Proposal for a revision and update of the FVE position paper on the Herd Health Plan (FVE/doc/2010/054)

Herd Health Planning

Red lines – Comments received by UEVH and UEVP

1. Background
It is widely accepted that a key challenge for the agri-food industry in the 21st century is to employ disease prevention strategies in order to maintain healthy herds, enhance animal welfare and improve farmer profitability. The role of the farmer also has changed during recent years, i.e. from “producing animals” towards “producing food in a sustainable manner”.

In its Plenary Meeting of 15 April 2014 the European Parliament voted on the European Commission’s proposals for a Regulation on Animal Health which now introduce the tool of the “animal health visits”.

For success in designing and implementing herd health strategies the veterinarian acts as a facilitator and becomes an educator to assist in positive change behaviour on farm. Effective knowledge transfer, which translates new and existing scientific output into farm level activity, is recognized as a key activity for further development of positive change in agriculture. Therefore the veterinarian acts as the leader of the farm management team.

Successful herd health planning requires some alterations in custom and habits on farm: whether it is on a one-to-one basis or with a group of farmers, the veterinarian has the key communication skills to enhance learning and implement herd health changes on farm.

Further down the food chain this approach will lead to a more sustainable and safer food and to a more sustainable environment for the consumer.

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1 European Parliament votes on proposals for Animal Health and Official Controls, FVE/14/doc/023 (rev)
2. Herd Health Planning: optimising AH/AW/PH

Herd health planning is a **continuous improving method** aiming to optimise animal health and welfare through systematic analysis of relevant data and regular clinical observations of the animals and their environment in order to allow informed and timely decisions to improve animal health and farmer profitability.

Herd health planning at farm level is a key mechanism in maintaining the sustainability of livestock production, with direct positive knock-on effects for animal welfare and public health. Moreover it helps limiting the impact of the farming on the environment throughout best practices may impact positively on farming incomes as well as potentially open up new markets.

The Herd Health Planning aims to:

1. Reaching optimal animal health and welfare;
2. Reaching quality safe and sustainable food and increased consumer confidence;
3. Prevent zoonoses (diseases transmissible from animals to humans) and enhance diseases surveillance;
4. Reaching optimal farmer's profitability and reduced farmer's stress;

These objectives can be achieved throughout a planned set of actions, namely:

- Understanding of the cost implications of each health issue;
- Assessing which areas require attention;
- Setting herd health performance indicators;
- Monitoring the incidence of health herd performance;
- Measuring the impact of clinical and sub-clinical disease issues;
- Determining the financial loss for clinical and subclinical disease;
- Apply corrective actions.

When disease incidence is measured against accepted standards, where and when to intervene can be easily planned.

Knowing the financial loss for clinical and subclinical disease helps direct effort and resources to the most important areas on the farm.

In addition herd health planning helps reduce farmer stress and promotes the smooth running of the farm as a business.

The Herd Health PLANNING should include:

- Good husbandry practices (housing, climate conditions, water/feeding and management),
- Good biosecurity measures;
- Veterinary medicinal products and feed additives good handling practices;
- Good hygiene practices;
- Clinical and sub clinical diseases monitoring plan;
Other important components are:

- Quarantine plan for new animals entering the farm;
- Infectious disease control plan, isolation facilities, bio security measures in order to prevent spreading of diseases from animal to animal as well as from farm to farm;
- Contingency plans;
- Identification system for all animals, including recording systems for treated animals;
- Recording system of movements and traceability of livestock;
- Frequency of checks on animal health and welfare status by the farmer;
- Prevention and control of production specific diseases;
- Vaccination plan;
- Parasite control and treatment plan (not only in livestock but also in companion animals living on the same farm);
- Disposal of dead animals (in accordance with EU and national legislation).

Regular animal health visits should be part of the Herd Health Planning and should be set up depending on the existing health problems, the size of the farm, the animal species, and the risk for introducing/spreading diseases. Appropriate financial resources should be also allocated.

3. Herd Health Planning Check list

This checklist is not exhaustive and needs to be adjusted to the specific needs of every single farmer.

- Record keeping: address feed, medicinal products and other treatments, occurrence of diseases, findings on health and welfare observations by the farmer, results and consequences of relevant analysis, relevant reports on checks (on animals or products) and on findings in slaughterhouses. If new herd health problems arise, they need to be described in detail as well as measures implemented for their improvement and/or treatment, and the follow-up needs to be performed.

- Animals: identify the animal species and category, source of the animals and/or semen, numbers of animals and respective movements, including the reasons for such movements.

- Identification and registration: implement national and EU law, as well as an additional system for identification of treated animals.

- Biosecurity: record the use of disinfectants (where, when, which), implement the use of special protective clothing (namely for visitors), control the access of vehicles on farms (by use of facilities for their disinfection), establish roadways, pest control, restrictions for domestic animals (e.g. no entry into stables), quarantine measures, implement and
control the purchase of animals, materials, equipment, as well as disposal of carcasses and litter, consider appropriate farm location (e.g. new buildings), register visitors on farms and implement proper visitor parking.

- Prevention measures: e.g. record vaccination, deworming and equivalent activities.
- Animal housing: consider climate, light, materials and appropriate equipment meeting animal welfare criteria.
- Animal welfare: implement appropriate handling and housing of animals (e.g. density, enriched environment), as well as their transport.
- Education and training of personal: ensure knowledge of relevant legislation on animal welfare, bio security and hygiene matters.
- Feed and water supply: control source of feed and respective ingredients, namely suppliers, as well as water, e.g. own source, storage, hygienic management.
- Health issues: keep recording systems for fertility, body condition score, claw/hoof health (including routine foot-care), number of animals culled for disease, clinical disease frequency (pinpoint which diseases - bacterial viral, parasitic - are important for the farm, depending on species and area) and, performance (e.g. litter size, growth rate, milk production, cell count, mortality).
- Participation in programs, necropsy and laboratory testing: to be implemented depending on animal species and region, and associated, whenever required, with serological tests, nasal swabs, sampling of feed, environmental tests, etc.
- Treatments: record drug administration (and store associated documentation), as well as drug storage, antiparasitic treatment, routine treatment (e.g. food additives) and non-routine treatment (e.g. antibiotics, anti-inflammatory medicines).