

## **Diocese of Hereford, Chaplain for Agriculture & Rural Life**

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**Dear Colleague**

### **October Briefing 2007**

A few notes which I hope may be helpful in your conversations with farmers.

#### **Disease update**

Bluetongue disease is circulating in East Anglia, which constitutes an “outbreak” rather than an isolated case. It is a disease of ruminant animals, including cattle, sheep, goats, deer and camelids, but it does not affect horses. Bluetongue virus can not pass from animal to animal, it requires specific types of midge to be transmitted – i.e. it is infectious, but not contagious. The midge can travel up to 2km a day, though in certain weather conditions they can be wind-blown much further. Late summer to early autumn is the optimum season for transmission. The control strategy is to impose a 20km Control Zone around the area in Suffolk where cases have been identified. Ruminant animals are able to move within the Control Zone, but not out of it, except to places of slaughter within the Protection Zone. The 150km wide Protection Zone from Lincolnshire to Suffolk allows for movement of ruminant animals within its boundaries, but not out of it. Footpaths etc have not been closed since this has limited impact on the spread of the disease.

Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) is also a viral disease affecting cattle, sheep, pigs and goats, though the virus is spread in fluids, exhaled air, milk and dung and, in certain circumstances, airborne contamination is possible. It can contaminate vehicles, clothing, feedstuffs etc so that although the disease does not affect humans, restrictions are much more stringent in FMD areas to reduce the risk of contamination. Animals may only be moved under strict licensing arrangements. By the end of September, FMD had been confirmed on five holdings within the FMD Protection Zone near Egham in Surrey. Foot and Mouth Disease controls remain in place on all FMD susceptible animals, including pigs, and are most severe in the designated Protection Zone and the wider Surveillance Zone in Surrey, and the FMD “Risk Area” covering Essex, Kent, East and West Sussex, Hampshire, Surrey, Berkshire, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Greater London. Where these also overlap with the Bluetongue Zones farmers will need to check carefully to see which restrictions apply to them. The rest of England and all of Scotland and Wales constitutes a “foot and mouth low-risk area” where some movement restrictions are being lifted, but only under strictly controlled circumstances.

The impact of the movement restrictions at the time of year when the majority of breeding stock would go to market, and when winter feed is already in short supply due to the earlier floods, has already had an effect on farm incomes. About 60% of the UK's livestock market (valued at £1.1 billion) is traded between August and November. The ending of the export market due to FMD restrictions (valued at £10 million per week) means that many animals that would have been exported now have to be absorbed by the domestic market, also sending prices down. This has been particularly true for this year's lamb prices. There are also welfare implications when

animals have to be kept on the same piece of land for long periods. The uncertainty over the future development of these diseases is also having a social impact. Various helpline numbers exist -

- **Farm Crisis Network** ([www.farminghelp.org.uk](http://www.farminghelp.org.uk) or 0845 367 9990) provides pastoral and practical support as well as advice. NB this is a new telephone number and the charge is equivalent to a local call.
- **The ARC-Addington Fund** (02476 690 587). Cash grant schemes have been available for business costs e.g. if stock have had to be housed and are eating winter fodder
- **Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI)** implemented its emergency procedures to ensure that all requests for help from farming families facing financial hardship as a result of the foot and mouth movement restrictions were processed without delay. The RABI emergency helpline number is 01865 727 888, the office number is 01865 724 931.
- **Samaritans** helpline number 08457 909 090

### **Decision expected on bovine TB and badgers**

The “other” disease having a huge impact on livestock farmers, bovine TB, will require a government decision soon. The Independent Scientific Group on cattle TB submitted its report to the government in June (see earlier briefings) and the Minister responding to this is due to give evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on 24<sup>th</sup> October. However the government has already suggested that the response will not involve the wholesale culling of badgers. TB statistics published at the beginning of September reveal that during July a further 2,314 cattle were slaughtered, an increase of 25% over the same month in 2006. The West of England experienced an 18% rise in new herd breakdowns compared with 2006.

### **Biofuels a “green” disaster?**

Although a great deal of emphasis has been put on developing biofuels as renewable energy resources, Friends of the Earth is asking the European Commission to revise its targets for using biofuels for transport following a leaked paper from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which highlights grave concerns about their social and environmental effects. The OECD report suggests that the economic impact of biofuels could be worse than that of petrol and diesel, leading to the replacement of natural forests, wetlands and pasture with intensively grown energy crops. Biofuels will also impact on the global economy, competing with land that would otherwise be used for food production. The findings of the OECD report are being disputed by others in the industry.

### **Milk prices rise**

Farm-gate prices for milk have risen due to a shortage in supply and increasing world demand. Marks and Spencers led with 28p/litre and Tesco, the largest UK food retailer, was paying 27.5p/litre. However, there are signs that the pressures leading to this rise are slowing and analysts suggest this represents the peak for the time being.

I hope this is helpful,

***Nick Read***