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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS REPRESENTATION IN GEORGIA

NEW CATTLE DISEASE IN GEORGIA



Georgia saw its first cases of lumpy skin disease in late 2016. To prevent further spread of the virus, the National Food Agency vaccinated the cattle in the risk-regions. At the request of national veterinary services, the country will host a mission by FAO experts. The FAO team will be carrying out an evaluation of Georgia's situation and provide training to assist national authorities in coming to grips with the disease.

"We need to get prepared to fight this new disease before spring – when the awakening mosquitoes, flies and other insect vectors of the lumpy skin disease increases the risk of spreading," said Mikheil Sokhadze,

Deputy Head of the National Food Agency of Georgia.

Since entering Turkey in 2013, followed by Russia and Greece more recently, a dangerous cattle virus has spread throughout the Balkans and now threatens to move further into Europe. To stop its progress and increase preparedness, FAO is concentrating its efforts and technical capacities on two regional projects aimed at prevention and control of the virus.



In most cases the lumpy skin disease virus is transmitted by insects. It gets its name from the characteristic nodules that appear beneath the skin of infected animals.

It can mean economic losses due to temporary declines in milk production, lower market weights, sterility in bulls, and secondary infections that can even lead to the animals' death. The

skin nodules also reduce the value of hides.

Countries may also fear trade restrictions, should the virus enter their national territory.

"This is the first time in history that this virus has emerged in Europe," said Andriy Rozstalnyy, FAO animal production and health officer. "So, as step zero, we should collect and analyse data on the spread of the virus and its financial consequences. Only after an assessment of the epidemiological situation can we move further to identify possible ways of handling it."

A cost-benefit analysis will be used to compare outbreak control options. Next, a field manual will be produced specifically for the Eurasian continent – an important practical output from one of the FAO projects, financed by the Government of Hungary.



Since few veterinarians in Europe have ever encountered lumpy skin disease, step-by-step guidelines are needed to ensure proper surveillance procedures are followed. Later, the manual will be translated into several national languages.

At a three-day regional workshop in Budapest planned for March, experts from across Europe and Central Asia will review and revise current strategies, update their knowledge of tools and approaches for preventing, monitoring and coping with the disease. Topics to be covered include risk communication and awareness, vaccination plans, and proper laboratory testing methods.

ANIMAL WELFARE ISSUES ARE SUBJECT OF INCREASED ATTENTION



A massive increase in animal production over the past few decades has raised a wide range of ethical issues, including concern for animal welfare. Retailers and the food industry are asking for higher animal welfare standards for foods of animal origin, and compliance with such standards is increasingly stipulated in trade agreements.

The transportation, handling and slaughter of animals – along with sustainability and related legislation – were all aspects of animal welfare under discussion at an international workshop in Tbilisi (25-26 January).

FAO and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) organized the workshop to

initiate a discussion of problems concerning animal welfare in Eastern Europe.



Around 25 representatives of the veterinary services and livestock sector from four countries – Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – were participating. The objective was to develop common understanding of animal welfare and regional action plan.

“Animal welfare is a complex subject with scientific, ethical, economic and cultural, social, religious and political dimensions,” said Andriy Rozstalnyy, FAO animal production and health officer. “Nowadays, livestock producers and consumers are increasingly talking about animal welfare issues, and they also consider it as a characteristic of quality of products originated from animals.”

To assess animal welfare in participating countries, RSPCA representatives made field visits to Armenia and Georgia in advance of the workshop. They measured and evaluated the performance of livestock producers and slaughter operators. Based in part on their observations, guidelines and recommendations on humane handling, transport and slaughter of livestock were presented at the workshop.



“Changes towards more humane treatment of livestock must come about through the joint efforts of governments, producers, the meat industry and international society,” said Rozstalnyy. “FAO in cooperation with RSPCA and other partner organizations could be in a position to coordinate these efforts, and provide technical advice and assistance to countries of the region.”

The welfare of humans and the welfare of animals are closely linked. In many regions, a secure supply of food for people depends on the health and productivity of animals, and these in turn depend on the care and nutrition that animals receive.

A number of studies have quantified the economic returns of animal welfare and shown that application of animal welfare standards and practices can even contribute to greater food security and enhance rural incomes.

CHALLENGE: HOW TO MAKE SURE RURAL WOMEN BENEFIT FROM ECONOMIC GROWTH?



It has been almost 17 months since the nations of the world adopted the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. To keep up the momentum and start delivering measurable results, FAO dedicated a three-day conference in Vilnius to the specific area of gender equality.



Studies have shown that improved societal status of women counted for as much as half of the global reduction in hunger between 1970 and 1995. Progress in women's access to education alone was linked to a 43 percent gain in food security – as significant as the gains from increased food availability (26 percent) and health advances (19 percent) combined.

“When women have equal access to resources, they spend more than men do on food, health, clothing and education for their children,” said Dono Abdurazakova, FAO senior gender and social protection expert.

“The principle of ‘Leaving no one behind’ guides every goal of the 2030 Agenda,” said Cristina Amaral, FAO deputy regional representative for Europe and Central Asia, in her welcoming remarks. “The focus on gender equality and women’s empowerment is explicit across all the Sustainable Development Goals, both as stand-alone Goal 5 and as a cross-cutting theme of more than 30 related targets.”

On the conference’s first day, statements by Ministers and other high-level participants laid the policy foundations for gender equality, presenting practical examples, local and international experiences, and success stories. Government representatives from European Union member countries, the Caucasus, including Georgia, and Central Asia will be given the floor.

“Enabling and empowering rural women is essential for sustainable agricultural development and food security, and it can shift dynamics in the family, community and even globally for the better,” she said. “This means it can ensure long-term social and economic growth.”



Women play a robust part in agriculture and food security: their labour force participation rate in the sector is 43 percent. Still, rural women are at greater risk of poverty. In almost all countries, female household heads have less access to critical resources such as land, water and credit, and are less well educated than their male counterparts are.

Discussions were held with country representatives and experts working in groups to detect challenges and opportunities, and to find tools and approaches for promoting inclusive agricultural and development policies.

Entitled [Promoting socially inclusive rural development in Europe and Central Asia](#), the conference was hosted by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), an autonomous body of the European Union on gender, based in Vilnius.



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