



Press Release

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Animal disease programmes: generally sound but cost-effectiveness unclear, say EU auditors

EU animal disease programmes do a good job of containing disease, but it is hard to tell whether they are cost-effective, concludes a new report from the European Court of Auditors. While there have been notable successes, such as decreases in the number of cases of BSE in cattle, the auditors warn that some controls are not sufficient and some costs are unreasonably high.

Member States health programmes to eradicate, control, and monitor certain animal diseases involved EU funding to the value of €1.3 billion between 2009 and 2014 to cover activities such as animal vaccination, testing, and providing compensation for slaughtered animals.

The auditors visited seven Member States – Ireland, Spain, France, Italy, Poland, Romania and the United Kingdom – which represent 72 % of the total expenditure in this connection. They found that the examined programmes had contributed adequately to the containment of animal diseases. The approach taken by the European Commission was generally sound, and supported by good technical advice, risk analysis, and a mechanism for prioritising resources. There have been some notable successes, for example, decreases in the number of cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in cattle, salmonella in poultry, and rabies in wildlife. Member States' programmes had generally been designed and implemented well, with adequate systems to identify animal disease outbreaks and facilitate their eradication.

However, the cost-effectiveness of programmes is difficult to determine, due to the lack of available models for analysis. There were examples of programmes which had been insufficiently monitored by the Member States, and of unreasonably high costs. Areas with scope for improvement included the exchange of epidemiological information and access to historic results, although this was in the process of being improved. The auditors also found that some programmes should better specify the actions and controls needed.

"Animal diseases can spread rapidly across borders and some animal borne diseases are transmissible to humans", **said Bettina Jakobsen, the Member of the Court of Auditors responsible for the report.** "So continuous vigilance and effective action at EU level is essential."

While the assessment of specific veterinary programmes was positive, say the auditors, the eradication of bovine brucellosis and tuberculosis, and ovine and caprine brucellosis, posed continuing challenges in some Member States.

The purpose of this press release is to give the main messages of the special report adopted by the European Court of Auditors.

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The auditors recommend that the Commission should:

- facilitate the exchange of epidemiological information between Member States;
- examine whether existing indicators should be updated to provide better information on veterinary control activities and the cost-effectiveness of programmes;
- systematically include wildlife as an aspect of future veterinary programmes, when relevant; and
- support Member States in acquiring vaccines, when this is epidemiologically justified.

Special Report No 6/2016 “*Eradication, control and monitoring programmes to contain animal diseases*” is available in 23 EU languages on eca.europa.eu.