

## From the Wings: The AVIS College Bulletin January 2008

### The Great Transition?

During 2008 at AVIS we look forward, with our many partners, to building on our response to fundamental transitions in the landscape of animal health and production that clearly emerged in 2007. These affect the rapidly evolving role of state veterinary services in particular and animal health, welfare and production professionals in general, worldwide. A consequence is that while disease prevention and management remain high priorities, resolving practical, economic and ethical dilemmas associated with production and consumption of animals may in practice claim equal or greater attention in the future. Of these transitions we would single out three:

#### 1. High Impact Diseases

High impact diseases, such as Avian Influenza, Blue Tongue and Foot-and-Mouth, continue to dominate. While their immediate impact is on the animals themselves, their consequences, like an illustration of chaos theory, ripple at high speed throughout the world, disrupting whole societies and economies as well as causing suffering and death. As this 2008 AVIS edition is being produced, the United Kingdom reports a new outbreak of AI in a swannery on the south coast. This swannery has its origins in medieval times, and is a major tourist attraction, bringing revenue to a relatively poor part of the Dorset coast. Of course, it also affects commercial poultry production in the area and another related industry in Dorset, hunting and shoots. What seems to underlie the outbreak is climate change, in this case causing the unexpected migration of a wild bird through the swannery, leaving infection in its wake. Climate change also appears to be one cause of the spread of Blue Tongue north in Europe, reaching the UK for the first time in 2007.



Enhanced, and better understood, biosecurity and surveillance procedures, combined with rapid notification of suspicious events and effective use of protection zones, have proven increasingly successful in managing such outbreaks. But the long-term solution to such challenges necessarily relies on continued understanding and support from the general public, support that in the end must derive from a social consensus as to what role the veterinarian and the associated animal health professional is to play in the local, regional and global community. Once that consensus is established, the resources the professionals need, whether in the field, the laboratory or in wider supervision of production and consumption must be provided and underwritten for the long term. One such resource is knowledge.

## 2. Regional Cooperation and Integration

Regional integration initiatives, such as those sponsored by the TAIEX office of DG Enlargement of the European Community, and the PRINT (promoting regional integration) programme of SADC, the Southern African Development Community, demonstrate innovative, "ground up" approaches to facing the problems caused by transboundary diseases.

There are four obvious keys to success:

1. having a clear, shared policy, such as contingency planning for preventing incursions of FMD, or "rolling back" CBPP;
2. building an effective, regional network of professionals, adequately resourced and trained;
3. engaging all stakeholders from the outset in planning and decision-making, including risk communications;
4. creating and using rapid, reliable means of communicating and using key knowledge, information and data.

The observance of World Rabies Day, September 8, 2007, based on similar principles, was a highly encouraging sign that in the "global village" stakeholders are willing to come together to address a disease that could be largely eradicated, but in fact is resurgent.

## 3. Economic Change: New Dilemmas in Food and Energy Security

The rapid rise of the so called "BRIC" economies, Brazil, Russia, India and China, and economic growth in many smaller countries, has brought with it a surge in consumer demand for protein of animal origin and concomitant price rises for meat in the world's markets. This trend is complemented by a significant political emphasis on bio-fuel production, in part as a reaction to the risk of global warming. Such price rises are adding to a general pattern of welcome renaissance in some of the more depressed agricultural areas of the world. But these same forces are causing a new dilemma for society as a whole; the more land is turned over to bio-fuel the less is available for food production. 2007 already showed signs of considerable strain in terms of overall food security which are likely to worsen in 2008.

This production trend brings with it new challenges in respect of food safety, public health and animal welfare. As the many large scale meat product recalls in the United States in 2007 illustrated, industrial scale production can bring industrial scale food safety headaches. Meanwhile, obesity is rapidly overtaking cigarette smoking as the leading public health challenge worldwide, causing professionals, consumers and policy makers to rethink their approaches to food production and consumption. In particular, clear policies on consumer education and product labelling, combined with good dietary practices and emphasis on waste reduction, will

take an increasingly central role in the "farm to fork" continuum. As pressure on animal production capacity grows, the potential for compromise or abuse in respect of animal welfare may grow, at exactly the time when consumers also exhibit paradoxical demands, on the one hand for humane production and slaughter, and on the other for continuing supplies of cheap meat.

AVIS continues to enjoy world wide support and contributions from renowned specialists in animal health. Their ranks are joined by others specialising in disciplines increasingly closely aligned with animal health, such as animal welfare, food safety and risk communications. The number is far too large to list here individually but the Editors wish to record their debt with the greatest of pleasure and admiration. We also wish to record the continuing guidance and support of the founding supporters of AVIS namely the FAO, OIE and, in particular, colleagues from the UK Institute for Animal Health.

AVIS is also committed to capacity-building and stakeholder support at both national and regional levels and looks forward to extending a number of initiatives that began in 2007 during the coming year, at the same time welcoming proposals for using AVIS programs and services, and for collaboration, from new partners around the world.

If you would like to discuss these possibilities, please email [mmoussaid@aviscollege.com](mailto:mmoussaid@aviscollege.com).

© AVIS 2008