Government should ensure that a solid evidence base is developed to inform priorities for surveillance and enforcement activities. This needs to be complemented by industry's involvement in and acceptance of the animal health and welfare challenge they face and continue to play its full part in sharing knowledge and developing strategies to manage risk inherent in these challenges.



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