

Schmallenberg virus [SBV] - recent developments, 5 Jan 2012

Summary report, Netherlands

In the Netherlands, approximately 3.9 million heads of cattle are held in over 39 300 officially registered holdings, over 1 million sheep in 30 300 holdings and 0.4 million goats in 16 000 holdings. These holdings are very diverse in structure and size, ranging from large commercial plants to small, hobby farms. The [congenital malformations] reporting requirement applies to all holders and the clinical signs have been reported from all categories.

As of 5 Jan 2012, reports on observed clinical signs which may indicate SBV infection have been received from 157 holdings. This included 90 sheep, 61 cattle and 3 goat holdings. [These sum up to a total of 154 holdings; see an update in commentary below]. Meanwhile, 52 sheep, 30 cattle and 2 goat farms have been tested, with the SBV actually demonstrated on 40 sheep farms, and, for the 1st time, also on a goat farm. In 43 tested holdings, the virus was not demonstrated. The remaining 73 holdings are still under study. The fact that the virus has not been demonstrated on 43 of the tested farms does not exclude the past involvement of the SBV since the infection could have taken place during the early stages of pregnancy.

A test for antibodies against the virus, which may provide definitive evidence of past infection, is under development. Based on the results of such test, the number of positive farms is likely to widen further. At my request, the nVWA has published an overview of the reports on their website [see most recent data in commentary below].

Situation in Europe

In Germany, the virus has now been found in a deformed calf. In Belgium, 20 farms, with reported congenital malformations in ruminants, have so far been examined. These included 8 cattle farms (all found negative), 11 sheep farms (of which 9 tested positive) and a negative goat farm. [See Belgium's update of 6 Jan 2012 in item 4 below].

The Chief Veterinary Officers (CVOs) from France, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom indicate that they have no abnormalities reported. In these countries the situation is closely followed, with France now also officially requiring notification.

Research

Though SBV is not known from other parts of the world, it is strongly related to other Orthobunyavirus. This also means that there are still many questions about its characteristics, introduction and spread. The analysis is even more complicated by the fact that the phenomena we observe are the result of an infection which probably took place several months ago. I therefore maximise the (scientific)

research and have asked Commissioner Dalli for support of this research. The researchers, including the Animal Health Service (GD), the Central Veterinary Institute (CVI) and the National Institute for Health and Environment (RIVM) adopt the said approach this week with their German colleagues and partners from the (Pharmaceutical) industry to benefit available expertise and avoid duplication. There are four named areas of research (Diagnostics, vaccine development, epidemiology, virus characterization), with the highest priority given to the development of a test that detects antibodies against the virus.

(European) exchange of information

Given the transboundary nature of the problem, my ministry maintains intensive contacts with the European Commission and other States. The developments surrounding the SBV are explicitly on the agenda of the meeting of the Standing Committee on The Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH) on 11 Jan 2012 in Brussels. Netherlands will stress the importance of joint research efforts to the other Member States. Previously I have already asked the Commission to set a reporting obligation on SBV, so that the the extent and distribution of this issue can be obtained on a European level. This request will be raised again by the Netherlands during the SCoFCAH meeting.

I will keep the House informed of further developments.

Dr Henk Bleker
Secretary of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation