

**A new Animal Health Strategy for the European Union (2007-2013)
where "Prevention is better than cure"**

In December 2004, the Commission launched an external evaluation to thoroughly review the outcomes of EU action on animal health and the direction we may wish to take in the future.

A combination of circumstances made it imperative to re-evaluate our policy:

- 1st • The main elements of the existing policy were drawn up largely between 1988 and 1995 when we were still a Community of twelve Member States;
- 2nd • New challenges have emerged. Diseases which were unknown a decade ago have appeared – SARS is an example – while others, such as foot-and-mouth disease, bluetongue and avian flu, have recently presented new challenges, reminding us that they remain very serious risks;
- 3rd • Trading conditions have also changed radically with the volume of trade in animal products increasing greatly, both within the EU and with third countries; and
- 4th • Science, technology and our institutional framework have evolved substantially.

Based on the evaluation results and the stakeholder consultation, the Commission presented its proposal for a new EU Animal Health Strategy (2007-2013). For the first time the Commission has set out its strategic aims and objectives for animal health, to cover the next six years.

Our vision is to work in partnership to increase the prevention of animal health related problems before they happen: "Prevention is better than cure". The strategy provides direction for the development of animal health policy, based on extensive stakeholder consultation and a firm commitment to high standards of animal health. It will facilitate the establishment of priorities that are consistent with agreed strategic goals and the revision of, and agreement on, acceptable and appropriate standards.

The concept of animal health covers not only the absence of disease in animals, but also the critical relationship between the health of animals and their welfare. It is also a pillar for the Commission's policy on public health and food safety.

The strategy covers the health of all animals in the EU kept for food, farming, sport, companionship, entertainment and in zoos. It also covers wild animals and animals used in research where there is a risk of them transmitting disease to other animals or to humans. The strategy also covers the health of animals transported to, from and within the EU. It is aimed at the entire EU, including animal owners, the veterinary profession, food chain businesses, animal health industries, animal interest groups, researchers and teachers, governing bodies of sport and recreational organisations, educational facilities, consumers, travellers, competent authorities of Member States and the EU Institutions.

The strategy builds on the current animal health legal framework in the EU and the standards and guidelines of the World Organisation for Animal Health. It sets out some challenging aims, not just for the EU institutions and Governments, but for all citizens, to improve animal health. These are its goals:

- **Goal 1:** To ensure a high level of public health and food safety by minimising the incidence of biological and chemical risks to humans.
- **Goal 2:** To promote animal health by preventing/reducing the incidence of animal diseases, and in this way to support farming and the rural economy.
- **Goal 3:** To improve economic growth/cohesion/competitiveness assuring free circulation of goods and proportionate animal movements.
- **Goal 4** To promote farming practices and animal welfare which prevent animal health-related threats and minimise environmental impacts in support of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy.

The timetable for delivery of all the specific actions included in this strategy will depend on the position of the Council and the Parliament, and also on our human resources capacity.

The Commission fully recognises that it cannot achieve these objectives by acting alone. To achieve success, we need to deepen and strengthen the existing collaborative approach, maintaining effective partnerships at all levels. All those with an interest in animal health will have their role to play and responsibilities to fulfil in optimising performance and results.

A partnership approach built on trust, openness and a willingness to take difficult decisions is essential for success. The strategy can only bring about real change if everyone involved in animal health works together and with all interested citizens. We must take advantage of existing collaborations, encourage new initiatives and make more use of non-legislative alternatives to regulation.