

The role of the Food and Agriculture Organization in bluetongue disease

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Summary

Recent years have witnessed a dramatic northwards extension of the bluetongue virus (BTV)-infected and disease-affected area within the Mediterranean Basin and the Balkans. Serious losses have been experienced for the first time in some areas never before known to have been infected. Associated with this are also changes in vector distribution and possible changes in vector competence. Similarly, in East Asia changes are occurring in virus and vector distribution which might be matched by northerly extension of BTV infection in Central Asia and southerly extension in South America. These events are neither fully defined nor are the determinants of their occurrence understood. Whether or not the events witnessed are due to climate change associated with global warming needs to be determined. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is concerned to ensure that the evolution of BTVs is monitored on a global scale to ensure that all countries, especially developing countries and those in transition, can be prepared in advance for future problems, if necessary. Concern over BTV does not stop there for several other vector-borne viruses and their associated diseases exist which could threaten livestock agriculture in vulnerable areas for which bluetongue could serve as a useful model. The FAO has a responsibility to assist member countries to establish epidemiological systems and specific investigational expertise and capacity to fill what could otherwise be lacunae in monitoring networks. Tactical and strategic responses to virus spread also merit united international action by the FAO, OIE and partners in animal disease control.

Keywords

Bluetongue – Control – International organisation.