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Healthy animals - typically Swiss

Sturdy cows grazing on Alpine meadows to the constant chiming of cowbells – it is an image beloved of every tourist. But it is also an image of which we can be proud; our animals are very healthy creatures. Swiss animal owners know that health is crucial to the wellbeing of their animals. Healthy animals are also more productive and the source of impeccable food. So the popular image of our country is in keeping with our typically Swiss demand for quality.

In a globalised world, animal health is an important pillar of any society, because the opening-up of markets also brings with it new risks. The pathogens of animal diseases can conquer whole continents within a day through animals and animal products. Switzerland's Animal Health Strategy 2010+ is therefore an essential quality feature for our products.

This strategy points the way to a safer future in the field of animal health. We are actively seeking to safeguard the health of our animals. And this is an advantage for our country that we aim to preserve. We need to do everything we can in support of this strategy – through prevention, crisis management and targeted control of animal diseases with international cooperation and forward-looking research.

But it is not the task of politicians and the veterinary authorities to implement the animal health strategy. On the contrary, it is first and foremost the animal owner who is responsible for the health of his animals. Especially farms and food producers need to play their part if the strategy is to have an impact. Only if we pull together and engage in "active prevention with decisive action" will healthy animals be more than a post-card image on Alpine pastures.

Doris Leuthard
President of the Swiss Confederation



Swiss Animal Health Strategy 2010+



Hans Wyss Director Federal Veterinary Office

In international comparison, Switzerland enjoys a high standard of animal health. This is not to be taken for granted. Costly eradication programmes have eliminated classical animal diseases such as infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) and diseases with high zoonotic potential (e. g. brucellosis, tuberculosis, rabies). Even with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) data indicate that the almost twenty-year efforts to control the disease have been successful.

Healthy animals and freedom from specific animal diseases provide an important foundation for producing good and safe food of animal origin in Switzerland and thus contribute substantially to the quality of domestic production. Producers and consumers equally benefit from this situation. To ensure that this foundation also remains in place in the future, substantial foresight and strategic planning is required. The Swiss Federal Veterinary Office (SFVO) therefore has developed the animal health strategy presented here. This has been elaborated in close collaboration with the cantonal veterinary authorities. The strategy provides the foundation for the public veterinary service for future decision-making. In addition it is also intended to foster discussion between individuals. institutions and organisations concerned.

The public veterinary service is prepared to implement this strategy in the medium to long term together with all stakeholders involved.

Why does Switzerland need an animal health strategy?

Animal health is an important contributor to the welfare of animals and to the sustainable production of food of animal origin. Healthy animals need less veterinary intervention. This reduces the use of drugs and also lowers the risk of residues occurring in foods. Healthy animals are more productive and form the basis for safe food of animal origin, which is an important contributor to public health. Safe products also increase the competitiveness of agriculture. This is important for domestic production, since two-thirds of gross earnings in the agricultural sector come from the animal sector.

Animal diseases and zoonoses do not stop at national borders. In Switzerland, as in other countries, an increase in the occurrence of new kinds of animal diseases has to be expected. This is related to (a) the globalisation with increasing movement of people, animals and goods and short travel times and (b) the fact that the consequences of global warming due to climate change have an increasingly visible impact on animal diseases.

Switzerland is already part of the European veterinary area. This makes it crucial that we collaborate closely with the EU as our most important trading partner. It is also important that animal diseases are controlled at the site of origin so that a spread to other regions can be prevented as far as possible.

In international comparison, Switzerland already has a high standard of animal health today. In the increasingly liberalised trade, the distinct level of animal health enables Switzerland to secure long-term competitive advantages for its domestic production. The strategy presented here is an instrument to prepare actively for these challenges while maintaining the high health standards.

Main focus

In a comprehensive sense, animal health includes measures and conditions to eliminate or significantly reduce the impact of diseases on animals including their wellbeing environments. According to animal health legislation and the threat situation outlined, the public veterinary service focuses in its "Swiss Animal Health Strategy 2010+" on infectious diseases and, in particular, on zoonoses (diseases that are directly or indirectly transmissible from animals to humans). Thereby impeccable primary production with healthy animals is crucial for the production of safe food.

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The "Swiss Animal Health Strategy 2010+" is aimed at all individuals, companies and organisations that are involved completely or partially with issues of animal health in any form; whether this be as animal owners, veterinarians, authorities, companies along the food chain or research facilities. It especially concerns animal owners in the daily handling of animals.

To further improve animal health, efforts are being made to achieve the following goals:

The federal authority reinforces its lead role and its engagement especially in prevention, early detection and emergency preparedness.

International networks and active cooperation with institutions and organisations in the field of animal health will be extended.

The cantonal veterinary services standardise implementation and foster intercantonal cooperation.

Animal health research is guided by the needs of animal owners and the public veterinary service. International research collaboration will be intensified.

Animal owners and other stakeholders are closely involved in decision-making processes and share responsibility in surveillance and control.

In order to achieve the strategic goals and to foster animal health sustainably, performance targets and measures within five fields of activities, called action plans, are defined in the "Swiss Animal Health Strategy 2010+":

Swiss Animal Health Strategy 2010+

I Prevention

In order to reduce the impact of outbreaks, the occurrence and spread of zoonoses, notifiable and economically relevant animal diseases are prevented or minimized by taking specific measures.

II Emergency preparedness

Outbreaks of animal diseases, in particular the outbreak of highly contagious animal diseases, may occur unexpectedly at any time. With optimization in emergency preparedness, the efficiency of the Swiss Veterinary Service and the relevant stakeholders is further improved.

III Control of zoonoses, notifiable and economically relevant animal diseases

A sustainable control of animal diseases is costly. Well-designed surveillance programs, a regulated funding system and a good cooperation between all involved parties contribute to an increased efficiency in the control of animal diseases

IV International cooperation

Animal diseases and zoonoses do not stop at national borders.
A reinforced international cooperation is a prerequisite to advance in animal health, both nationally and globally.

V Science, research and development

New scientific findings have to be comprised in the implementation of anima disease control programs in order to further improve animal health. A network of research groups and an international exchange of relevant findings plays an important role in this process.

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Performance targets within the action plans

I. Prevention

a) Preventive measures

- The various animal husbandry systems have been assessed in terms of infection risks.
- Vaccination strategies have been evaluated and are used as an effective preventive measure for various animal diseases.
- The regular and current exchange of information between all involved parties on the disease situation and the occurrence of animal diseases has been expanded.
- The implementation of import-export regulations has been optimized.

b) Early detection

- Emerging and re-emerging diseases are identified and assessed with regard to their potential risk to humans and animals. Based on this, appropriate measures are initiated.
- A system for early detection through syndrome surveillance has been developed.

c) Diagnostics

- Efficient, rapid and modern diagnostic tools are available at all times for animal diseases relevant to Switzerland.
- The structure of the laboratory system in Switzerland has been adjusted with regard to the increased demands for quality, effectiveness and efficiency (cost/benefit ratio).

d) Data management

 Databases on animal diseases and zoonoses have been optimally linked to other information systems, and data have been made available to all relevant stakeholders.

e) Increased disease awareness

- The level of information and training of animal owners on disease awareness and on appropriate preventive measures is continuously increased.
- Disease awareness for relevant emerging and re-emerging diseases has been raised according to identified risks among official veterinarians, veterinary practitioners, people employed in animal disease diagnostics and in the public veterinary service.
- The mutual exchange of experts from the European Union, cantonal authorities and international organizations has been promoted.

II. Emergency preparedness

a) Contingency planning

- Contingency plans for all relevant highly contagious animal diseases are in place and constantly updated.
- Cantonal procedures and intercantonal collaboration for the recruitment of sufficient human resources and materials in the event of highly contagious diseases are reviewed and adjusted.
- Laboratory contingency plans for highly contagious animal diseases are constantly updated and adjusted to the national and international threat situation.

b) Simulation exercises

 The control of the relevant highly contagious animal diseases is reviewed and optimized by means of regular national and international exercises.

c) Vaccination strategies

 Vaccination strategies for relevant highly contagious animal diseases have been evaluated and the contingency planning correspondingly adjusted.

d) Communication activities

- An effective emergency communication is in place and functional.
- Online information has been established as an indispensable source of information on animal diseases
- The Swiss veterinary service is known to be a competent and trustworthy partner for the media.
- During an outbreak of a highly contagious animal disease there is understanding in the general public for prevention and control measures.

III. Control of zoonoses¹, notifiable² and economically relevant³ animal diseases

a) Control and eradication programs

- The efforts to control animal diseases have been nationwide harmonized and implemented under the leadership of the SFVO in close cooperation with the cantons.
- Animal owners take more responsibility in the control of animal diseases.
- The collaboration between the Swiss veterinary service and animal health services for the control of animal diseases has been reviewed and adapted.

b) Surveillance

- Zoonoses have been reclassified according to their potential harm to animals and humans, the frequency of their occurrence and the cost-efficiency of their control.
 The legal requirements have been accordingly adjusted.
- Monitoring programmes for animal diseases have been optimized in terms of cost/benefit ratio.
- The list of notifiable animal diseases has been reviewed.

c) Funding

 A standardised national funding system for the control of animal diseases and zoonoses has been evaluated.
 For the control of economically relevant animal diseases with no risk to humans, the costs are shared uniformly and nationwide by industry and individual animal owners.

IV. International cooperation

a) International agreements

- The Swiss animal health status is specifically promoted in an international context.
- Respective to the EU-Swiss veterinary agreement,
 Swiss representation has been assured on all decision-making EU committees in the field of animal health (comitology⁴).

b) Multilateral and bilateral cooperation

- Sanitary and technical control-related conditions have been established for market access and keeping on the market.
- Sustainable bilateral cooperation is specifically promoted.

V. Science, research and development

- Research needs for the Swiss veterinary service are accordingly assessed for implementation.
- Results of scientific studies are provided to develop future control and surveillance strategies.
- The SFVO actively promotes the networking of national and international research groups and strengthens international cooperation.

- ¹ Zoonoses are diseases that are transmissible between animals and humans.
- ² The term "notifiable animal disease" includes all diseases listed in Articles 2–5 of the Animal Health Ordinance (AHO) (SR 916.401).
- ³ The term "economically relevant animal disease" is used here to include all infectious animal diseases that are economically relevant but not listed in the Animal Health Ordinance (AHO).
- 4 Comitology is taken to mean the system of administrative and expert committees of the European Union (EU). The committees play a key role in the decision-making process of the EU; they may be used both by the EU Commission and by the EU Council. They consist of representatives of Member States; Switzerland has observer status on a few of these committees. The task of the committees is to review legislative proposals, including formal votes.

Implementation of the strategy

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Certain aspects of the strategy will need an adjustment of the legal framework. In the forthcoming revision of the animal health law, it is planned to strengthen the role of the federal authorities in the prevention of animal diseases and zoonoses; a corresponding draft will be presented to the Swiss parliament in the near future. Implementation concepts are to be developed for the various action plans together with all those concerned. The "Swiss Animal Health Strategy 2010+" is to be implemented step by step with all those involved starting in 2010. This will be a medium to long-term implementation phase.

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