Veterinary Services in Belize: adapting organisational models to the needs of small economies

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Summary
International trade in agricultural goods is governed by the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the 'SPS Agreement') of the World Trade Organization. Small economies, such as the economy of Belize, must have the necessary infrastructure in place to meet their obligations and exercise their rights under the SPS Agreement. In response to the shortcomings of a small economy, the Belize Government has established the Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA) as its organisational model, to meet the challenges of providing Veterinary Services in this new millennium, as well as the demands of the international trade in animals and plants and their products. This model became operational in the year 2000 and has received national and international recognition as an appropriate model for small economies. The success of BAHA is due to strong political support and its dual public and private sector characteristics.

Keywords

Introduction
International rules have directly affected national regulations on the trade in agricultural goods since 1948, when the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade became effective. As a signatory to the World Trade Organization (WTO) (established in 1995 to serve as the umbrella organisation for international trade), Belize must meet its obligations and exercise, but not exceed, its rights when employing any of the WTO Agreements. The Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the ‘SPS Agreement’) applies to animal health (and food safety and plant health) measures in the international trade in animals and their products (12). The SPS Agreement encourages the use of internationally agreed standards, guidelines and recommendations in international trade. The international organisation which is recognised as being responsible for developing these standards, guidelines and recommendations is the OIE (World organisation for animal health). The OIE is the only international organisation to have been invested with such a mission within its field of competence (9), i.e., animal health, including animal production, food safety and animal welfare. Countries with small economies, such as Belize, in conforming to the SPS Agreement, must employ the principle of equivalence in trade agreements because the appropriate level of protection adopted by any one country may be achieved in various different ways. Under the principle of equivalence, disease control measures can be placed under the following categories:

– infrastructure
– programme design and implementation
– specific technical requirements (11).

Small economies have inherent problems in their organisational framework within the public sector. Most of these problems are related to scarce resources, particularly funding. Funding is not as readily available to the Belize government as it was in the past, as major funding agencies now prefer to work directly with the beneficiaries of such funding or through non-government organisations. Moreover, there is strong competition among ministries for government funds, and further competition within each ministry for the
funds allocated to that particular ministry. Thus, as a solution to the agricultural health organisational problems within the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Cooperatives, Belize created the Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA).

This paper describes an economically viable and efficient organisational model of the agricultural health services in a small country. This model meets the challenges of ensuring safe agricultural products for domestic use and fulfilling the requirements of international trade.

Characterisation of the agricultural sector in Belize

Belize is a small Commonwealth country located on the Atlantic coast of Central America, sharing borders with Mexico and Guatemala and bounded to the east by the Caribbean Sea (Fig. 1). It has a territory of 22,963 km² with 256,000 inhabitants. Since the 1980s, the agriculture sector has provided the main source of growth in the economy of Belize. During this time the agriculture sector has experienced a growth rate of more than 4.0% per annum and the growth rates of the livestock, fisheries and forestry sub-sectors have been even higher. The contribution of agriculture to the gross domestic product, foreign exchange and employment is relatively stable, averaging around 20.0%, 70.0% and 24.0%, respectively (8). Agricultural production is heavily dependent on a few traditional products: sugar, citrus, bananas and, in recent years, marine products.

There is no tradition of livestock production in Belize (7). When the country was first settled in 1638 the economy was primarily forestry oriented and even by 1952 a stable and prosperous agricultural economy had yet to evolve. The Department of Agriculture was established in 1928 but remained very small until 1948 when an agricultural station was established at Central Fram in the Cayo District. The livestock industry was formally organised in the late 1970s, when the Belize Government passed the Meat and Livestock Act (1), which established an association of livestock producers known as the Belize Livestock Producers’ Association (BLPA).

By the 1990s, these markets were no longer in existence and the only abattoir approved by the US Department of Agriculture closed down, due to poor throughput. The foot and mouth disease epidemic of 2001 in the United Kingdom led to Mexico closing its borders with Belize to trade in animals and animal products. This effectively destroyed the confidence of farmers in the BLPA, as the formal trade in live cattle to Mexico stopped completely. As of May 2003, this trade has yet to be re-initiated. As a result of these events, the BLPA has found it difficult to become organised into a successful institution representing the interests of livestock producers.

The Belize Poultry Association (BPA) was formed in the early 1990s because of the lack of proper representation by the BLPA and because poultry producers preferred to be independent (B.B. Bergen, personal communication). Today the BPA is a well-recognised and successful organisation, funded by the collection of a levy on the sale of day-old chicks at the hatcheries. The broiler industry is important for food security, development, agricultural diversification and foreign exchange savings (3).
The strengthening of veterinary and animal production services, the formation of the BPA and the establishment of different livestock councils are positive measures in the strengthening of the livestock industry. However, the transformation of the BLPA into a truly representative and economically viable organisation is a challenge which needs to be addressed.

The livestock survey of 2002 (Table I) showed an increase in the population of dairy-type cattle and a decrease in the number of pigs, in comparison to the 2001 figures. However, in general, the cattle population has remained relatively stable since the census of 1985, whereas the number of pigs shows an increase from 15,000 to 22,874.

The Cayo District and the Orange Walk District are the two livestock districts with extensive ranching systems. The agricultural sector in other districts consists principally of small farmers in subsistence farming. Mennonite (a religious denomination) farmers are the backbone of the livestock industry in the Orange Walk and Cayo Districts.

Belize became a Member Country of the OIE in 2002. It plays an active role in the Regional International Organization for Plant Protection and Animal Health (RIOPPAH), an organisation whose headquarters are in El Salvador and which serves nine Member Countries. Belize became a Member Country of RIOPPAH in 1996.

The organisation and structure of Veterinary Services

Veterinary Services in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Cooperatives: past to present

Veterinary Services in Belize were originally provided by British veterinarians stationed in Jamaica, then by British veterinarians in Belize through the Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) programme, provided by the British government. The last British veterinarian left in 1988. As these veterinarians were well supported by ODA and other similar funds, Veterinary Services in Belize flourished. However, as Belize veterinarians filled the posts, ODA funds were no longer available and the Belize government found it increasingly difficult to fund Veterinary Services. Eventually, there were no more resources to operate the Veterinary Services, including the veterinary diagnostic laboratory. The Veterinary Service was heavily staffed but there were few finances to purchase veterinary medications, field and laboratory supplies, vehicles and fuel. Moreover, those services which were provided focused principally on small animal clinics and large ambulatory animal medicine. As veterinarians spent most of their time attending small animals and little time on food animals, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Cooperatives (MAFC) decided in 1996 that it would divest itself of small animal clinics. The change from small animal clinical service was a policy change which did not meet much opposition from users of the service because of the growing availability of private veterinary clinics. This led to more work being done in large animal medicine but the focus was still placed more on clinical services than on regulatory and extension activities.

The screwworm project in 1990, which led to the declaration of screwworm-free status for Belize in 1994, was supervised by a Principal Agricultural Officer rather than the Principal Veterinary Officer, due to an argument over the division of powers and responsibilities. This dispute eventually resulted in the Animal Production Section, which had formerly come under the responsibilities of the Principal Veterinary Officer, being transferred to the management of the Livestock Officer in charge of the biggest Ministry livestock station at Central Farm, Cayo District. Before this, the animal production responsibilities of MAFC consisted primarily of operating and maintaining the livestock stations owned by the Ministry, and little extension work was done.

In 2000, MAFC created the Livestock Division to provide livestock extension services to farmers. The division is headed

### Table I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Belize</th>
<th>Cayo</th>
<th>Corozal</th>
<th>Orange Walk</th>
<th>Stann Creek</th>
<th>Toledo</th>
<th>Total 2001</th>
<th>Total 2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beef cattle</td>
<td>4,310</td>
<td>16,250</td>
<td>1,237</td>
<td>28,890</td>
<td>1,178</td>
<td>1,524</td>
<td>53,389</td>
<td>55,593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy cattle</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>1,079</td>
<td>1,053</td>
<td>1,171</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>3,560</td>
<td>2,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigs</td>
<td>1,006</td>
<td>3,378</td>
<td>1,334</td>
<td>6,536</td>
<td>766</td>
<td>9,800</td>
<td>22,820</td>
<td>27,541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>1,776</td>
<td>1,942</td>
<td>1,921</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>6,409</td>
<td>4,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birds</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>4,131,337</td>
<td>2,276,000</td>
<td>2,183,794</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3,350</td>
<td>8,624,481</td>
<td>7,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs (dozen)</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>1,540,567</td>
<td>15,570</td>
<td>321,660</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>14,255</td>
<td>1,982,052</td>
<td>2,300,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

by a Director of Livestock Production who supervises a Livestock Officer in each of the six districts of Belize. In 2001, through the Livestock Division, MAFC formed councils for each major livestock species and type, for example, the Dairy Council. The Ministry also spearheaded the importation of breeding animals as it was felt that genetic improvement was one of the biggest needs of the industry.

Veterinary Services are provided to farmers and owners of companion animals (pets) through government and private veterinarians. A parallel veterinary service to these public and private Veterinary Services also exists, called the para-veterinary service (6). This service is extensively used throughout Belize. Para-veterinaries are not trained as veterinarians but they practise as such. Farmers tend to use these para-veterinarians in circumstances when trained veterinarians are not easily accessible or they cannot afford their services.

The Veterinary Association of Belize was organised in the mid-1990s to provide a forum for discussion and continuing education. The Veterinary Surgeons’ Board of Belize was formed in 1996 to supervise the registration and control of veterinarians and animal health assistants, as well as to regulate veterinary surgery.

**The animal health status of Belize**

Belize has an enviable animal health status. There are few endemic diseases of quarantine or zoonotic importance. The OIE List A diseases which have been reported in Belize include vesicular stomatitis, classical swine fever (last occurrence in 1988) and bluetongue. In the case of bluetongue, serological evidence exists but there are no clinical signs of the disease. These diseases are endemic to Mexico and Central America. Belize is seeking international recognition of its disease-free status for classical swine fever and avian influenza, and has fulfilled the necessary scientific and technical requirements to support such a declaration. Belize is also considered free of brucellosis, porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome, avian infectious laryngotracheitis and other avian diseases.

Diseases of importance to the livestock producer include rabies and blackleg, both endemic diseases. In 2001, some breeding pigs imported from a neighbouring country gave positive serological test results for porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome while in post-entry quarantine. The decision was taken to send the breeding pigs to slaughter and farmers themselves then requested scientific evidence that Belize was still free of this disease. A quick serological survey was undertaken and the negative results supported the policy decision to slaughter the animals. Annual screening of layers (broiler breeders) since 1999 shows that broiler breeders are free of pullorum and fowl typhoid.

**In search of an organisational model**

Scarce resources in the public sector and the increasing demands of international trade in a competitive environment required the restructuring of agricultural health services in MAFC. The Costa Rica office of the Inter-American Institute of Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA) conducted a study in 1994 on the agricultural sector. This study showed the need to modernise agricultural health services to meet the challenges of international trade. As a result, IICA was commissioned to prepare a project proposal on how to achieve this aim. Many organisational models were assessed. Consideration was given to the following models:

- the creation of an agricultural health revolving fund within MAFC
- the creation of an independent agricultural health public sector unit
- the strengthening of existing agricultural health services within MAFC
- the creation of an institution bridging both the public and private sectors.

**Creation of an agricultural health revolving fund**

Although a successful veterinary drug revolving fund was already operational within MAFC, it demonstrated the two problems with this approach: the reconciliation of monies and the diversion of funds to uses other than Veterinary Services.

**Creation of an independent agricultural health public sector unit**

Both a Canadian and a Guatemalan model of an independent agricultural health sector unit were analysed: the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Unidad de Normas y Regulaciones. However, this type of unit would still fall under the control of government finances, incurring the risk of the diversion of funds to other public sector uses.

**Strengthening existing agricultural health services**

The drawback to this approach is that scarce public sector resources would always be a problem. In addition, this approach would make the collection of fees on a cost-recovery basis difficult. Livestock producers who are used to clinical field services being provided by the government at minimal or no cost, would not accept that the same government provider now charge for those services.

**Creation of an institution bridging both the public and private sectors**

This was seen as the most feasible model, as it would allow the collection of fees on a cost-recovery basis and would also
benefit from the private sector culture, which allows rapid responses to market demands.

The IICA project proposal centred on the last option: the creation of an institution which involved both the public sector and the private sector. The International Development Bank subsequently funded the project at US$4.8 million, with the Government of Belize providing US$1.2 million in equivalent funds. The project, which was initiated in 1999 and will end in September 2003, called for the creation of the National Agricultural Health Services and the transfer of all MAFC agricultural health and quarantine staff, buildings and land to this institution. The name of this institution was eventually changed to the Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA).

The Belize Agricultural Health Authority

The Belize Agricultural Health Authority Act 1999, established BAHA to manage plant and animal health, so as to improve the administration of agricultural health and quarantine services in Belize. This Authority is a statutory organisation under MAFC and became operational in May 2000. The main objective in creating BAHA was to enhance the competitiveness of Belize agricultural products, especially in foreign markets, by strengthening animal (including fisheries) and plant health services through the increased participation of the private sector. Other objectives for BAHA are the reduction of losses from pests and diseases, and ensuring the safety and quality of agricultural products in both the domestic and foreign markets.

The Authority is administered by a Board of Directors and a Managing Director. The eleven members of the Board of Directors are appointed by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Cooperatives. This Board is the policy-making arm of BAHA. Board members include representatives from government Ministries (Agriculture, Health, Trade and Economic Development) and the private agricultural sector. The Managing Director is a Board member who does not have the right to vote and is responsible for the day-to-day management of BAHA, including the organisation of staff. At present, a Board member of the BLPA is serving on the Board of BAHA. The Board of BAHA has regular monthly meetings to review the performance of the Authority in relation to its objectives, as well as supervising its finances and assessing policies, cost-recovery measures and any other management issues which need to be addressed, for example, the hiring and firing of senior staff. Directors of the different departments periodically make presentations to the Board and the Board may call on any director to make a presentation to provide more information on the statutory regulations proposed for enactment.

The Authority is managed in a classical, hierarchical ‘top-down’ style. When first established, BAHA had only three departments, as follows:
- Animal Health
- Plant Health
- Quarantine.

The Food Safety Department was later created from the Animal Health Department, as a number of animal health activities were seriously affecting human health. Furthermore, the shrimp industry was making repeated requests for inspections since they wanted to export their shrimps to the European Union.

The Managing Director holds weekly meetings with senior management staff to discuss policies and address general issues affecting BAHA. This senior management team of ten staff members includes the directors of these four departments, as well as the resource directors of the Human Resources, Finance, Transportation and Project Units. The current BAHA organisational chart is shown in Figure 2.

At present, BAHA provides the following services:
- the organisation and administration of field and laboratory services
- certification for imports and exports
- animal quarantine
- disease surveillance
- veterinary public health supervision, including food safety.

![Current organisational chart of the Belize Agricultural Health Authority](image-url)

Fig. 2
Current organisational chart of the Belize Agricultural Health Authority
The Animal Health Department

Belize is divided into six districts, as follows:
- Corozal
- Orange Walk
- Belize
- Cayo
- Stann Creek
- Toledo.

The Cayo District in the west is the largest district and contains the capital city of Belize, Belmopan, as well as the former capital, Belize City, the Central Office for BAHA in Belmopan and the Central Office for Animal Health in Central Farm. The Animal Health Department has the following regulatory responsibilities under the BAHA Act:

a) epidemiology, including the following functions:
- risk analysis
- disease surveillance
- preparation of emergency plans
- investigation of disease outbreaks
- disease control and traceability

b) trade, including the following functions:
- issuing import permits
- issuing health certificates
- management of quarantine stations
- certification and approval of quarantine and disease control measures (12)

c) field services, including provision of the following:
- clinics
- preventive medicine
- pharmacy services

d) laboratory services, including the following areas:
- diagnostics
- referrals
- laboratory supplies

e) veterinary public health protection and food safety, including:
- managing zoonoses
- vampire bat control
- inspection of farms, abattoirs, dairies and food-processing establishments

f) drug registration, including the control of:
- veterinary drugs
- biologicals
- veterinary pesticides
- animal feed

g) animal welfare.

The Animal Health Department has four veterinarians and five technical support staff (Fig. 3). There are three animal health offices operated by BAHA, as follows:
- the Orange Walk Veterinary Clinic services the northern districts of Corozal and Orange Walk
- the Central Farm Clinic services the Cayo, Stann Creek and Toledo Districts
- the Belize City Clinic services the Belize District.

Apart from the Central Veterinary Laboratory at Central Farm, Cayo District, there is also a small veterinary laboratory at the Orange Walk Clinic. Although these animal health offices are still called ‘clinics’, only a limited amount of clinical work is now performed at these offices and recent surveys conducted by international animal health consultants (5, 6), have suggested that the name ‘clinics’ be abandoned, as this name is misleading and confusing for producers (5).

![Current organisational chart of animal health services in Belize](image-url)
The Animal Health Department works closely with the Food Safety Department. The Food Safety Regulations 2001, designated BAHA as the competent authority in Belize with responsibility for monitoring, inspecting, approving and controlling the food safety systems of all businesses which produce or process food for national consumption or export (2).

**The Belize Agricultural Health Authority model: veterinary experiences from 2000 to the present**

The Authority has made a positive impact both nationally and internationally. The success of BAHA is due to the following factors:

- a team approach
- private sector involvement
- the establishment of user groups
- political support
- the establishment of good working partnerships
- public support
- staff support.

**The team approach**

Animal health, plant health, food safety and quarantine are all managed by one institution. Thus, staff, supplies and equipment can be used across departments when necessary. For example, technicians in the Mediterranean fruitfly (*Ceratitis capitata*) surveillance programme visit livestock farms along their surveillance routes to assist the Animal Health Department in vesicular disease surveillance. Similarly, food safety inspectors combine the inspection of slaughter and processing establishments with animal health surveillance activities. The present Managing Director is keen on establishing a team spirit and favours team and group events to encourage camaraderie among the staff. Although the cross-utilisation of staff is a sensible measure when one has few human resources, experience has shown that in Belize it is not always applied. When cross-utilisation is employed, the way in which it is done is equally important. The present team-building strategy of the Managing Director is helping to strengthen BAHA and positive results are already being seen. A recent visitor to BAHA commented that he found staff very enthusiastic about their organisation. There were very few negative remarks (G.A. Wells, personal communication).

**The private sector approach**

As a statutory body, BAHA can conduct innovative cost-recovery programmes, rapidly implement (or ‘fast-track’) financial decisions and initiate staff motivation strategies without the drawbacks and delays of government bureaucracy. Thus, BAHA is able to charge for its services, using these funds to:

- purchase equipment and supplies
- hire new staff
- fund necessary training for staff
- implement a life and health insurance scheme for its employees
- ensure that the Authority is sufficiently flexible to meet market demands.

**Establishment of user groups**

The establishment of user groups involves identifying groups within the farming and food processing industries who use the services provided by BAHA and forming these users into consultative groups, according to their interest or commodity. This has proved to be an effective mechanism which assists BAHA in conducting its mandate (4). These ‘stakeholder’ groups also include representatives from related government departments, such as the Public Health Department and Bureau of Standards. The meetings of these user groups are an informal forum to discuss issues affecting the services provided by BAHA to industry. The meetings are also used to discuss cost-recovery programmes. The Authority has found that, when cost-recovery programmes are discussed with user groups, the programmes are well supported by the users themselves.

**Political support**

The attitudes of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Cooperatives and other government ministers towards BAHA has always been supportive and encouraging. This has created an effective environment for the enactment of laws and regulations, cost-recovery of services and co-operation from relevant ministries such as the Ministries of Health and Natural Resources.

**Partnerships**

In addition, BAHA has been able to foster good working relationships with both government and non-governmental organisations, as well as international organisations, national associations and user groups (those who employ the services provided by BAHA). Such collaboration is enhanced through consultation, training and co-sponsorships of programmes. Whenever feasible, memoranda of understandings between BAHA and other related groups are encouraged, for example, the current development of a memorandum of understanding between BAHA and the Pesticides Control Board on the registration of pesticides for veterinary use.

**Public support**

The Belize Agricultural Health Authority is not owned by the government of Belize nor by a private company. It is owned by the people of Belize, who are the primary users and beneficiaries of its programmes and services. Public support has been gained through public awareness programmes, public consultation and the obvious benefits achieved by BAHA. The management of BAHA has emphasised public support as one of the best strategies for the success of BAHA and is in the process of hiring a Public Relations Officer to work full-time on public support measures and initiatives.
Staff support
The staff of BAHA are well trained, dedicated and strongly motivated to achieve the objectives of BAHA. Its officers are recognised within the region of Central America and the Caribbean as being leaders in the field of the application of disease control and phytosanitary measures. The Authority recognises that its staff are an excellent resource base and encourages staff training and development.

Conclusion
The Belize Agricultural Health Authority is a successful organisational model which provides the flexibility required to adapt to the challenges of disease control measures in the national and international trade in animals and plants and their products. Widespread political support and the ability to harness elements of both the public and private sector allow BAHA to implement cost-recovery measures, as well as disease control and phytosanitary measures, in a timely and opportune manner. In its three years of operational life BAHA has obtained recognition by Belizeans and has been well received in the international arena. Although it can be argued that these achievements are the result of a specific project to create an organisation bridging both the public and private sectors, rather than continuing institutional achievements, the future will show the real strength of BAHA as an institution. The project which created BAHA ends in September 2003, and strategies are already in place to ensure the sustainability of BAHA, particularly its economic viability. Reports provided by animal health consultants contain many good recommendations and, as BAHA evaluates and applies these recommendations, the Animal Health Department can only become stronger, more well-organised and an increasingly effective asset to the people and government of Belize.

Acknowledgements
The author wishes to thank the Government of Belize, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Cooperatives, BAHA and the livestock industry for affording him the joy of working in agriculture, particularly animal health. Most of these observations come from the personal experience and knowledge gained by the author while working as an animal health technical officer. Thanks also to the editorial board at the OIE, particularly Dr R. Dugas.

Les Services vétérinaires du Belize : adapter les modèles organisationnels aux nécessités des petites économies

V. Góngora

Résumé
Les échanges internationaux des produits issus de l’agriculture sont régis par l’Accord sur l’application des mesures sanitaires et phytosanitaires (Accord SPS) de l’Organisation mondiale du commerce. Les petites économies telles que le Belize doivent disposer de l’infrastructure nécessaire pour s’acquitter de leurs obligations et exercer leurs droits conformément aux termes de l’Accord SPS. Confronté aux difficultés propres à une petite économie, le gouvernement du Belize a créé l’Autorité sanitaire pour l’Agriculture (Belize Agricultural Health Authority, BAHA), conçue comme un modèle opérationnel permettant de répondre aux enjeux des Services vétérinaires en ce nouveau millénaire ainsi qu’aux exigences du commerce international pour les animaux, les végétaux et leurs produits. Ce modèle, devenu opérationnel en 2000, est désormais reconnu sur le plan national et international comme particulièrement adapté aux petites économies. Le succès de BAHA est dû au ferme soutien politique dont elle a bénéficié, ainsi qu’à sa nature duelle, relevant à la fois du secteur public et privé.

Mots-clés
Los Servicios Veterinarios en Belice, o cómo adaptar modelos organizativos a las necesidades de las pequeñas economías

V. Góngora

Resumen
El comercio internacional en productos agropecuarios se rige por el Acuerdo sobre la aplicación de medidas sanitarias y fitosanitarias ("Acuerdo MSF") de la Organización Mundial del Comercio. Las pequeñas economías, como la de Belice, deben disponer de la infraestructura necesaria para cumplir sus obligaciones y ejercer sus derechos de conformidad con el Acuerdo MSF. Para poner remedio a las deficiencias propias de una pequeña economía, el Gobierno de Belice instituyó un modelo organizativo basado en la creación del Organismo de Sanidad Agropecuaria de Belice (Belize Agricultural Health Authority: BAHA), capaz de asumir la doble responsabilidad de prestar servicios veterinarios en este nuevo milenio y de responder a las exigencias derivadas del comercio internacional de animales y plantas y sus derivados. El nuevo régimen entró en funcionamiento en el año 2000, y desde entonces ha merecido la aprobación de instancias nacionales e internacionales como un modelo adecuado para las pequeñas economías. El éxito del BAHA descansa en el fuerte apoyo político del que ha gozado y en el hecho de combinar características del sector público y del sector privado.

Palabras clave

References