

Independent Review of Foot and Mouth Disease in Northern Ireland

June 2002 - Working Paper 2

Review of the Cross Border Aspects of the 2001 Foot
and Mouth Disease Outbreak in Northern Ireland



Foreword

This working paper was prepared by Dr Patricia Clarke of the Centre for Cross Border Studies and details the cross border aspects of the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in Northern Ireland.

Extracts of this paper were incorporated into the June 2002 PricewaterhouseCoopers Independent Review of Foot and Mouth Disease in Northern Ireland report.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The fast dissemination of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in the United Kingdom during Spring 2001 and the spread to three other EU Member States (Netherlands, France and Ireland) emphasised the vulnerability of the Irish economy, North and South. An economic evaluation of the impact of FMD in the Republic estimated that the effort to limit the spread of the disease had cost the Exchequer €210 million. It is estimated that more widespread outbreaks would have cost the Southern economy over €6 billion.

Even before the spring 2001 FMD crisis, there were compelling reasons why the authorities in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland should work together to protect and enhance the animal health status of the island. The risks of a List A disease outbreak in the EU were increasing due to the cessation of EU prophylactic mass vaccination in 1991. Changes in travel and trade patterns and in trade regulations have increased the probability of animal diseases spreading across national borders. Ironically, the success of disease control in EU animal populations has also resulted in a lack of emphasis in training veterinarians in the recognition of these now 'rare' diseases.

During the period 1990-1999 outbreaks of eight List A diseases were reported in the EU.

Table 1. Reported outbreaks of List A diseases, 1990-1999, in the EU

Disease	Outbreaks Total number	Outbreak Year(s)	Source of primary outbreak	Number of reporting Member States
Foot and mouth disease	191	93, 94, 96	outside EU	2
African swine fever	1410	90-99	inside EU	3
Classical swine fever	1377	90-99	outside + inside EU	7
Swine Vesicular disease	164	91-99	Inside EU	5
Sheep pox	195	94-98	outside EU	1
Bluetongue	1438	98, 99	outside EU	1
Avian Influenza	40	92, 94, 97-99	inside EU	3
Newcastle	669	90-99	inside EU	14

Source: Sustainable Animal Production Conference, September 2000, Germany.

Diseases must be able to travel in order to spread. By working on an all-Ireland basis, the authorities in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland can potentially utilise the natural water barrier around the island to prevent the introduction of disease into both jurisdictions. It is also clear that unless the authorities North and South of the border adopt co-ordinated disease control and eradication campaigns the efforts of individual jurisdictions will be continually frustrated.

On 13 February 2002 Bríd Rodgers, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, announced her decision to appoint PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to undertake an independent review of the spring 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in Northern Ireland. As part of this process the Centre for Cross Border studies was asked by PwC to prepare a paper on the cross-border implications of the FMD outbreak and, in particular, the extent to which North-South cooperation was effective in both preparing for, and dealing with, the disease. In particular this paper sought to address the following specific questions:

- Prior to the FMD outbreak in Northern Ireland had there been communication or co-operation of contingency plans or evidence of cohesion and practical co-operation in the formulation and communication of plans between government departments and private organisations in the North and South?
- What level of consultation between the South and North Departments/ Ministers occurred at the commencement of the crisis and during it? This should involve the provision of quantitative data in respect of the number, frequency, level and nature (ad hoc, informal, formal) of communication. Have the two Departments of Agriculture, North and South, different responsibilities thus limiting the potential for direct co-operation?
- To what extent was the North/South Ministerial Council used as a mechanism to facilitate co-operation and communication during the outbreak?
- To what extent did private organisations such as those representing farmers, processors, veterinarians etc, communicate during the crisis? Would this have been of value and should formal mechanisms to facilitate same be encouraged?
- To what extent was practical help given or received by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development from the Southern authorities, and more especially from the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural

development in the South? Could resources be combined, or drawn from the other jurisdiction in times of need?

- Did any logistical difficulties relating to security precautions, policing, monitoring, pursuit of lines of investigation, etc arise during the crisis between the two jurisdictions?
- How do the combination of all these issues impact on the value of a cohesive all-island animal health approach?

The two Agriculture Ministers, Mrs Brid Rodgers and Mr Joe Walsh, and their Departments, together with the other state agencies involved, North and South, have been credited for the skill and dedication they demonstrated in containing the spread of FMD on the island, particularly given the potentially catastrophic consequences of a widespread outbreak. However, there remains some disquiet that the human and financial fallout from FMD has only been partially dealt with. The FMD crisis has highlighted some very real lessons that need to be learnt. Now that the main threat has passed, questions need to be asked about how such joint actions can improve the effectiveness of disease prevention in the future.

This paper draws on material in a number of recently published reports. In February 2002, to coincide with the first anniversary of the outbreak of FMD, the Centre for Cross Border Studies published a report¹ on the cross border dimensions of the foot-and-mouth disease crisis in Ireland. This report was prepared following an extensive review of published material during the height of the FMD crisis, expert group discussions in Dublin and Belfast, individual interviews with 33 key players from the island and a North-South Study Day involving key people from the South's Expert Advisory Group, the farming organisations, North and South, Teagasc, veterinary and agricultural academics, border farmers, and business, rural health and local government representatives. The two Ministers of Agriculture issued a statement saying that the report's findings were "extremely valuable" and the Centre's work would "help to inform how we react should we ever have to confront crises of this sort in the future".

In April 2002 a report² on the Irish farmers experience of the FMD crisis was issued by Mr Raymond O Malley, the main Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) representative at the centre of the foot and mouth outbreak in the South, at the request of the Office International Des Epizooties (OIE). Mr O Malley is a prominent member of the IFA and has first hand experience of the facts and issues which arose following the discovery of FMD on the southern side of the border.

In addition, this paper draws on a mapping study³ of North-South agriculture which was prepared by the Centre for Cross Border Studies to aid discussions at a North-South Agriculture discussion day held in Armagh in April 2000.

2. CROSS BORDER RELATIONSHIPS

There has been much discussion in recent years about the benefits of an all-island animal health system. This issue has been highlighted by politicians, farming unions, veterinary bodies and marketing boards in a variety of different debates including the 1995 Forum on Peace and Reconciliation, the CAP reform negotiations, the British and Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body debates and the negotiations leading to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. Indeed it was following a joint presentation by the Irish Farmers' Association and the Ulster Farmers' Union at the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in March 1995 that one of Ireland's leading agricultural economists, Professor Seamus Sheehy, referred to the "lax importation restrictions which could be leaving the island open to disease such as FMD".

It is important to review the development of cross-border relationships and how they have affected the island's ability to protect itself against animal disease.

2.1 Ministerial and Departmental

As the Social Democratic and Labour Party⁴ has pointed out, prior to the Good Friday Agreement much North-South co-operation was essentially *ad hoc*: "It has lacked overall co-ordination and has not been addressed on a strategic,

¹ The Foot-and-Mouth Disease crisis and the Irish Border. Patricia Clarke, Centre for Cross Border Studies. January 2002

² Foot-and-Mouth Disease- An Irish Farmers Perspective. Raymond Malley, IFA Louth County Chairman. February 2002

³ North-South Co-operation on Agriculture and Food. A mapping Study. Ciarán Ó Maoláin, Centre for Cross Border Studies. April 2000

⁴ Social Democratic and Labour Party (1999), *Innovation, investment and social justice: a framework for economic development*, Belfast: SDLP

medium to long-term basis and still suffers the inhibiting effects of the different bureaucratic and fiscal systems that operate on both sides of the border." However agriculture has been cited as one area where there has been a long history of North-South co-operation and where cross-border relationships have been relatively well developed, with some official meetings of Agricultural Ministers, North and South.

In Dublin in October 1997 the Republic's Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Joe Walsh TD, met Lord Dubs, then Minister for Agriculture for Northern Ireland. At this meeting the ministers exchanged views on the EU Agenda 2000 proposals, agreed to maintain close contact as the debate at EU level progressed and reviewed cross-border co-operation on a range of animal health issues. In particular, both ministers undertook to consult closely on how best the EU proposals under Agenda 2000 for an intensified rural development policy could be operated by the two governments for the advancement of rural communities in Northern Ireland and in the border counties of the Republic. There were no subsequent formal meetings by the ministers until the creation of the Northern Ireland Executive in December 1999, although occasional informal contacts occurred, for example on the margins of EU meetings.

It might have been expected that cross border co-operation would be particularly welcome in relation to animal health, in that diseases do not respect political frontiers. Both jurisdictions faced similar problems in relation to BSE, bovine TB, brucellosis and pig diseases, for example, but formal contacts before 1998 appear to have been infrequent both at the operational level and among civil servants of middle or higher rank. These included visits to each other's workplaces and meetings in the context of conferences or seminars mainly organised by non-governmental bodies. For example, the Chief Veterinary Officers of each jurisdiction met once a year, and at lower levels there were adhoc contacts, usually on issues specific to border areas. Training programmes often had some cross border participation but they were not jointly planned. Contacts tended to deal with technical rather than strategic matters, which could potentially influence policy issues.

In one key agricultural sector, beef production, there was a particular reason in the 1990s for the Republic and the UK to shy away from co-operation that would have significantly benefited Northern Ireland: the EU ban on UK beef exports, prompted by the BSE crisis. Although it was often suggested that the North was suffering by being "lumped in" with Great Britain, which had a much higher incidence of the disease than either the North or the Republic, two important factors weighed against the British and Irish governments formulating a joint approach to the EU in order to have the North treated on the same terms as the Republic. From the Republic's point of view, its lower incidence of BSE allowed it to escape a ban and so gave it a competitive advantage over UK (including NI) beef exporters; in fact Northern firms were obliged to buy in Southern beef to fulfil export contracts. Meanwhile, from London's standpoint, any move to have a lower-incidence region excluded from the UK statistics would only have made the overall figures look worse. The North and South responded quite differently to the BSE problem, with the North concentrating on the development of tracking systems and technical procedures, while the most visible response in the South was high profile policing of the border to keep out Northern cattle. Even after the ban on Northern beef was lifted in June 1998 considerable ground had been lost in export markets, particularly in the Netherlands.

A paper presented by the two governments to the Multi-Party Talks in London in January 1998 summarised previous North-South co-operation to date in agriculture. In relation to animal and plant health, it was agreed there was room for expanding the co-operation that there had been on bovine disease including BSE, on illegal trade in bovine animals and their products, and on the protection of veterinary and plant health status. Other areas identified as having potential for increased co-operation were rural development; agricultural research, training and advisory services; and the development of the bloodstock industry. This paper also outlined plans to establish closer ties between the Northern and Southern agriculture ministries in the run-up to the review of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), citing a common aim to protect beef and sheep sectors. No mention was made of co-ordinating emergency plans for dealing with epizootic disease

2.1.1 Following the Good Friday Agreement

The Good Friday Agreement(GFA) proved a pivotal point in the development of agricultural relationships between the two jurisdictions. The North-South provisions of the 1998 Agreement provided for the setting up of the North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and outlined a new institutional framework and context within which co-operation between the two parts of the island is now being taken forward. Agriculture, and animal health in particular, is one of the areas agreed for co-operation where common policies and approaches are approved in the NSMC for separate implementation in each jurisdiction through the mechanism of existing bodies. The intention to strengthen this co-operation in the area of animals and plant health was also noted in the Common Chapter contained in the Northern Ireland Structural Funds Plan (2000-2006) and the National Development Plan for the Republic of Ireland (2000-2006).

Following the GFA, relationships at Ministerial level and between officials of the two Departments have been formalised and strengthened, and co-operation is being developed in a broader and more measured manner. In July 2000 an Irish Government decision established North-South co-ordination units in all Southern government departments. The Northern Ireland Departments have a more informal system, with key people in each department acting as liaison officers on North-South co-operation. In this way there are designated North-South officials in each agreed sector of co-operation and this has introduced a dynamic new way of cross-border working. Senior officials in both Departments have noted that the post-Good Friday Agreement arrangements under the auspices of the NSMC had given a new energy to existing inter-departmental contacts.

In the North, where cross-border co-operation is more of a sensitive issue, the Minister must report back to the Northern Ireland Assembly on the progress of the sector. Departmental staff, who are ultimately tasked with implementing any decisions, prepare the Minister for answering any questions from Northern Ireland Assembly members. This process is open and detailed and is published in the official Hansard records of the Assembly. While the new system is considered by civil servants to be heavily bureaucratic, with its elaborate choreography designed to ensure full transparency, it has given Ministerial backing to cross-border working practices so that people are now obliged to work together. The NSMC stress that the level of bureaucracy is not dissimilar to other EU arrangements and that the high level of documentation ultimately lends itself to a better process.

The objective of the North South Ministerial Council is to progress from agreed principles of co-operation to the reality of working co-operatively against a background of mutual agreement. This involves co-ordinating two systems (North and South) that are operating at two different levels (EU region and EU member state), something that takes enormous effort to make happen in an effective, co-ordinated way. The NSMC's unique procedures, under which a Northern nationalist minister like Mrs Rodgers is 'shadowed' by a unionist minister at all North-South meetings, appear to have legitimised the option of working on a cross-border basis towards an all-Ireland animal health policy.

An added benefit of NSMC arrangements is the formalisation of cross-border links at ministerial level between the agricultural sector and the environmental sectors which should ensure that the environmental impact of agricultural measures are addressed within new agricultural policy. On 23 October 2000 the Northern Agricultural Minister, Mrs Brid Rodgers, accompanied the then Northern Minister of the Environment, Mr Sam Foster, to a NSMC Environment Sector meeting in Navan. At this meeting it was agreed that a scoping study, including an inventory of relevant environmental management practices and controls currently applied to agriculture, North and South, be undertaken.

During the FMD crisis there was much discussion about possible sites for the disposal of animals pending a large-scale outbreak of FMD on the island. Thankfully a solution was never needed to this issue but it highlighted the need for a cross-sectoral solution to any future emergency. It is not known whether discussions regarding the identification of a disposal site are still continuing with a view to updating current contingency plans.

In the words of the joint heads of the NSMC "the North-South Ministerial Council injects process and prioritisation which ensures that issues are addressed regularly at political and strategic level. In essence, in a world of ever competing priorities animal health issues will not be allowed to drop off the agenda."

2.1.2 NSMC meetings in Agricultural Sector format

To date the two Ministers of Agriculture have held six North/South Ministerial Council meetings in agriculture sectoral format, including a meeting specifically devoted to dealing with the FMD crisis. These meetings reflect the progress of North-South departmental relationships at key points in time. However the NSMC points out that there is a myriad of activity between the meeting dates during which decisions taken at these meetings are being implemented.

In December 1999 Minister Walsh met Mrs Bríd Rodgers, then Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development of Northern Ireland, on her first visit to the Republic as Minister. The two Ministers agreed to intensify existing co-operation between their two Departments and to establish a formal framework to make that co-operation more effective in the future.

In November 2000 the NSMC endorsed proposals to formalise liaison arrangements at official level on animal health matters. A Strategic Steering Group was established to co-ordinate animal health policy on the island and this group would make regular reports to the NSMC on animal health co-operation together with recommendations for policy and/or operational decisions. In addition, eight civil service Policy Working Groups were established to consider animal health issues which would apply to the whole island. The eight working areas included:

1. Import/export of live animals and their products, and all EU matters in the veterinary/animal health field of interest to the two Departments

2. Bovine TB/brucellosis
3. TSEs (e.g. BSE in cattle and Scrapie in sheep)
4. Veterinary medicines
5. Zoonoses and Exotic/Novel Diseases (i.e. animal diseases that are transmittable to humans)
6. Animal welfare
7. Animal health schemes
8. Disease surveillance

The Council also requested that the new Strategic Steering Group prepare an initial report on animal health on the island of Ireland with a view to the development by March 2002 of joint strategies for the improvement of animal health on both sides of the border. The Strategic Steering Group and the Policy Working Groups are composed solely of senior civil servants. However following the FMD outbreak a limited input from key players in farming organisations, North and South, has been sought.

Therefore, when FMD was discovered in the UK there was already a formal commitment from the two Departments, and dedicated structures in place, to develop an all-Ireland animal health strategy.

Special FMD meeting

A special meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council was held in Dublin on 6 April 2001, over six weeks after FMD had been discovered in the UK. This meeting was exclusively devoted to the FMD crisis and the efforts to combat its spread on the island of Ireland. Officials agreed that sustained co-operation between the two administrations was essential to reduce the risk of the further spread of the disease. It was also agreed that the two Departments would:

- develop a strategy for the control of animal movements on the island of Ireland, drawing on work done in both jurisdictions; and
- in light of the experience gained from the FMD outbreaks, consider the means of prevention, containment and eradication of future epizootic outbreaks on the island.

On 11 September 2001 both Ministers of Agriculture met again (but not under NSMC format) to review various aspects of the FMD situation against the backdrop of the risk posed to the island of Ireland by the continuing incidence of FMD in Britain. Both Ministers stressed their joint commitment to ensuring that port and airport FMD controls were fully maintained and effective. They recognised the need for intensified North-South collaboration in preventing a re-occurrence of FMD on the island, especially in terms of improved animal identification and the monitoring and control of animal movements. Importantly, both Ministers stated that co-operation was essential not only to reflect the interdependence of effective controls in addressing FMD but also to maintain the necessary level of mutual confidence in such controls on the part of the administrations and the general public in both jurisdictions.

To-date the NSMC in agriculture sector format have held three further meetings, in October 2001, January 2002 and April 2002, where the progress of the Strategic Steering Group and the Policy Working Groups has been reviewed. Tackling the FMD crisis provided both Departments with an opportunity to test their existing animal health plans and to discover what is realistic when it comes to dealing with animal health issues on the island. In light of this experience plans for an all-Ireland animal health system were revised in a number of ways.

The initial reports on the status of animal health being prepared by the Strategic Steering group were revisited to provide a more realistic assessment of animal health issues on the island from which to plan joint strategies. A ninth Policy Working Group was established to consider the cross-border dimension of fraud. The difficulties in progressing this work due to the FMD crisis were noted and the timetable for developing joint strategies has been revised forwards from March 2002 to December 2002. The FMD crisis has renewed the impetus for the NSMC to vigorously pursue animal health issues co-operatively. As the joint heads of the NSMC point out, "if the NSMC did not exist, then it would now have to be invented". The major lesson of the FMD crisis for the NSMC was the obvious co-dependency of both agriculture systems and the continued importance of animal health issues as an area for cross-border co-operation.

In a significant statement following the last NSMC meeting in April 2002, the Council agreed that the foundations had now been set for an all-island animal health strategy. Joint action plans have been agreed for each of the nine Policy Working Groups. A common approach has been adopted by both administrations in relation to internal movement controls on animals and bio-security measures for those involved in agriculture and related industries. Progress has been made in aligning controls applied to imports of animals and animal products by both

administrations at all points of entry into the island. This represents a major development in the quest to produce a workable, all-island animal health strategy by December 2002.

2.1.3 NSMC and emergency situations

It is important to reflect on the extent to which the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) was used as a mechanism to facilitate co-operation and communication during the outbreak. There is no doubt that there was a measurable impact in and across the two jurisdictions of having the Good Friday Agreement institutions and procedures in place.

The history of practical co-operation between the two Departments of Agriculture was referred to on numerous occasions throughout the FMD crisis. Both Ministers, Mrs Brid Rodgers and Mr Joe Walsh, stressed that the links between their departments, now formalised under the auspices of the NSMC, had facilitated a high level of co-operation and were very important for the long term maintenance of animal health on the island. Following the FMD crisis both Ministers have repeatedly referred to the tangible benefits of close North-South co-operation in avoiding the “dire consequences that could have been for the island’s industries and rural communities”.

During a Northern Ireland Assembly debate on 5 March 2001, Minister Rodgers was asked if the absence of NSMC meetings had inhibited her officials from dealing with FMD as effectively as possible. She stated that the links with the South’s Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (DAFRD) were very important for the long-term maintenance of animal health on the island. On the issue of short-term solutions, however, she said that no NSMC meeting had been held in the middle of the crisis for the simple reason that it would have been “daft” for officials to spend time preparing the papers necessary for setting up such a meeting when they should be dealing with the emergency in a practical manner.

The joint secretaries of the NSMC echoed this statement, agreeing that “the NSMC has not been established to deal with emergency situations and that while strategic decision making should be done at the NSMC level, operational plans should be agreed at the Departmental level”.

2.2 Producers

In the main cross-border co-operation has developed between producers and/ or organisations of similar size and stature on both sides of the border.

2.2.1 The Ulster Farmers Union and the Irish Farmers Association

Cross-border relationships between the two main farmers unions on the island, the Ulster Farmers Union (UFU) in the North and the Irish Farmers’ Association (IFA) in the South, can be traced back as far as 1955 when the UFU was represented at the founding conference of the National Farmers’ Association (the IFA’s predecessor).

Bilateral meetings at senior officer level take place two or three times a year. The commodity specialists in the UFU are in frequent conversation with their IFA opposite numbers. There is also frequent contact on sectoral issues between lower-ranking officials. There are occasional joint conferences and seminars on specific issues such as mushroom farming, animal health and so on.

The IFA and UFU participate in East-West meetings with the National Farmers’ Union (NFU) and the Scottish Farmer’ Union (SFU), and in European forums. The IFA and the UFU have usually taken similar positions, albeit independently, on EU and World Trade Organisation matters affecting the farming industry. Indeed, it was said during the 1999 Dáil debate on the British-Irish Agreement Bill that the UFU had, for years, usually been closer to the Republic’s position in EU negotiations than it had been to that of the British Minister of Agriculture. The UFU’s perception of a common interest with the Republic, as representing producer regions rather than consumer society in Great Britain, underlay its expression of disappointment at the suspension of the Northern Executive in February 2000.

There are regular examples of the two main farming unions working jointly to enhance their competitiveness and efficiency. For instance, in 1995 the leadership of the UFU and the IFA made a joint presentation at the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin. In July 1999 the two bodies held day-long talks at UFU headquarters in Belfast. Matters discussed included implementation of the CAP reform decisions, allocation of the national envelope in the beef sector, a co-ordinated approach on TB and brucellosis, and slaughter issues which were to be the subject of further cross border talks involving the unions and the relevant authorities.

Following the FMD outbreak the two main farming unions have extended their cross-border commitments into a joint programme of work on animal health issues. On 3 April 2001, just over a month after the Meigh outbreak,

the UFU and the IFA met to consider co-ordination of their policies. They called jointly for an "island of Ireland" approach to animal health, and for the branding of animal food products as of "Ireland origin", whether produced in Northern Ireland or the Republic. The North-South Food Safety Promotion Board has welcomed the decision by the IFA and the UFU to establish a new joint, North-South working committee in the livestock and sheep areas to pursue the highest possible animal health status for the island of Ireland.

In April 2001, the food marketing agencies, North and South, also welcomed the moves by the IFA and the UFU towards an all-Ireland approach to promoting farm produce. In 2000, Northern Industrial Development Board and the Southern Bord Bia jointly promoted specialty food at a New York food fair under the logo "Ireland – the Food Island." Mr Phelim O'Neill, marketing manager with the NI Livestock & Meat Commission, welcomed any future promotion where it was mutually beneficial and where political sensitivities were taken into account.

Representatives from the UFU animal health committee met with their counterparts from the IFA on 24 October 2001 to discuss a wide range of issues relating to cross-border animal health. In the wake of the FMD crisis the two farming organisations say they are particularly anxious to ensure that bio-security on the island is maintained at its highest level. At this meeting the two unions exchanged knowledge and expertise on tackling the sources and spread of TB and brucellosis; reviewed the BSE situation, which is having a negative impact on the profitability of the beef sector in both jurisdictions; and agreed to work together to resist the "unnecessary and additional regulations" outlined in the recent EU Commission proposal that all veterinary medicines for food producing animals should be made prescription only.

In April 2002 the new IFA President, John Dillion, met UFU leaders in Belfast for the first time since his election in December 2001. Animal health and sheep identification were two of the main items on the agenda. Both the IFA and the UFU continue to voice their approval for an all-Ireland approach to animal health.

2.2.2 Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association (NIAPA), Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA) and Irish Cattle Traders & Stock Owners Association (ICSA)

Just as the UFU relates on a cross border basis to the IFA, Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association (NIAPA) relates to its nearest equivalent in the South - the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association (ICMSA), which is the smaller of the two main Southern farming unions. The ICMSA and NIAPA have had strong links for many years, and have launched a North-South forum to promote the interests of farm families in all parts of Ireland. The forum, which meets three or four times a year at executive-to-executive and council-to-council level, deals with the larger policy issues, while commodity committees of the ICMSA and NIAPA are in constant contact on specific matters. In 2000 the 50th anniversary meeting of the ICMSA was attended by a senior NIAPA delegation and was also to have been attended by both agriculture ministers, had the Northern Executive not been suspended.

NIAPA also meets from time to time with the IFA and other bodies, and in principle it is committed to working with any Southern organisation, and with farmers' organisations elsewhere, on matters of common concern. For instance, in recent years NIAPA has been in regular contact with the Irish Cattle Traders & Stock Owners Association in the South. In 2000 the chairperson of NIAPA addressed the ICSA annual general meeting on the potential for cross border collaboration and the two organisations continue to exchange information and ideas.

2.3 The co-operative sector

The Ulster Agricultural Organisation Society (UAOS) and the much larger Irish Co-operative Organisation Society (ICOS) have established a North-South secretariat; training courses for co-operative directors and managers are run jointly, and a North-South co-operative development officer has been appointed. Both societies are members of COGECA, the EU confederation of agricultural co-operative organisations (ICOS directly, and the UAOS via the Federation of Agricultural Co-operatives (UK) Ltd).

A round of mergers in the Southern co-operative sector in the 1990s was accompanied by a substantial penetration of Northern Ireland and British markets by businesses such as Dairygold, Golden Vale and Glanbia. Lakeland Dairies, one of the largest dairy co-ops in the Republic, is based in Cavan and operates in Northern Ireland through a wholly-owned subsidiary, Lakeland Dairies (NI) Ltd. Town of Monaghan Co-op has become one of the biggest players in Northern Ireland, taking approximately 8 per cent of the milk pool, and Donegal Creameries also have a significant presence.

The Northern Ireland Animal Welfare and Quality Assurance Code of Practice is supported by two co-operatives in the Republic (Donegal Co-op and Town of Monaghan Co-op) alongside the Department of Agriculture and Rural

Development, the UFU, NIAPA, United Dairy Farmers Ltd and the Northern Ireland Dairy Association, together with three Northern Ireland co-ops.

2.4 Veterinary level

In the past there were limited formal contacts between the veterinary professional bodies in the North and the South. This was partly due to the different veterinary structures in place in both jurisdictions. Northern Ireland veterinary officers belong to the North of Ireland Veterinary Association (NIVA), the Northern Ireland branch of the British Veterinary Association, or (if they have entered the Service from private practice) the Association of Veterinary Surgeons Practicing in Northern Ireland (AVSPNI) or the British Small Animal Veterinary Association Northern Ireland Region. In January 2001 four of the five⁵ main veterinary bodies in the Republic of Ireland merged to form one body: Veterinary Ireland. The Irish Veterinary Officers Association (VOA), which represents vets employed by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (DAFRD) in the South, is still considering whether it will also become part of this unified veterinary body.

In the past the lack of a direct equivalent of the VOA in the North has limited the opportunities for formal exchange. However individual vets from the North have always participated in the VOA's conferences. The March 2000 VOA conference was addressed by several DARD officials and by an official of the North-South Food Safety Promotion Board. The April 2002 VOA conference included Dr Jim Scudamore, Chief Veterinary Officer, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, London as a guest speaker. As a result of informal contacts in the working environment, there are social and sporting contacts among the veterinary officers in both jurisdictions and there are numerous links between the various associations for vets in private practice.

Following the change in the veterinary structures in the Republic in January 2001, new North-South links have been pursued. Representatives from the two main veterinary bodies in the North, the AVSPNI and the NIVA, met with officials from Veterinary Ireland in June 2001 to discuss the possibility of forging closer links between the veterinary bodies on the island. It is generally accepted that the main veterinary policies in both jurisdictions are very similar, with the majority of policy decisions being taken at EU level. It is the manner in which these policies are interpreted and practically implemented which see differences emerge.

One possibility discussed at this meeting was that of Veterinary Ireland becoming 'Veterinary All-Ireland', with vets from Northern Ireland becoming associate members of the Southern organisation. When the Veterinary Ireland animal health committee, one of five interest groups in the new Southern veterinary structure, was being established in early 2000, the president of the NIVA accepted an invitation to become a member, thus ensuring that its discussions would benefit from a Northern perspective. However, this committee was not active during the FMD crisis.

Veterinary Ireland's animal health committee has since identified a number of areas on which it will focus its attention over the coming months:

- examining ways of maintaining high animal health standards in a market which allows free movement of animals between countries;
- updating policy in relation to BSE, tuberculosis, brucellosis and other major diseases;
- promoting research that will develop a database of 'normal' or 'background' disease levels in the Irish animal population.

The enlargement of the EU in 2004, which will see 10 new countries joining, is expected to see a greater reliance on the veterinary profession to control animal diseases within its boundaries. It is inevitable that this will accelerate the drive to co-ordinate the activities of the profession within the EU and may in turn facilitate the move to a co-ordinated veterinary approach on the island.

2.5 Food safety bodies

Over the past 20 years there have been numerous food safety crises in Ireland, ranging from scares over botulism, listeria, salmonella, e-coli and new variant CJD to the more recent concerns over genetically modified foods. In the British context many of these same crises are considered to have been badly handled, with contradictory positions by manufacturers, consumer groups, the medical profession and government spokesmen and no-one attempting to co-ordinate advice, policy or activity.

⁵ On 1 January 2001 the Irish Veterinary Association, the Irish Veterinary Union, the Irish Companion Animal Veterinary Association and the Veterinary Officers Association merged to form Veterinary Ireland.

At the EU level, food safety has been moved into the Consumer Protection Directorate, DG XXIV, and during 1999 new independent food agencies were created in the Republic of Ireland and in the UK. These bodies, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and the Food Standards Agency, remain in existence, as do the various enforcement agencies in Northern Ireland. There is likely to be extensive East-West and North-South co-operation and information exchange among those bodies.

The designation of food safety as a priority area for cross border implementation work was at least partly a reflection of the trend in the UK, Ireland and elsewhere to transfer the control of food safety away from agriculture-oriented bodies to consumer-oriented ones.

The Food Safety Promotion Board (FSPB) was established in 2000 as one of the six North-South 'implementation bodies' under the auspices of the Good Friday Agreement. The FSPB is principally charged with tasks involving food safety awareness – campaigns, conferences, training and advising professionals and the general public. It is also involved in supporting North-South scientific co-operation, and in links between institutions working in the field of food safety – laboratories, statutory food safety enforcement agencies, international and domestic research bodies. Its remit includes the promotion of specialised laboratory services in both Irish jurisdictions.

Like other North-South bodies, this board's establishment and operation has been hampered by political differences within the Northern Ireland Executive, but also, ironically, by the impact of FMD-induced restrictions on non-agricultural activities (i.e. during the height of the FMD crisis all cross-border organisations cancelled their meetings). The direct risks from FMD to the safety of food sold to the public are negligible, but those illegal cross-border practices which the FMD crisis has highlighted do represent potentially major risks. The only effective policy to minimise or eliminate such risks would be an all-island policy.

Food safety is intimately linked to human health and in the case of zoonosis (i.e. any animal disease that can be transmitted to humans such as FMD) to animal health. The surveillance of animal health status on the island is currently controlled by the two Departments of Agriculture. At the moment the Republic of Ireland produces an annual zoonosis report which features statistics on animal health, human disease and food safety. Similar statistics from Northern Ireland are collated on a UK-wide basis and are not published in regional format.

The veterinary profession in Ireland, North and South, is prepared to play a major role in relation to assurance schemes for all food of animal origin produced in Ireland. Veterinary Ireland is proposing that veterinary practitioners in the South assume responsibility for on-farm inspections in 2002 for the National Beef Assurance Scheme in conjunction with TB and brucellosis rounds, pending agreement with the Southern Department of Agriculture. In the UK a call was made for a similar assurance programme for sheep following the recent controversy over scrapie in flocks there.

2.6 Limitations

The government departments with lead roles in respect of agriculture and food, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in the North and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (DAFRD) in the South, are broadly similar in the two jurisdictions. Both lead departments have administrative, policy and regulatory roles in respect of agricultural education, advice and research, rural development, agricultural production, animal and plant health, and food industries. The main areas of divergence include:

- in relation to the North, the overarching role of the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in negotiating and implementing UK-wide and EU agriculture and food schemes;
- responsibility for forestry and fisheries, which remains with the Agriculture Department (DARD) in the North, but in the South has been transferred to the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources (DMNR).

Minister Rodgers stated at the SDLP conference on 10 November 2001 that she would be pushing very strongly to have fisheries listed as an area of North South co-operation as soon as possible. Indeed, DARD has recently developed closer working relationships with the fishery bodies in the South and has agreed a programme of grants for North-South work in this area.

A more serious concern in terms of an all-island animal health strategy is the need for East-West co-operation. As a recent Democratic Dialogue report ⁶(1999) points out, barring a reform of the EU itself, EU-level co-operation and thus animal health issues are essentially an East-West rather than a North-South issue:

⁶ Democratic Dialogue. *No Frontiers. North-South integration in Ireland*. 1999.

The [British-Irish] agreement refers ('strand two', §17) to arrangements being made to ensure the views of the NSMC [North-South Ministerial Council] "are taken into account and represented appropriately at relevant EU meetings". But of course the union is based on the member-states, so whatever 'views' the NSMC might have could, as things stand, only be conveyed to meetings of the Council of Ministers, for example, via the representatives of the UK or the Republic. This would be likely, in practice, to mean the governments in Dublin and London coming to a policy agreement to express a common view.

Any moves to protect the animal health status of the island will inevitably impinge on the relationships between Northern Ireland and Britain. This may meet with resistance from the large supermarket chains such as that evoked by the implementation of the ban on animal and animal products from Britain into the North during the FMD crisis. In addition, while the producers and exporters are keen to explore new avenues of working on the island, one of the commonly cited constraints to co-operation at a strategic or policy level is that they are competitors in many markets.

3. KEY FACTORS

There were a number of key factors which influenced the immediate decision of the two administrations on whether to adopt an all-Ireland approach to the 2001 FMD outbreak.

3.1 Importance of devolved administration

The 1998 Good Friday Agreement saw administrative power being devolved to Belfast and the establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive. Devolution has benefited cross-border relationships in two main ways: it has led to the creation of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and the associated North-South structures, but it has also created the freedom for Northern Ireland to explore new avenues of opportunity that simply could not have been contemplated in a Direct Rule situation. During the FMD crisis the Northern Ireland devolved government did not look towards London for direction, as certainly would have happened under Direct Rule, but largely took its own decisions.

The most important decision taken by the devolved administration in Northern Ireland during the FMD crisis was the ban on 'imports' of animal and animal products from Britain to the North from 21 February. This effectively stopped the clock and allowed the island's agricultural authorities to take control of tackling the crisis. This was the first high profile example of Northern Ireland's new ability to make its own decisions, allowing the North to deal with the outbreak in a way that suited them best. The Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs. Brid Rodgers, said in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 5 March that this ban had attracted considerable criticism from Britain because of the trade implications involved. Speaking following a luncheon with members of the Association of European journalists in Belfast on 28 January 2002, Bríd Rodgers said that she "was in no doubt that a Direct Rule Minister would have found it virtually impossible to sanction such a move and that he/she would certainly not have been able to maintain this position for any appreciable length of time".

This initial ban influenced the EU decision to grant regionalisation status to Northern Ireland (firstly on 3 April 2001 and again on 7 June 2001) and has set an important precedent for achieving separate status from Britain in the campaign to remove the current ban on Northern beef exports. Over the past three years accumulated cases of BSE are greater in the North. However the present position is that cases are currently running higher in the South.

It is important to note that to a large extent the Northern Ireland administration has autonomy over animal health issues. As one DARD official has pointed out, Northern Ireland has its own Chief Veterinary Officer while the rest of the UK has one Chief Veterinary Officer to cover England, Scotland and Wales. Indeed, the President of the Scottish National Farmers Union, Mr Jim Walker, while acknowledging the importance of any devolved administration in shortening lines of communication, highlighted the fact that unlike Northern Ireland the Scottish state veterinary service was still answerable to the central administration in England. While policy decisions were made by the Scottish Minister, their implementation was delayed by having to check with the central UK authorities.

3.2 Origins of the outbreak

When FMD was last recorded in Britain in 1967, the Republic of Ireland adopted a "fortress Ireland" policy – closing borders and stopping most travel to and from Britain. This would not have been a feasible response in response in 2001 with open EU markets, over 800 trucks per day arriving in Ireland, North and South and over 14,000 people per day arriving at the island's airports.

The lack of clear information on the origin of the FMD outbreak in the UK was a key factor for both the Northern and the South administrations in deciding whether to adopt an all-Ireland approach to defending the island against the spread of FMD.

On 21 February 2001 after discussions with London and Brussels, the Northern Ireland Minister for Agriculture, Mrs. Rodgers, agreed that Northern Ireland should be included in an EU plan to impose a temporary (7 day) prohibition on intra-community and third country trade in live animals, meat, milk and other products from the UK. This decision was based entirely on the realities of the situation in which Northern Ireland found itself. Northern Ireland had no veterinary grounds to claim that it should be exempt from an UK-wide ban and any attempt to distance itself might have tarnished Northern Ireland's prospects of achieving subsequent regional status. When FMD was confirmed in pigs in Essex, it was far from clear as to the source of that infection. Northern Ireland pigs had passed through the establishment in question at the relevant time, so it was possible that it was they that were the source of the infection. Moreover, there was every possibility that FMD had already been unwittingly imported into Northern Ireland (as turned out to be the case). Newspaper reports highlighted worries that other imports of livestock from Scotland to Northern Ireland might have been in contact with infected animals. In particular, there were rumours circulating that sheep from these consignments had been sold in Swatragh mart in Co. Derry on 14 February.

Following the confirmation of FMD in the UK, there were a number of calls made for the two administrations to adopt an all-Ireland "fortress approach" to dealing with FMD. DARD officials stress that by the time the IFA made its call on 22 February, the FMD virus had already been imported some three days previously so such a call came too late. If DARD had made the assumption that the FMD virus had not been imported and had not adopted the approaches it did, there is little doubt that the outcome would have been much worse for both jurisdictions.

DAFRD officials in Dublin say inclusion of Northern Ireland in the EU prohibition order effectively ruled out any possibility of adopting an all-Ireland approach. Instead, the Departments of Agriculture in the two jurisdictions worked separately but with a high level of cross-border co-operation.

3.3 Location of FMD outbreaks on the island

The location of the first FMD outbreak in Northern Ireland close to the border at Meigh in South Armagh on 1 March 2001 and the subsequent outbreak at Proleek in County Louth on 22 March 2001 meant that the cross-border aspects of the crisis were at the forefront of the responses of both administrations, North and South. Following the confirmation of FMD at Meigh, an exclusion zone which extended across the border into County Louth was put in place. This exclusion zone had been in place for three weeks before FMD was confirmed in Louth. The attention of the media at the onset of the FMD outbreak was almost immediately directed at the border region and any differences in the approaches of the two administrations were publicly scrutinised.

4. RESPONSES TO THE FMD OUTBREAK

Contingency plans for dealing with FMD in the two jurisdictions were approved by a European Commission decision (93/455/EEC) in July 1993, and both jurisdictions had recently updated their plans as part of routine business. The FMD Contingency Plan for Northern Ireland as a region of the UK was drawn up in 1991 and updated in 1996. On 23 October 2000 Divisional Veterinary Offices in Northern Ireland were requested to update their epizootic disease dossiers. As part of routine contingency planning, all local Divisional Veterinary Officers were asked to check their FMD supplies on 18 January 2001. A FMD training exercise had been held in April 1999 and was attended by the DARD epidemiology team and one veterinary officer from each of the 10 Divisional Veterinary Offices in the North. The FMD contingency plan for the Republic of Ireland was last updated in May 2000 when a two day training course involving 47 DAFRD vets was held.

4.1 Resources

Both Departments attempted to recruit as many staff as possible to assist in efforts to prevent and control FMD. Within each department all available personnel were re-deployed to deal with FMD-related duties and additional staff were recruited from other relevant departments, such as the Rivers Agency and the Forestry Agency in the North and the Customs Service and the Department of the Environment in the South. At the time of the FMD outbreak there were approximately 482 vets employed by the two departments. In both jurisdictions additional private vets were recruited on a temporary basis to provide local knowledge and advice at a local level. In Northern Ireland private veterinary practitioners were employed only after the outbreaks in Ardboe, Co. Tyrone and Cushendall, Co. Antrim were confirmed. They were not employed in Meigh.

Separate epidemiological expertise was available to both Departments. In the South, DAFRD deployed the resources of the Veterinary Epidemiology and Tuberculosis Investigation Unit in University College Dublin, a unit it had established and funded since 1985. The DARD Veterinary Service maintains an epidemiology team, comprising a group of

veterinary officers under the management of the Divisional Veterinary Officer (Epidemiology). This group meets bi-monthly with the express purpose of updating its members on epizootic disease.

The major difference between the Departments of Agriculture North and South was that of resources to police the bans on movement. In the North security has not been devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive. This meant that the involvement of the police and army in the FMD controls in the North was the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. In contrast, in the South the Garda Síochána was deployed at 141 border crossings, at ports, and at the boundaries of the restricted zones. Gardaí throughout the country were involved in the enforcement of animal movement restrictions. At one stage, 20% of the Garda Síochána's manpower resources were devoted exclusively to FMD control measures at a cost of £44million Irish pounds. Irish Defence Forces personnel assisted in the establishment and manning of checkpoints and also in the tracking and culling of feral goats and deer in the cull area (Cooley Peninsula).

The initial involvement of the police and army in the North was much more limited. Seven officers from the RUC's police liaison teams were deployed in DARD HQ in Belfast and two in Local Epizootic Disease Control Centres. Following the outbreak in Ardboe, Co. Tyrone on 13 April, 253 troops were deployed in building pyres, loading animals for rendering, advising on potential deep burial sites and provided mapping and imagery support in the form of aerial photographs. DARD has referred to the difficulties faced by the RUC and the army in carrying out FMD duties due to the terrorist threat in some of the infected areas, particularly in south Armagh. However DARD denies that it was unable to police the border because of security concerns and stresses that its priority was the control of ports and airports, neither of which required police or army presence. The South Armagh Farmers and Residents Committee expressed their concerns that army personnel, who had been flown in from England where FMD crisis was rampant, were continuing to patrol the South Armagh border region and could potentially pose a risk of inadvertently spreading FMD within the area. In both jurisdictions the police were involved in investigating criminal activity in relation to illegal animal movements and the illegal entry of animals on to the island.

There was early recognition by the Departments of Agriculture, North and South, of the need to mobilise the support of the general public, whose co-operation was vital in tackling with the threat of FMD. The media, North and South, proved to be a crucial resource in communicating the official departmental messages to people on the ground and in informing the public of the consequences for the island if FMD was allowed to spread. Indeed interviewees said that the sensationalist coverage of the FMD crisis by the UK media reinforced determination by both the Departments of Agriculture and the media themselves in both jurisdictions to avoid a similar problem in Ireland. In the South, Minister Walsh and his officials held daily press conferences at which they openly addressed journalists' questions and updated the media on the day's events. This process halted the continuous stream of questions being directed to DAFRD and freed up DAFRD personnel to work on other areas. There was no similar arrangement in the North.

4.2 Structures

A number of structures were put in place in both jurisdictions which proved effective in dealing with the FMD crisis.

4.2.1 Central and Local Disease control centres

A main co-ordinating centre and local centers for controlling FMD were established in both jurisdictions. In the case of Northern Ireland these centres are known as the Central Epizootic Disease Control Centre (CEDCC) and the Local Epizootic Disease Control Centres (LEDCC). In the South they are known as the National Disease Control Centre (NDCC) and the Local Disease Control Centres (LDCC). While the proposed work of these structures was broadly similar, there were marked differences in their application.

Following the initial outbreak of FMD in Britain, the CEDCC was set up in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Belfast HQ on 23 February as a precautionary measure. In the South the NDCC, which is established on a permanent basis at the Veterinary Service HQ in Dublin, was put into full operational mode on 28 February.

In the North LEDCCs were officially set up in each Divisional Veterinary Office (DVO) area where a FMD outbreak had occurred and only after FMD had been confirmed, although DARD stresses that DVOs were acting unofficially as LEDCCs before being officially designated as such once outbreaks were confirmed. Thus local centres were established in Newry DVO on 28 February, in Dungannon DVO on 13 April and in Ballymena DVO on 15 April.

In contrast, following the upgrading of the central facility to full operational mode, all 27 District Veterinary Offices in the Republic were instructed to set up LDCCs as a precautionary measure. Thus when the first FMD outbreak occurred in Meigh in South Armagh on 1 March, a LDCC was already in operation in Co. Louth. On 2 March the activities of this LDCC were transferred to a local hotel which was closer to the restricted zone. The

facilities of a local sports club were taken over by the LDCC for use as a disinfection point for staff returning from visits to farms.

These centres in both jurisdictions provided a focal point for local activities, ensuring that there was a link between what was happening at departmental and ground levels. The mapping of exclusion zones, the manning of checkpoints and the issuing of licences for movements of vehicles and personnel within the infected zones were managed through these centres.

In the South it was widely felt that decisions were made and enforced by people who knew the locality. In contrast, one of the main criticisms from the Northern farming community was the communication deficit between the Department and people on the ground. This gap was bridged to a considerable extent by the main farming union in the North, the Ulster Farmers' Union, which developed strong relationships both with the Department and with the farmers on the ground.

The local centres in the border region provided excellent opportunities for exchanging operational knowledge on a North/South basis. A team of veterinary officers from the Republic's Veterinary Service attended a three-hour workshop organised by DARD in the northern LEDCC in Newry within days of the nearby Meigh outbreak. Ideas and information were exchanged at this meeting and a return visit was subsequently made to the southern LDCC in the local hotel in Co. Louth. These exchange visits were seen as routine practice by department officials in both jurisdictions.

4.2.2 High Level Task Forces (Inter-Departmental Co-ordinating Committees)

In both jurisdictions, high level inter-departmental groups were established to co-ordinate all the efforts involved and to assess developments and new issues as they arose.

The Irish Government's group, which was convened on 28 February, initially met daily at 8:30 am. It was chaired by the Taoiseach, Mr. Ahern, and included Ministers from all the relevant government departments: the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources, the Department of Finance, the Department of Public Enterprise, the Department of the Environment and Local Government, plus senior representatives from the Garda, the Defence Forces, and the Revenue and Customs services. This group was able to agree on actions before the start of the working day and proved to be a timely and effective method of co-ordinating actions across departments.

In the North, immediately after the first FMD case was identified, Minister Rodgers established under her personal Chairmanship, an interdepartmental group of senior officials including at least two Permanent Secretaries, drawn from all Northern Ireland Departments and from the Northern Ireland Office, to co-ordinate the efforts against the spread of the disease. This group quickly set about producing guidelines for farmers and other rural dwellers, schools, hospitals, occupants of public buildings throughout Northern Ireland and for the wider general public. The group met for the first time on 3 March and subsequently twice a week for several weeks, thereafter moving to weekly meetings and later still to an ad hoc basis when necessary. Early issues considered by the group included the major ice hockey fixtures at the Odyssey Arena in Belfast and the North West 200 motor cycle race. The group also provided regular and frequent reports to the Executive and other briefing material as necessary.

Separately, the Executive established a second inter-departmental group called the Ministerial Group which was chaired by a senior official from the Office of the First Minister/ Deputy First Minister, to consider the wider implications of the disease outbreak. This group also included senior officials from most departments as well as the Local Enterprise Development Unit and the Tourist Board. Its agenda was to monitor actions taken in Great Britain by the FMD Task Force and to consider their application to Northern Ireland. It met for the first time on 30 March. The group produced an information leaflet with details of the rate relief scheme for business affected by FMD and other measures aimed at offering assistance to those who had suffered economically from the restrictions imposed as a result of the disease.

4.2.3 Expert Advisory Group

On 9 March the Republic's Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Mr Walsh, established an Expert Advisory Group to consider the range of controls already in place and to make recommendations on adapting them as the situation unfolded. This group, which was chaired by the Professor of Large Animal Medicine at UCD, Professor Micheal Monaghan, included Irish experts in the fields of veterinary science, biotechnology, animal research, and epidemiology, plus senior civil servants from DAFRD. The first task of this group was to draw up guidelines for high-risk groups and controls to allow low-risk events to recommence.

Special advice was also given by the Expert Advisory Group in relation to travel to and from FMD-infected areas. Risk-based assessment techniques were used to draw up a series of stringent protocols for the eventual resumption

of certain activities such as horse-racing. This group's practical and soundly-based recommendations reflected the high level of technical and professional expertise of its membership. The establishment of this group was hailed by many as a master stroke by the Southern Minister. In effect, it allowed the Department to avail of sound scientific advice removed from the usual constraints of politics.

4.3 Processes

Once again, the processes employed in both jurisdictions were broadly similar. In 1991 the EU adopted an official policy of slaughtering infected and contact animals of susceptible species in the case of an outbreak, followed by decontamination of the infected and exposed premises. This policy is known as 'stamping out'. It was the manner in which this policy was applied North and South of the border which saw differences arise. There were a number of issues which proved to be contentious, namely the slaughter and destruction of animals, the policing of movement controls and the portal and airport controls. These issues are now addressed in more detail.

4.3.1 Slaughter and destruction of animals

In the North almost 51,000 animals (including 4,455 bovine animals, 42,409 sheep and 3,622 pigs and 79 others) were culled in the three main areas where the FMD outbreak occurred, namely Meigh, Ardboe and Cushendall. On infected and contiguous premises, all animals were killed onsite and burnt in funeral pyres. The original plans to dispose of culled animals from Meigh in deep burial graves were halted after protests by local farmers over possible health and environmental damage and compensation arrangements for the cull. The local community were unhappy that they had not been more fully consulted before DARD had started to dig deep burial pits within the grounds of a local tourist amenity. Following interventions from the Ulster Farmers Union and the Irish Farmers Association, the cull was eventually completed with arrangements made to dispose of animals in a similar fashion to the South. This meant that when the culling was extended to surrounding areas, animals were transported to a local site and killed. The carcasses were then transported in sealed trailers under direct Veterinary Service supervision to a rendering plant in Belfast.

In the South a total of 53,000 animals (800 bovine, 600 pigs, 3,000 deer, 230 goats and the rest sheep) were culled in the Co. Louth zone. On infected and contiguous premises all animals were killed in situ. Funeral pyres were not used by DAFRD, as this method of disposal was not considered acceptable for a number of reasons including public relations and environmental considerations. Where culling was extended to surrounding areas, animals were transported to an unused local slaughterhouse where they were killed by stunning. The carcasses and blood were transported in sealed containers under DAFRD supervision to a rendering plant in Co. Meath. During the initial days of the FMD crisis, the local disease centres in the South sought to identify any disused premises which could be used for culling animals, in the event that the disease spread across the border.

In the North authorities slaughtered sheep and cattle within a 1km zone and monitored animals within a 3km zone. This contrasted sharply with action taken in the South. All susceptible animals within the 1km and 3 km zone there were slaughtered. Farmers inside the 10km zone were asked to volunteer to cull their sheep before blood tests forced the obligatory culling of all animals on the Cooley peninsula.

Culling of large wild game in the Cooley protection zone in Co. Louth required a military operation involving up to 100 Army personnel including marksmen and helicopter support, under supervision of three DAFRD veterinary officers. The bullet method was only used for the culling of wild animals. The majority of these carcasses were transported by helicopter or all-terrain vehicle to the slaughterhouse used for the main cull, from where they were sent for rendering. The culling of wild game on the Northern side of the border was also undertaken.

4.3.2 Policing of movement restrictions

There were three major differences between the two jurisdictions in enforcing movement restrictions:

1. Involvement of the police force
2. Policing the border
3. Daily face-to-face briefings with farmers

The location of the first outbreak of FMD in the North was at Meigh in south Armagh. The RUC was unable to introduce static patrols in this area due to the potential security threat. Instead policing of animal movements was carried out by DARD staff through static vehicle checkpoints situated at the perimeter of the 3km protection zone. The police conducted mobile vehicle checks within the 3km protection zone and the 10km surveillance zone, and were requested by DARD staff on two occasions to deal with journalists who refused to obey instructions by DARD staff to move away from restricted areas. These incidents were broadcast widely throughout the island and caused considerable unease in Southern border areas over the North's perceived ability to enforce the ban on animal movement. On 2 April Minister Rodgers announced that the RUC had intercepted 163 movements of animals since the controls had been established, and that 60 of these were being investigated and processed.

In the South policing of movements was carried out by DAFRD and the Garda at static disinfectant and cleansing checkpoints on the edge of the 3km protection zone and the 10km surveillance zone.

After the Irish Government received notification of the outbreak of FMD in the UK on 21 February, it placed an immediate ban on UK imports of susceptible animals and products, and made arrangements with the Garda for appropriate resources to be sent to the border region. Resources were deployed to 141 recognised entry points along 251 miles of border between Northern Ireland and the Republic and steps were taken for the disinfection of vehicles and people entering the state from the North. These crossings were staffed 24 hours a day, with over 1,000 troops and gardaí drafted into the border region. 31 crossing points were designated for the transport of agricultural products. DAFRD, the Farm Relief Service, Civil Defence and other agencies provided back-up support in dealing with people, disinfecting and associated duties. Retired personnel were recalled to ensure that all border crossings were staffed on a round-the-clock basis. The policing of the southern side of the border was thus highly visible.

In contrast, border controls were only put in place on the Northern side within the exclusion zone in south Armagh. On 7 March Minister Rodgers said there was no justification for controls of movement from the South as it had FMD-free status. Apart the controls on the Armagh-Louth border, no other controls were ever put in place on the Northern side of the border despite the outbreak of FMD at Proleek in Co Louth on 22 March and a statement from Minister Rodgers on 2 April that her main concern was now the threat from the South.

The different approaches to policing the border were adopted according to the different perceptions of risk in the two jurisdictions. The border patrols on the southern side were very heavy as government and people in the Republic saw Northern Ireland dealing with an extension of a very serious FMD problem in Britain. The situation was exacerbated by a lack of information on the illegal movement of animals and the fact that the clinical signs of the disease were difficult to detect in sheep. The Southern authorities felt that there was validity in restricting movement from the North as the risk of FMD entering their territory in other ways (i.e. airborne) was very low. In contrast, the Northern authorities did not view the Republic as a major FMD risk, and DARD officials directed their efforts to policing the entry ports and airports from Britain. From a veterinary perspective it was logical to concentrate veterinary efforts on maintaining bio-security at farm level.

From 26 March 2001, after the intervention of an IFA official, the Southern authorities held face-to-face meetings with local farmers in Louth every day at 6pm to explain the measures being undertaken. DAFRD has stated that these meetings were extremely useful in enlisting the co-operation of those affected by the outbreak. Farming representatives say that this policy of meeting and co-operating with the local communities reassured them that everything possible was being done to control the spread of the disease.

DARD stressed that the cornerstone of the Northern approach to FMD was the idea of "fortress farming", where farmers were encouraged to avoid wherever possible allowing anything on to or off their premises. Any meetings of farmers would have been in direct contravention of that principle and DARD took a conscious decision at an early stage to discourage any such meetings of farmers so as to prevent the spread of FMD via indirect contact. In discussions with Northern farmers the lack of local briefings was interpreted as a lack of departmental interest in keeping them informed, and contrasted this policy with the daily meetings organised in the South.

4.3.3 Procedures at airports and ports

While there was some early criticism of the control and disinfectant procedures at airports and ports in the South, they were generally considered to be of the highest quality. DAFRD officials say initial criticisms reported in the media, notably those of politicians travelling through Cork airport for a British Irish Inter-Parliamentary meeting on 26 February, have subsequently been proved to be inaccurate. The protection at entry points against importing infection from Britain was a critical element in the Republic's overall defence - so much so that the Irish Government provided additional disinfection facilities at British Irish Sea ports, claiming that "the British port authorities there were unwilling to do so" (Minister Walsh, 28 June).

In contrast, there were many critical media reports with respect to the timeliness of the disinfectant procedures that were put in place in the ports and airports in Northern Ireland. On 21 February, after livestock movements into Northern Ireland from Britain were suspended, disinfecting of lorry wheels with power washers commenced at Larne, Belfast and Warrenpoint, Co Down. However it was not until 4 March that disinfectant-soaked mats were put in place for all vehicles, drivers and foot passengers disembarking from ferries coming from Britain. DARD states that the short delay in providing disinfectant-soaked mats was not viewed as particularly serious in a direct disease-control sense. Instead DARD preferred to concentrate on measures, such as spraying of vehicles, that were aimed more at controlling the spread of the disease rather than raising public confidence. At the same time announcements were broadcast on planes and ships for persons who had been in contact with animals to contact DARD staff. One DARD official said they may have over-relied on transportation companies to assist in directing members of the public to DARD contacts.

There were a few travellers who refused to follow the disinfection procedures on arrival at Belfast airport, stating that there was no legal basis for disinfecting people who were travelling within the UK. The different legal basis for such procedures in Northern Ireland as a region of the UK and the Republic of Ireland as an independent nation state was quoted by the media as one reason why there might have been delays in enforcing disinfection and cleansing procedures at Northern ports and airports. However this was denied by DARD officials.

A report by the EU Food and Veterinary Office in June 2001, following a mission to review FMD management in Northern Ireland, said the controls at Northern Ireland ports and airports, both before and after the outbreak of FMD in Britain, were similar to, and in some cases exceeded, those applied between EU member states. The removal of border disinfectant procedures in August 2001 was evidence that the Irish Government had confidence in these Northern procedures.

When Ministers Walsh and Rodgers met in Larne on the 11 September 2001 they underlined the importance of maintaining effective controls at airports and ports on the island. In particular, they noted the interdependence between the two jurisdictions in this regard, which makes equivalence in the effectiveness of these controls in both jurisdictions essential. In a show of public unity Minister Walsh viewed the FMD controls in operation at the port of Larne and, in turn, he invited Minister Rodgers to view the equivalent operations in the South. Both Ministers stressed their joint commitment to ensuring that port and airport controls are fully maintained and effective for as long as there remained a risk of FMD spread from Britain.

On 21 March 2002 Minister Rodgers attended a meeting with the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Mrs Margaret Beckett, to discuss the problem of illegal imports of food to the UK. Also attending the meeting were a wide range of representatives of UK government departments, enforcement authorities and industry colleagues. Minister Rodgers stressed the fact that Northern Ireland has very few direct transport connections other than with Britain and the Republic of Ireland, with the main problems tending to come from further afield via Britain. At this meeting Minister Rodgers reiterated a point made earlier by the Southern Government, stating that the controls on Northern ports are considered to be the second line of defence, with controls on entry into Britain as the first line of defence.

4.4 Rebuilding

There were both similarities and differences in the manner in which both jurisdictions dealt with the aftermath of the FMD crisis.

4.4.1 Extended serological testing

Extended serological testing was undertaken on both sides of the border in an effort to ensure that the FMD virus had been successfully eliminated from the island. The Northern authorities have been unable to establish any link between the outbreaks in Meigh, Ardboe and Cushendall. They were unable to exclude the possibility of further undetected illegal diversions of sheep from Britain. Working on the assumption that FMD was present in the sheep population, on 23 April DARD commenced a serological survey of all sheep flocks in the North. It has been a considerable success and is one of the most extensive responses to FMD surveillance anywhere in the world. By October 2001, over 80% of all sheep flocks in Northern Ireland had been sampled, with over 0.5 million samples having been tested. All inconclusive tests have generated a detailed epidemiological flock investigation and the survey has not detected FMD in any Northern Ireland flocks.

While the tracing of the origin of the Proleek outbreak failed to establish a verifiable link to the outbreaks in Northern Ireland, the Southern authorities are confident that the Co. Louth outbreak came as a result of indirect contact with infected sheep at the farm in Meigh, across the border in Armagh.

The Southern authorities also instigated a national serological survey of sheep on 8 May in order to demonstrate the South's freedom from FMD in accordance with OIE (Office International des Epizootics) guidelines. This survey was divided into two phases. The first and more intensive phase took place in the eastern part of the country where the sheep population is less stable. This was followed by a second phase in the west and south of the country. DAFRD stresses that this survey was conducted "at levels well in excess of the OIE guidelines."

4.4.2 Compensation

The policy of stamping out animal disease requires total co-operation by farmers, and a basic condition to secure their co-operation is that they receive prompt and adequate compensation. Determination of compensation is crucial and became a key cross-border issue during the FMD crisis. Rumours that farmers in the South were being paid considerably higher compensation rates than their counterparts on the Northern side of the border contributed to a 48 hour delay in commencing the extended cull in South Armagh. These rumours were only quashed by discussions

involving unions officials from both sides of the border who dispensed with any hearsay and highlighted the equivalence of compensation levels, North and South. Inconsistencies in independent evaluations are still the cause of a legal dispute in the South and highlight the need for an agreed animal evaluation plan as part of any future all-island contingency plan. Many farmers from both sides of the border believe that they have sacrificed their livelihoods for the sake of the national good, but reassurance that they would be properly compensated has not been forthcoming. Certainly, should a similar event occur again, farmers would be very slow to allow their animals to be culled without full compensation being paid up front.

4.4.3 Regeneration policy

Each FMD outbreak area (Meigh, Ardboe, Cushendall in the North and Proleek in the South) has subsequently produced a regeneration plan for their area. It is interesting to note that there has been no consultation between the groups from opposite sides of the border to develop a common approach to the regeneration of their areas. Particularly in the South Armagh – North Louth region, cross-border discussions could have facilitated a co-ordinated approach to issues such as restocking. For instance, restocking in mountainous areas such as the Cooley Peninsula or the Glens in Cushendall is particularly difficult. In the case of the Cooley Peninsula, Teagasc experts predict that it will take three generations of sheep and approximately five years to fully restock the mountain areas. Sheep introduced to a mountain area have to acclimatise to the local environment (e.g. develop immunity to local ticks) and become familiar with the geography of the area, i.e. good grazing, shelter, dangerous areas etc. This knowledge takes time to accumulate and many sheep will be lost in the process. The recent Southern budget has recognised this fact and Cooley farmers have been allowed four years to restock from a taxation point of view. Differences in the plans of the two jurisdictions may lead to disputes at a later date.

5. CROSS-BORDER CO-OPERATION DURING THE FMD CRISIS

When the extent of the FMD outbreak in England became apparent, the North's Agriculture Minister, Mrs Brid Rodgers, took two immediate steps: she agreed to Northern Ireland's inclusion in a temporary EU ban on intra-community and third country trade in UK animals and animal products, and placed a ban on the import of animals and animal products from Britain into the North. On 21 February the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (DAFRD) in the Republic responded to the confirmation of FMD in England by banning the import of animals and animal products from the UK, including Northern Ireland. This was a requirement placed on all Member States on that date in accordance with EU Decision 2001/145. In both Irish jurisdictions airports and ports were put on alert, and control measures, as indicated in their respective contingency plans, were implemented to protect the island from the spread of the disease. The two Departments of Agriculture began extensive programmes of tracing UK imports to the island since 1 February.

As the crisis developed, cross-border co-operation was intensified across all sectors of the farming industry. There were numerous examples throughout the FMD crisis where the sharing and exchange of information between the agricultural authorities in both jurisdictions was very effective. The two Departments of Agriculture, through the respective Chief Veterinary Officers, were in constant liaison, often on a half-hourly basis, after the threat of the disease became evident after 20 February. Officials across all levels of the departments, including deputy chief veterinary officers and heads and deputies of policy divisions, were in regular contact by telephone, fax and email. The press officers from both departments of agriculture developed a strong relationship, liaising in respect of both timing and content of relevant press releases. There is no doubt that an intricate network of cross-border communication was active during the FMD outbreak. However it is difficult to quantify the extent and nature of this communication as it was mostly conducted informally and as such has not been documented. Even after the threat of FMD had passed, communication continued with five representatives from DARD veterinary division and one from DARD policy division attending the internal review of FMD conducted by the Southern Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (DAFRD) in Dublin in November 2001.

There were key moments throughout the crisis which demanded North-South co-operation, and these moments allow us to appraise the level of practical co-operation that did occur. Specific examples are given below where co-operation played a valuable and practical role at departmental level, at farmers union level and at local level.

5.1 Tracing of sheep

One of the main thrusts of cross-border co-operation involved the tracing of sheep, which had been brought into Northern Ireland from Britain and then illegally diverted to farms in the North or destinations in the Republic of Ireland.

Once FMD had been confirmed in Britain, DARD staff carried out checks to establish the destination of all susceptible species (not just sheep) imported from GB with effect from 15 January 2001. DVOs were instructed to commence this tracing work on Friday, 23 February. Movement restrictions were applied to destination premises and an immediate

visit by DARD veterinary officers undertaken. This proactive tracing detected the first outbreak of FMD at a very early stage and prevented many more outbreaks on the island of Ireland.

DARD inquiries were hampered by the lack of information from people involved, who were afraid of incriminating themselves. However the Northern authorities rejected attempts to plead immunity in return for information on the destination of sheep. The difficulties of tracing the 'missing' sheep were compounded by the fact that the exact number of sheep was unknown, with media reports estimating these rising to 60 from an initial figure of 21. On 23 April Minister Rodgers stated that 19 cases of illegal importation into Northern Ireland were being investigated by the RUC and DARD's Enforcement Unit. She said that during the period 11-19 January alone 2,200 sheep were brought into Northern Ireland legally but traded illegally.

The figures for the Meigh sheep are outlined by DARD in the following paragraphs.

The DARD tracing exercise so far has shown that a consignment of sheep, imported from England on 19 February for immediate slaughter, had not been confirmed at the listed destination. Subsequent investigations implicated premises in Meigh, Co. Armagh which were visited by a DARD official late on Sunday, 25 February. Twenty-one sheep on the farm were isolated and inspected by a veterinarian. At an inspection on 27 February, FMD lesions were detected in four of the animals. Samples of the lesions were forwarded to the Reference Laboratory in Pirbright and FMD was subsequently confirmed.

The infected farm was small, consisting of a barnyard and field of less than seven acres. There were no other susceptible livestock on the premises and no apparent direct contact between the 21 sheep and livestock on neighbouring farms.

Backward testing of the infected sheep revealed that they were part of a consignment of 373 that had originated in Scotland and England. The load consisted of three groups, two of which were purchased in Longtown Market, Cumbria on 15 February, while the third had been held at farm premises in Penrith. Backward tracing from Longtown showed that the infected sheep from a farm in Lancashire had been present in the market on the 15 February and probably infected the group destined for Northern Ireland.

After arrival in the province, the sheep were taken directly to Killeen in south Armagh where a group of 71 was unloaded. These were then taken by a different vehicle to a farm in the Republic but eight were subsequently returned to Killeen.

The rest of the imported consignment was taken to Meigh where the sheep were held for approximately 20 hours. Thereafter 248 sheep were taken in two vehicles to an abattoir in Athleague Co. Roscommon, while others were removed, during the following week, to various premises in the Republic. The sheep sent to the South were traced to four premises in Counties Meath, Laois and Louth. These sheep and all in-contact animals were examined, tested, slaughtered and destroyed. All such tests were negative for FMD.

14 animals were left at the end in Meigh and these, together with seven sheep already on the premises, formed the group examined by the Veterinary Officer on 26 and 27 February. The 21 sheep at Meigh and the eight at Killeen were destroyed at the respective sites. DARD investigations into this matter are still underway.

DAFRD officials in the Republic also traced imports which were considered to constitute a FMD risk: UK imports from 1 February, French imports from 16 February and Dutch imports from 20 February. However their investigations concentrated on the illegal diversion of sheep brought into Northern Ireland from Britain for immediate slaughter to other destinations in the North and their subsequent transport across the border. Co-operation between the authorities identified a number of such consignments, including the consignment from northern England which caused the initial outbreak in Meigh in south Armagh. Over 1,500 tracings of imported (legal and illegal) animals from the UK (GB and Northern Ireland) resulted in the culling of more than 5,500 imported and in-contact animals in the Republic. Approximately 140 suspect cases of illegal importation from the North were investigated by DAFRD's Special Investigation Unit with assistance from the Garda Síochána's National Bureau of Criminal Investigation. Where imported animals had been slaughtered at an abattoir in the South, tracing of personnel, livestock and vehicle movement was undertaken to determine if the disease had been spread to other farms.

There is no doubt that the two Departments co-operated at the highest level in tracing animal movements, even to the extent that a joint team of officials travelled to England to interview one livestock dealer.

5.2 Extended cull in South Armagh

Following the outbreaks of FMD in Meigh in south Armagh (1 March) and Proleek in north Louth (22 March), both Departments announced their intention on 25 March to carry out a precautionary cull of sheep in the area around and between the locations of the two outbreaks, on both sides of the border. The rationale was the creation of a firebreak around both outbreaks to prevent the spread of any further infection in the area.

Cross-border negotiations played an important role in ensuring that this extended cull of animals in south Armagh went ahead. Representatives from the two main farmers unions in the North, the Ulster Farmers Union and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association, and the Irish Farmers Association in the South, met representatives from the local farmers group in south Armagh on 27 March to open up communications after local concerns had halted the commencement of the cull. The local community was angry that the North's Department of Agriculture had begun preparations for a mass burial grave in the grounds of a local tourist site without any consultation.

Throughout the FMD crisis in Northern Ireland the farmers' unions played a major role in communicating and negotiating how departmental policies could be implemented on the ground. For example, Minister Rodgers referred to their involvement as being crucial in finding a resolution of the problems in south Armagh.

Here the personal friendship between the UFU deputy president, Mr. John Gilliland, and the IFA County Louth chairman, Mr. Raymond O'Malley, played a key role in defusing a potentially damaging situation. At the request of the UFU, Mr. O'Malley was included in cull discussions. Traditionally in south Armagh there have been strong links with north Louth and there are numerous cross-border farms in the area.

The inclusion of an IFA official immediately dispensed with any hearsay concerning higher compensation payments to farmers in the South, as Mr. O'Malley was able to state categorically what was happening in the extended cull in north Louth. It was in the Irish Government's interest to ensure that the south Armagh cull went ahead in order to eliminate as far as possible any risk to the EU-agreed regionalisation policy which had isolated north Louth. Similarly, Minister Rodgers stated in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 2 April that while the decision to cull had come from the two Departments and not from the EU, the EU Commission had made it clear that concerns over whether the virus was still present in the province would be a crucial issue in deciding on regionalisation for the North.

An acceptable method was agreed at these negotiations for the disposal of animals which was similar to that already in place in the South. It was agreed that mass burial pits would not be used to dispose of dead animals, but that they would be transported in sealed containers to a rendering plant in Belfast.

During the discussions reference was made to the possibility of using the Ravensdale abattoir, which was handling the cull just over the border in Louth. This abattoir was situated within the north Louth exclusion zone and adjacent to the south Armagh exclusion zone. The option of using the Ravensdale plant was never officially discussed with the Southern authorities. The EU Standing Veterinary Committee ruling had banned all animal movements out of Northern Ireland (as part of the UK). It would have taken too long to apply for a derogation of this ruling to allow animals from the North to be taken to the Ravensdale plant.

5.3 Movement of milk

A number of practical problems resulted from the ban on importing Northern milk into the Republic. Town of Monaghan Co-op, Lakeland Dairies and Donegal Creameries are the first hand buyers of around 15 per cent of Northern Ireland milk, with around 80,000 litres a day being transferred across the border. In the initial days following the introduction of the ban Northern processors absorbed the surplus milk which was destined for cross border trade. Tankers belonging to Southern processors, which were handling Northern milk, were fitted with filters and did not cross the border into the Republic.

Problems escalated following confirmation of the FMD outbreak in Meigh on 1 March 2001. It was estimated that the suspension of milk powder exports would cost the Northern Ireland dairy sector in the region of £5million per month. The main priority was to ensure that all milk outside the 10km zone in Meigh was collected and processed. Town of Monaghan Co-op and Lakeland Dairies arranged to sell their milk to over 13 customers, which involved shipping some milk to England and Scotland. Inside the 10km zone milk supplies to three Northern processors were collected by a dedicated tanker which had been fitted with a virus filter. Other suppliers had to dump their milk. Eventually a special pasteurisation facility was established in the North which allowed processors such as Lakeland Dairies and Monaghan Co-op to transport milk across the border to a dedicated factory for processing during the FMD restrictions.

It was particularly significant to see dairy processors from both sides of the border working closely together as the entry of Southern processors into the Northern market as a result of the UK's deregulation of milk marketing in 1995 had not been a welcome development. Discussions with one of the main Southern processors confirmed that they had been kept informed of any Northern developments in a timely and efficient manner.

5.4 Day-to-day logistical problems

There were a number of 'on the ground' logistical problems which cross-border co-operation was able to overcome. For example, the SDLP Fermanagh/South Tyrone MLA, Mr. Tommy Gallagher, called on Minister Walsh to remove some of the more "absurd" restrictions that were put in place at the border during the crisis. Examples of inconvenience included cases of children not being allowed to take sweets or chocolate across the border into the South; parents of infants being asked to awaken them and take them out of their safety seats in order to have their feet dipped, and people on their way to work being searched daily and told not to have butter on their sandwiches. Other examples cited were of people from the South being prohibited from taking produce such as milk or apple tarts back to their homes across the border, even though such produce originated in the Republic. It was reported that towns and villages along the northern side of the border experienced considerable reductions in trade as a result of such restrictions.

There were also numerous reports from the Northern farming unions about the significant difficulties experienced in moving materials (e.g. poultry meat, vegetables and mushroom compost) that were not affected by the export ban to the South. Minister Rodgers announced in mid-March that the main problems caused by this "over diligence" had been resolved through discussions with Minister Walsh. DAFRD officials stated that a blanket ban on foodstuffs had been initiated because of the speed needed to react to the FMD threat (such a ban was much simpler to implement than training their staff in specific tasks). A report by the EU Food and Veterinary Office in late June reminded member states that it was not acceptable to impose controls on trade in agricultural products beyond those laid down in EU legislation.

Another example of cross-border co-operation on the ground was the agreement by vets whose work straddled the border to restrict their activities to one side of the border after a request from the Republic's Department of Agriculture.

The importance of co-ordinating actions across the border and being aware of the practical implications of such actions was highlighted by an example on the south Armagh border. In order to enforce the ban on Northern food imports to the South, a checkpoint was placed by DAFRD on the main Dublin to Belfast road on the Louth-Armagh border. Inevitably this resulted in long delays for motorists, with reported tailbacks of up to seven kilometres. In an effort to avoid these delays, a large volume of traffic diverted off the main road using secondary routes through south Armagh. Thus in the days before final arrangements were made to cordon off the area around the infected farm at Meigh, this largely cross-border traffic was passing less than 100 yards from Ireland's only outbreak of FMD.

6. IMPACT OF THE FMD OUTBREAK

The 2001 FMD outbreak has had a profound effect on the agricultural sector, most notably in terms of the level of public awareness of agricultural practices and the need to ensure animal health, the tolerance towards illegal activities and the amount of controls which have now been put in place.

6.1 Public awareness

In both jurisdictions there was a largely positive response from the public and support for the measures being taken, with an expressed sense of national pride in being involved particularly strong in the Republic. While most cultural, sporting and other bodies in both jurisdictions willingly made cancellations, there were examples of major events taking place in the North against the desired wishes of the Department. The most publicised of these was the holding of an ice hockey match against a Welsh team by the Belfast Giants on 26 February, a week after the first FMD outbreak in England and a day before the first confirmed outbreak in Wales. As a British League sporting fixture, the Belfast Giants were acting on advice from the British Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in London rather than DARD in Belfast.

The fact of having two different systems working side by side provides an opportunity for comparing the effectiveness of the responses of the two jurisdictions as outlined in their contingency plans. It is important to note that actions taken in one jurisdiction were sometimes influenced by those in the other jurisdiction. Some in the farming community now ask if this could be done on a continuing and more structured basis in the animal health area.

Discussions with DARD and farming union officials offered some views on the perceived contrasts in implementing controls in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Many people in the North, particularly in nationalist areas, wanted DARD to mirror what was being done in the South, but this was not always the best or most effective option for the North. The focus of many people's attention was on the border and not on the entry ports and airports where DARD's efforts were rightly concentrated. The South placed a greater emphasis on maintaining public confidence in their efforts to control FMD.

6.2 Dealing with fraud

There was extensive coverage of all relevant events in most newspapers. Investigative journalists like Sean McConnell of The Irish Times played a key role in discovering the extent of illegal practices in the agricultural industry, often to the discomfort of the authorities, and raising the public's awareness of such practices, including:

- The massive movement of livestock up and down the British countryside, across the Irish Sea, into the Republic and onto the Continent.
- The 'import' of sheep into the North from Britain which were illegally taken South for processing, a lucrative trade which was based on the avoidance of tax.
- Other illegal activities such as claims by some farmers for EU payments for sheep that did not exist or that they did not own themselves but borrowed for the day of inspection.
- Evidence of substantial smuggling of calves from the North, many of which were dumped by farmers as inspection of stock increased and restrictions on the movements of animals tightened.

The impact of the FMD outbreak was felt across all sectors of the community and has raised the public's interest in ensuring that such an episode does not happen again.

The FMD outbreak has also seen a severe crackdown on illegal activities and what may once have been considered as a minor misdemeanour has now become a 'hanging offence'. In hindsight there was already a lot of evidence which pointed to large scale abuse within the agricultural sector. In late 2000 an anonymous telephone call alerted DARD to the fact that a haulier from Co. Antrim was importing consignments of sheep certified for immediate slaughter which were not being presented at the destination slaughterhouse. An investigation of port records of all incoming livestock was undertaken which showed that this haulier was importing consignments of between 300 and 400 hoggets up to five times per week. These loads were usually certified as going for direct slaughter at a particular slaughterhouse, but a cursory check showed that these consignments had not arrived. DARD officials decided to trace the haulier's movements to find out where in Northern Ireland he discharged sheep, and on 8 December 2000 he was followed from Larne harbour to the premises of a dealer in Co. Londonderry. In January 2001 the haulier was informed by letter that his activities were being investigated and that files were being prepared for his prosecution.

Prior to 11 January no point of destination checks were being performed. At the same time the communications system at the ports were strengthened to detect and prevent similar instances of fraud. It is important to note that this incident was handled by DARD without officially informing the Southern authorities, despite the fact that the illegally diverted sheep were destined for a meat plant in the South.

There was also public evidence that the VAT rebate system in the South was being abused. In 1999 RTE, the Southern national television station, broadcast a film of midnight deliveries of Northern sheep to Southern factories, as unearthed by a Tipperary farmer and the IFA. An audit of 11 meat plants by the Revenue Commissioners in the Republic (at the request of DARD) clawed back over £350,000 in VAT fraud over a three year period. These settlements were reached on the basis of private negotiations rather than through legal actions (this is not considered to be an unusual way of settling fraud cases). The Revenue Commissioners, the Garda or the DAFRD did not initiate prosecutions against any of the factories or dealers involved.

By March 2002 in the South three people had been dealt with by the courts. A further 39 individuals and two meat premises were being investigated. Nine files had been sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions. John Walsh, the livestock smuggler who was implicated in bringing FMD-diseased animals to the island, spent six months in jail before being released on bail. In May 2002 he was convicted of tax offences and agreed to a settlement of €20,000 with the Criminal Assets Bureau.

On 22 November 2001 Minister Rodgers announced her intention to tighten the Sheep Annual Premium regulations for 2002 after it became evident that some farmers who had claimed for sheep they did not have would escape prosecution because of loopholes in current Northern Ireland legislation. 12 farmers from south Armagh who had claimed subsidies for non-existent animals had their cases referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions, but Mrs Rodgers said a technical deficiency in the law meant that prosecutions could not go ahead. On 21 March 2002 Minister Rodgers launched her Department's counter fraud strategy with support from the UFU and NIAPA.

6.3 Controls

The outbreaks of FMD disease on the island have had a major impact on the controls both Departments of Agriculture have been able to exert over farming activity. Many of these controls have been put in place in the South, with the North then deciding whether or not to implement similar controls.

In the South, the Department of Agriculture has been given draconian powers to control the spread of animal disease and many of the controls introduced in 2001, including controls on movement of animals, remain in place. For

instance, on 8 March 2001 the Southern Government introduced primary legislation in the form of an amendment to the Disease of Animals Act. This legislation was drafted over a weekend, approved by the Government on the Tuesday, passed by Dáil Eireann on Thursday and signed into law on Friday. It provided for

- extensive powers for authorised officers
- the definition and regulation of dealers
- the forfeiture of assets such as land and premises used in the commission of offences
- disqualification by the courts of convicted persons from agriculture related activities
- inferences to be drawn in relation to items such as ear tags in court proceedings.

In February 2002 the Southern government extended the powers granted under the amendments made to the Disease of Animals (Amendments) Act 2002 for a further year.

For the first time in history of the Republic of Ireland, cattle-dealers and agents are now licensed and must apply annually to the Department of Agriculture for permission to trade. Other controls include the individual identification system which has been put in place in the South, based on tagging and computer records, so that every ewe and lamb born in the Republic is now identified. Bio-security and other enhanced precautionary measures remain in place at ports and airports. Codes of practice are being finalised to promote 'good practice' in relation to bio-security – these will cover farmers and those working with farm animals; work and leisure activities in the countryside and marts; meat plants, showgrounds, co-operatives and other agriculture-related premises. After considerable pressure from farming organisations, the 30-day holding period which did apply to movement of animals after purchase has recently been softened. In May 2002 Minister Walsh replaced this rule by introducing a limit on the number of sales that may take place of any animal where there has been dealer involvement.

In the North a subset of these controls are in force. The 30-day standstill period still applies to the movement of animals in the North and equivalent bio-security measures are in place at portal and airports. However, discussions are still ongoing over whether to adopt a paper-based individual sheep tagging system, similar to the South, or to implement a complete electronic tagging system. On 2 May 2001 Minister Rodgers announced proposals to curb illegal movement of livestock and increased penalties for those involved in such movement. However, DARD officials say the process of amending similar legislation in the North may take up to two years. Finally, the North has not published any plans to establish a licensing system for cattle dealers and agents.

Trade in live animals between the North and the South continues to operate according to a more regulated regime. Protracted negotiations between the two Departments pre Christmas 2001 led to the introduction of trade certification as a requirement for exporting or importing sheep originating from Northern Ireland or from the Republic to the other Irish jurisdiction.

7. LESSONS

There are a number of lessons which have emerged from this work.

7.1 Past co-operation

In the last 10 years Newcastle disease has struck the poultry flock; Aujeszky's disease and blue ear disease have struck the pig herd; BSE has infected the cattle herd, and finally FMD has spread into the sheep (and cattle) herd. Salmonella enteritidis, found in poultry and eggs, has been imported from Britain to Northern Ireland, but has not spread in the South. All these diseases have affected Britain and Ireland in recent years. Veterinary experts suggest that the earlier detection of such animal diseases in the North relative to the South reflects the traditionally high trade in live animals between the North and Britain.

While there was already a stated high level of co-operation between the two jurisdictions before the FMD outbreak, it was clearly not sufficient in itself to keep disease out of the island. The fact that Northern Ireland operates under a 'dual status' has been highlighted as a cause of conflict by IFA officials in the South. While officially part of the UK, in some instances the North and the South are treated as a single entity when 'island of Ireland' animal health status applies. For instance, prior to the FMD outbreak no certification was required for sheep moving between the North and the South.

The FMD outbreak highlighted a number of deficiencies and plus points in the animal health system as it existed on the island. It is generally accepted that there is a heavy responsibility on all sectors of the farming community (departmental, farming, industry etc.) to establish codes of practice and to police those practices by co-operating in a way that is mutually beneficial. This co-operation, particularly regarding the illegal movement of animals, was severely tested by FMD and was found to be defective. The inability to identify individual animal movements was shown to be a huge disability in the fight against FMD on the island. On the positive side, the co-operation between the two

Departments of Agriculture as formalised under the auspices of the NSMC was very effective in limiting the spread of the disease. The devolved government in the North did a huge service to the island by implementing a ban on animal and animal products into the North from Britain.

At the UFU annual dinner on 22 March 2002, Minister Rodgers reflected on the FMD crisis and accepted the message from the agri-food industry that the government needed to do more to protect the animal health status of the whole island of Ireland. Minister Rodgers also confirmed that she was finalising revised 'peacetime' controls on imports of animals and produce from Britain in consultation with the authorities in Britain and Dublin. It is anticipated that these 'peacetime' controls will see Northern Ireland being treated as an EU member state rather than a region of Britain, an action that would greatly strengthen the North's import and export controls and one that may attract considerable criticism from Britain.

7.2 Co-dependency of agricultural sectors, North and South

The FMD outbreak has highlighted the co-dependency of the agricultural systems, North and South. One clear message from the FMD outbreak is that animal health is not a political issue and ironically, if the NSMC has not already been in place, a similar structure would have had to be invented. Within the Northern Ireland Assembly people from every political persuasion worked together to fight the spread of the disease. This did not prevent some Northern unionist politicians claiming that the Republic's authorities were hiding the extent of FMD in their jurisdiction, and government ministers in the Republic claiming that the UK authorities were failing in their response to the crisis.

The response to the FMD crisis in each jurisdiction was a multifaceted approach which depended on each element of the agricultural sector playing its part – government departments, hauliers, farmers, producers and general public alike. In November 2000, three months before the outbreak, the North/South Ministerial Council had endorsed proposals to formalise cross-border arrangements at official level on animal health matters. Since the crisis, cross-border animal health committees have been active both between the Irish Farmers Association and the Ulster Farmers Union, and between Veterinary Ireland and one of the two Northern veterinary bodies, the North of Ireland Veterinary Association. It is important that responses to any future outbreaks on the island are also based on a partnership approach engaging all sectors of the community, North and South.

7.3 Illegal practices

The immediate reason why FMD came to the island was through the illegal diversion of sheep to farms in the North. However there are a number of factors which traditionally encourage animal movement onto and within the island. These factors need to be managed on an all-Ireland basis. The constant media attention during spring 2001 has publicly highlighted a series of illegal practices in the agricultural sector which could have serious public health implications. Agricultural incomes in Northern Ireland have fallen drastically over the past few years and many organisations in the North feel that they have not been adequately compensated for the currency differential between Sterling and their eurozone competitors. The lax controls at the ports, the lack of audit trails to confirm the supposed destinations of certified 'direct for slaughter' sheep, coupled with a large market for lamb at the big processing plants in the South and the ability to abuse the VAT rebate scheme in the South, have facilitated a lucrative, illegal trade in sheep on the island.

The Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland's Beef and Sheep Yearbook 2001 provides an insight into the huge movement of sheep across the Irish border. The stated industry opinion is that of the 39,000 lambs recorded as imported from Britain for slaughter during 2000, the majority (23,000-26,000 lambs) did not go to Northern plants but crossed the border into the Republic. The other main concern mentioned in this yearbook is the massive number of Northern lambs (between 700,000 and 900,000 per year or 56% of production) and ewes and rams (145,000 or 71% of production) which have no officially recorded destination.

Following the evidence of such practices as highlighted during the FMD outbreak, a ninth Policy Working Group was established under the NSMC Strategic Steering Committee to consider cross-border fraud issues.

7.4 Contingency Plans

Both contingency plans define the responsibilities of the respective Departments of Agriculture in preparing for, and dealing with, cases of suspected and confirmed epizootic disease. Feedback from two separate missions of the EU Food and Veterinary Office to Ireland reported recognition from DARD (June 2001) and DAFRD (August 2001) that the response needed to deal with the FMD crisis was much greater than that anticipated in their contingency plans.

The contingency plans in both jurisdictions were prepared at official civil service level. There was no consultation with the many organisations who assisted in controlling the outbreak. Preparation of the plans did not involve veterinary practitioners and others, such as farmers, slaughterers and hauliers, and did not incorporate prior exercises or detailed

measures for the rapid, safe and efficient disposal of animals. The main concern of members of the farming communities, North and South, was that the two Departments possessed these action plans but farmers did not have access to them. Importantly there was no reference to dealing with cross-border issues in the either contingency plan, North or South, despite the central role that cross-border co-operation played in eradicating the disease.

7.5 Strengthened case for an all-island animal health system

Senior civil servants and farming union representatives in both jurisdictions agreed that the level of cross-border co-operation during the FMD crisis played a significant role in preventing the widespread introduction of the disease to the island and in containing it to the four infected areas. Interviewees said the practical and successful experience of working together in an emergency situation had emphasised the benefits of preparing an island plan on how to deal with any future animal health emergencies which may arise in Ireland.

The dominance of the media coverage of the crisis for more than two months in spring 2001 has raised political and public awareness of agricultural and rural development issues. In the past, the wider community generally became concerned with animal diseases only when such diseases had significant human health implications. There is now a heightened realisation in the two jurisdictions that the threat of animal diseases has the potential to impact directly or indirectly on all sectors of society, and in all parts of Ireland, and that the most successful way to avoid future emergencies is to utilise the natural water barrier around the island by moving towards an all-Ireland animal health system.

7.6 Benefits and problems of an all-Ireland animal health system

At the Centre for Cross Border Studies North-South FMD study day in October 2001 the main reasons for pursuing a common animal health agenda were summarised as the ability to trade internationally if the island is kept relatively disease free; the ability to bring localised outbreaks of animal disease quickly under control, and the capacity to anticipate and react to common problems in the farming industry.

It is accepted that there are significant political and practical hurdles to overcome in developing such an all-Ireland animal health system. Among these are the imbalance in political and administrative powers between the North as a region of the UK and the South as a sovereign EU Member State; the fact that the agricultural industries, North and South, currently operate in direct competition with each other; the limited ability of the island to pursue a 'fortress Ireland' approach in the context of a single EU market; the problems caused by the present and future currency differentials between the two jurisdictions; and the traditional trading patterns between Northern Ireland and Britain, the extent of which are not mirrored in the South.

During a Dáil debate on 4 April 2001 the Taoiseach, Mr Ahern, referred to the excellent relationships that have been built up under the North South Ministerial Council in the context of agriculture. However he also stated that the establishment of a single veterinary regime for the island would require agreement between the Irish and UK Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive. While pledging his support for such a regime, he said that for such an all-Ireland system to make sense the regulations governing the control of animal movements from other European countries would have to be the same in Northern Ireland as in the Republic of Ireland.

The Taoiseach stressed that any decision to establish a single veterinary regime on the island would also require equivalent animal health status in both parts of the island. He said that while there is a considerable equivalence at present, the situation is complicated by the high incidence of BSE in the UK cattle herd, which has meant that the export of cattle from Northern Ireland has been banned since March 1996. He also referred to the Over Thirty Month Scheme operating in the UK, where such bovine animals are excluded from the food chain.

Discussions on a future strategic policy aiming towards an all-Ireland animal health system are currently under way between the two Departments of Agriculture under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council. Since the 2001 FMD outbreak the Departments of Agriculture, North and South have sought a limited input from key players in farming organisations, North and South. However the farming communities in both jurisdictions are still concerned about the extent of their input into this process, and would like to see a multi-sectoral group established which would bring commercial, rural development and other factors into the discussions. Such a group, perhaps modelled on the Expert Advisory Group set up by Minister Walsh during the FMD crisis, should have access to high quality scientific advice, should work alongside the North South Ministerial Council and become a focal point for co-ordinating an all-island approach to animal health.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions and recommendations relating to the cross-border and all-Ireland dimensions of the FMD crisis in Ireland have been drawn from this work. The NSMC Animal Health Strategic Steering Group are already taking forward some of these recommendations. Since the 2001 FMD outbreak a common approach has been adopted by both administrations in relation to internal movement controls on animals and bio-security measures for those involved in agriculture and related industries. Progress has been made in aligning controls applied to imports of animals and animal products by both administrations at all points of entry into the island. However the detail behind these new developments are not yet available.

8.1 A realistic assessment of the animal health status of the island should be undertaken.

It is recommended that a thorough and realistic assessment of the animal health status of Ireland be undertaken. This assessment should be based on an objective comparison with other EU member states and should review the spread of all animal diseases, including the method of spread, onto the island over the past decade. This assessment should also include a review of routine animal health data collection systems in both jurisdictions with a view to improving the surveillance of such diseases on the island.

Up-to-date information should be readily exchanged on disease occurrence at an island level and at a local level near the border. It may be appropriate to designate one or two officials from the Departments of Agriculture to follow developments in monitoring and control of FMD and other relevant diseases in other countries, who would make this information freely available to the public.

8.2 A study of the advantages and disadvantages of an all-island animal health system should be undertaken.

Any serious analysis of an all-island animal health system needs to incorporate a study of the costs and benefits associated with the introduction of a common approach to animal (and plant) health on the island. A comprehensive and objective examination of an all-Ireland approach has yet to be attempted. It is important that this review is based in commercial reality and grounded in EU legislation. While the proposals of the NSMC Animal Health Strategic Steering Group do appear to be well advanced, they will not be made public until next year (2003). It is important that an objective assessment of these plans is conducted to identify and address any areas of contention before any future emergency occurs. Policy making within agriculture is largely as a result of EU directives. The lead on the implementation of EU directives in the UK is taken by Westminster and not by the devolved administration in Northern Ireland, so it is important that the East-West dimension is included in this work.

8.3 An all-island multi-sectoral group, with key representatives from the food supply chain, should be established to drive forward proposals for an all-Ireland animal health system.

The strategic policy for an all-Ireland animal health system is currently being taken forward by the two Departments under the auspices of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC). There is a concern among the farming communities that they have little input into this policy development process, and that while the NSMC has legitimised the relationships between the two jurisdictions, it is politically, and not commercially, driven. It was the considered opinion of key players at the CCBS North-South FMD study day in October 2001 that a multi-sectoral group should be convened which would bring commercial, rural development and other relevant factors into the discussion in order to produce a workable all-Ireland strategy. This group, which would work alongside the NSMC Animal Health Strategic Steering Group, should have access to high quality scientific advice and become a focal point for co-ordinating an all-island approach to animal health.

While there is unanimous agreement that any all-Ireland approach should be led by the two Agriculture Ministers, it is worth bearing in mind that any new system must be 'bought into' by the people on the ground. There is a sense that progress towards an all-island animal health system may be becoming fragmented, with the Departments, farming organisations, food safety bodies, industry and veterinary bodies already working separately. A cross-interest group would serve to marry these different perspectives into one formalised, co-ordinated all-Ireland approach.

8.4 The contingency plans in both jurisdictions should be urgently reviewed.

Following the individual departmental inquiries, North and South, the contingency plans for both jurisdictions need to be urgently reviewed. With the benefit of hindsight, a single contingency plan should be developed for the island outlining all the possible scenarios that a future outbreak may bring. Issues to be considered should include an epidemiological analysis of how the FMD virus entered the country and the subsequent method of spread; an examination of how disease surveillance and other early warning procedures can be improved, and a determination of

whether legislative and other support frameworks need to be improved. This contingency plan should also address the issue of whether both Departments of Agriculture should have the same powers as the military in emergency situations.

Bearing in mind that separate institutional and legal structures exist on the two sides of the border, at the very least it should be possible to co-ordinate 'mirror' contingency plans with features common to both plans. These plans need to involve all organisations who played a part in dealing with the 2001 FMD outbreak and should include joint exercises which deal specifically with cross-border issues. It is interesting to note that the EU Commission supported the first multinational simulation FMD exercise of candidate countries carried out in June 2001.

8.5 The convening of an all-Ireland Expert Advisory Group should be considered in any future emergency situations.

The convening of the Expert Advisory Group in the Republic was hailed as a considerable success in terms of removing the politics from the crisis and applying high quality scientific advice to all decisions made by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. While acknowledging that politics can never be totally removed from any North-South situation, the convening of an all-Ireland Expert Advisory Group during any future emergency situation – made up of independent experts as well as civil servants – might go some way towards meeting this objective.

8.6 A cross-border rapid reaction force should be developed.

At a recent international conference on prevention and control of FMD held in Brussels on 12-13 December 2001, the EU Food and Veterinary Office stated that the veterinary manpower in many member states was inadequate and called for an EU rapid reaction force to deal with disease epidemics as they arise. This rapid reaction force would make it easier to implement concerted responses across several national boundaries within the Union. It is widely expected that the EU will propose a series of transnational initiatives to deal with any future epizootic outbreaks.

This begs the question of whether an all-Ireland reaction force should be established in the event of any future epizootic outbreak. Limited resources could potentially be pooled on an all-island basis during any future crisis and re-allocated to where they are most needed, irrespective of location, North or South. For instance, private vets are used to working on both sides of the border, and stronger links between the two jurisdictions have now been put in place, including the possibilities of secondment between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Garda Síochána. Formal policy and operational relationships exist between the two Departments of Agriculture, North and South. Co-ordinating epidemiology expertise, purchasing arrangements for essential items such as disinfectant, port and airport controls, culling arrangements and disposal of carcasses may avoid duplication of work and free up limited resources to undertake additional duties. A single rapid reaction force may also avoid tensions arising due to public comparisons of differing responses across the two jurisdictions.

8.7 The links between the main farming bodies, North and South, should be developed.

The main farming organisations on the island, the Ulster Farmers Union and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association in the North and the Irish Farmers Association and the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association in the South, are very strong political lobbying groups. All possibilities of developing closer links between these groups to promote an all-Ireland animal health agenda should be explored, including the possibility of secondments. Such developments need to consider the risk of adverse effects on existing relationships between Northern Ireland and the UK bodies. At the International Conference on Control and Prevention of FMD held on 13 December 2001 the need to combine legislation and controls with good awareness policies was highlighted. The farmers unions in particular were shown to play a huge role in communicating departmental messages at ground level and ensuring that farmers concerns were addressed. It would be useful to develop the participation of farm organisations in the diffusion of information.

8.8 All-island animal herd/flock health plans should be developed.

The bio-security measures introduced on all farms as part of the FMD response governed the restriction of movement of animals, people and machinery; adequate disinfection; quarantine facilities for sick animals; secure feed and water; vermin control, and handling and disposal of slurry. If such measures were adopted routinely, the incidence of salmonella, TB, brucellosis, and many other diseases could be dramatically reduced throughout the island. A code of 'good practice' should be implemented on an all-Ireland basis. It is important to remember that, quite apart from FMD, there are other major animal disease problems on the island which have serious human health implications. The potential to produce significant financial benefits by reducing veterinary treatment costs and thus controlling production losses needs to be emphasised at ground level.

8.9 A uniform approach to animal ID on the island needs to be developed.

Animal traceability is being addressed at an EU level, with trials of electronic identification systems currently being sponsored by the EU Commission. It is expected that proposals for EU legislation will eventually emerge, but these are not expected for at least 18 months. The South has already implemented a manual, tag-based, individual identification

system for sheep in the short-term, and the North has also announced its intention to introduce an individual tagging system. The inability to identify animal movements was shown to be a huge disability in the fight against FMD on the island. Plans should be made to harmonise ID systems for all animals on a North-South basis and methods for promoting mutual access to records should be developed. The advance gathering of information to be used in an emergency should serve to accelerate both the implementation of quarantines and identification of movement of infected animals. Programmes to collect critical information and make it immediately available should be identified.

8.10 A forum should be developed for inclusive all-Ireland discussions.

By highlighting or questioning certain practices and basic assumptions, the FMD crisis represents an opportunity to put certain activities on a sounder all-Ireland footing. All of the key organisations (Departments of Agriculture, politicians, veterinary bodies, farming unions, industry and local farmers representative groups) have now collectively committed themselves to the examination of such an option. There is a need to develop a forum where people can actively and collectively engage in these discussions.

One impact of the FMD outbreak has been the ability of the Departments of Agriculture to exercise a greater range of controls over the industry. These controls should be co-ordinated on a North-South basis so as to avoid any future conflicts. A number of pertinent questions need to be discussed on an all-Ireland basis and a joint programme of research needs to be initiated:

- How should greater control be exercised over live animal dealers?
- How can greater control be exercised over marts on the island in view of their potential adverse effects on both bio-security and animal welfare ?
- Should more reliable methods, such as electronic implants, be examined in order to ensure traceability of livestock movement?
- Do we have a similar approach to FMD vaccination policy North and South?
- Should farmers be encouraged to pay into consequential loss insurance funds?

The extensive animal movements revealed by the FMD outbreak seem problematic not only from a bio-security point of view but also from the perspective of animal welfare and sustainable development. In the three weeks before the FMD outbreak was discovered, about two million sheep were moved around the UK (Cabinet Office 2001). Movement of replacement breeding ewes and store lambs for finishing from upland breeding flocks to lowland finishing flocks is an essential part of the sheep industry.

However the outbreak highlighted the opportunistic role of sheep dealers in this process. Animals were being bought and resold through marts in different regions of the UK over very short periods of time, with some animals going through a succession of different farms. Under these circumstances, sheep which were infectious but had gone unrecognised as having clear clinical symptoms of disease came into contact with large numbers of previously uninfected animals over large areas. The problem was compounded by unofficial dealing at marts of animals never registered in the official sales records and therefore not readily traceable as dangerous disease contacts.

During the height of the FMD crisis in England, the UK government was actively considering the policy of ring vaccination before the winter months. Such a vaccination policy would have major implications for exports. Is there an agreed North-South policy on how the island would react to such a policy move?

8.11 All-Ireland research programme

Discussions on a future all-island animal health policy need to be backed up by a joint research programme which could include such topics as :

- Risk assessment studies of the different methods whereby disease can be introduced
- A socio-economic study of the role of marts
- Information Technology developments facilitating automated, low cost animal traceability
- A socio-economic study of the feasibility of a return to more localised meat production/processing chains
- Modelling of disease epidemiology in relation to new restrictions on animal movements
- The gathering of integrated baseline data on animal, human and food safety
- The implications for rural policy of diversifying from farming to the rural tourism industry, which was shown to be equally vulnerable during the FMD crisis.