Organisation and structure of the Veterinary Services of the People's Republic of Bulgaria

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Summary: The authors present the structure and principles of the Veterinary Services in Bulgaria from district to international level, outlining the historical process which culminated in the creation of the State Veterinary Union in 1986. This autonomous body has comprehensive responsibility at national level and regional administration for the provision of integrated and rationalised services and professional training. It was made especially necessary by the increasingly intensive nature of husbandry in the country.

The importance of control and prevention of disease is also underlined. Geography, trade and tourism make Bulgaria highly vulnerable to the introduction of infectious animal diseases and the measures adopted and strictly enforced within and at its borders are described in detail. Overall responsibility for the implementation of these measures is vested in the National Authority for the Protection of Animal Health (created in 1983) and Animal Health Protection Boards in each of the country's regions. Once again, rapid response to needs in this area is made possible by the administrative coherence, based on democratic centralisation, of the Veterinary Services.

KEYWORDS: Bulgaria - Disease control - Disease prevention - Intensive husbandry - International organisations - Veterinary services.

The structure, organisation and management of the Veterinary Services of the People's Republic of Bulgaria are based on the principle of democratic centralisation. They stem directly from the social and economic changes which have taken place over the last decade.

The third agricultural reform since the victorious socialist revolution in 1944 was introduced in 1970. Under this reform, which was based on specialisation and concentration of crop and animal production, the 1,300 existing farms were grouped together to form three hundred farming complexes, each with between 20,000 and 50,000 hectares of arable land.

Animal husbandry in Bulgaria underwent the same process of enlargement. Thus, along with the formation of industrialised farming complexes, highly mechanised and automated intensive animal production units were set up. The average numbers of

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animals raised either in complexes or farms are as follows: between 5 and 15 million broilers; between 10,000 and 500,000 laying hens; 36,000 to 200,000 fattening pigs; 1,000-5,000 ewes and 1,000-10,000 fattening lambs.

Modern, state-run dairy units and abattoirs for livestock and poultry have also been set up on an industrial scale. The output from these is mainly for food consumption, but certain products of animal origin are processed for industrial use. Horizontal integration is applied in each of the specific areas mentioned.

GENERAL ORGANISATION AND ACTIVITIES OF THE VETERINARY SERVICES

Substantial changes were made to the organisation of the Veterinary Services in order to meet the stringent requirements of intensive husbandry and to avoid the risk of introducing acute infectious diseases into the country.

In 1976, the Bulgarian government ordered the setting up of the Veterinary Services, a Union with a dual role in both scientific work and production, the task of which was to implement official policy in the veterinary field.

THE STATE VETERINARY UNION

On 29 May 1986 a new institution, the State Veterinary Union, was created under the authority of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. This is a body with financial, administrative and legal autonomy and it sprang from the Union created in 1976. This has administrative and financial authority over all the veterinarians and veterinary technicians working on industrialised farms and in intensive livestock units, and possesses all necessary material and technical resources (veterinary clinics, diagnostic laboratories, transport, etc.).

The inclusion in the State Veterinary Union of administrative and technical departments (research, diagnosis, disease treatment, the Institute for serum and vaccine production, marketing and supply of veterinary drugs, veterinary border control, meat-product inspection and control, animal rendering plants and the regional veterinary services) has created an environment conducive to improvements in the quality and efficiency of veterinary work in the following ways:

– the elimination of:

  1) the administrative dependence of the veterinary services;
  2) complex hierarchical links;
  3) the subordination of different veterinary departments to different administrative and financial authorities;

– a reduction in the leadtime between research and practical application, giving scientific veterinary activity a greater practical efficacy directly linked to production;

– the creation of a unified system for earlier diagnosis of infectious diseases and poisoning, and effective dissemination of the resulting information;
the possibility of transferring staff and equipment where outbreaks of disease occur, for action on problems originating outside the country and for duties arising from Bulgaria’s international obligations (creation of buffer zones along the country’s borders; implementation of mass vaccination and disease identification programmes with a view to eradicating contagious disease outbreaks; food inspection in all localities, including resorts);

- the avoidance of duplication of activity and the more rational use of staff and resources;

- increased rapidity of response through legal and budgetary independence;

- the application, made possible by administrative independence, of management techniques of positive or negative reinforcement for success or failure;

- the creation of conditions encouraging more adequate national distribution of veterinary staff;

- the provision of a year-round veterinary assistance service for both public and private sectors, organising staff for night-duty and public holidays;

- the development of a more effective system for in-service training and improved qualifications for specialist veterinarians;

- the improvement of the living and working conditions of veterinary staff.

Regional Veterinary Centres

A Regional Veterinary Centre has been set up in each of the twenty-eight regions of Bulgaria. These are under the financial and administrative control of the State Veterinary Union.

Like the main authority, these Centres integrate administrative and scientific veterinary activities, treatment and control of animal diseases, coordination of field activities and supervision of trade and distribution in animals and animal products in their respective regions. They implement national veterinary policy to ensure the protection of health and the improvement of animal and poultry production in both public and private sectors. In addition, they carry out inspections in food-industry establishments and ensure that there is no risk to consumer health from products of animal origin.

District Veterinary Services

Each region is divided into between five and ten administrative districts, each with a veterinary service attached to the Regional Veterinary Centre.

Specialist veterinarians working in the field organise and carry out disease prevention and treatment programmes. They are also responsible for hygiene, increasing productivity, reducing livestock mortality and sterility rates and ensuring the wholesomeness of animal products.

The main lines of the veterinary specialists’ work at District level are to ensure that Production Plan targets are met, that costs are reduced and that the profitability of animal husbandry in the public sector is increased. They also have a duty to provide assistance for disease treatment and prevention in the private sector of the areas for which they are responsible.
The State veterinary organisation described above was tested in one of the national regions over the three-year period from 1982 to 1985. In view of the positive results obtained (improved efficiency of veterinary work and reinforcement of the effectiveness of the veterinary specialists), the Government decided to extend this type of organisation to the rest of the country as from 29 May 1986.

THE CONTROL OF INFECTIOUS ANIMAL DISEASES

Bulgaria has adopted a strict system for the control and prevention of infectious disease. This was considered necessary in view of the trends apparent in the worldwide epizootiological situation and the characteristics of Bulgaria as a country. Its geographical position and existing structures of trade and tourism favour, according to the assessment of the FAO, the introduction of serious infectious diseases, making Bulgaria one of the countries most at risk in Europe.

This system comprises a complete set of organisational and regulatory measures, provision of technical and material resources and specific actions to control and diagnose animal diseases.

In 1983, the National Authority for the Protection of Animal Health was set up. This Government body, which is headed by the Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, is composed of the Ministers and Deputy Ministers of all Ministries and the Directors of all Institutions whose activities relate to national protection against animal diseases. It has overall responsibility for the implementation of measures for the prevention and control of infectious diseases.

In each region, Animal Health Protection Boards have been set up under the leadership of the Chairmen of the Executive Committees of the Town Councils.

The creation of the National Authority and the regional Animal Health Protection Boards have made the health of livestock and the control of infectious animal diseases matters of concern to both general public and State and this has improved considerably the effectiveness of the measures taken.

The role of the National Authority and the Regional Boards is:

1) to prevent the introduction of exotic infectious diseases into the country;

2) to ensure rapid diagnosis, control and eradication of infectious diseases occurring in intensive animal production units and in the private sector.

The implementation of these two tasks is backed by the provisions of the Law on Veterinary Services with the Decrees deriving from it and is based on the principle of democratic centralisation.

BORDER INSPECTION AND QUARANTINE MEASURES

The prevention of the introduction of diseases (including infectious diseases) into the country is based principally on border inspections and quarantine. This is achieved through:
- regulations governing import and export of food on the basis of epizootiological data from the Office International des Epizooties and other international organisations;

- careful inspection at entry points, along with confiscation and destruction of all unsterilised animal products found in the luggage of tourists or travellers passing through;

- disinfection of transportation entering the country. In addition, if a serious epizootiological situation occurs (involving exotic infectious animal diseases), “squads” can be formed to escort vehicles in transit to the exit border post. The annual disinfection capacity involves approximately 400,000 trucks, 350,000 railway wagons, 8,000-10,000 planes and 4,000-5,000 ships each year;

- application of strict quarantine measures for imported livestock, animal products and fodder.

**PROTECTION OF ANIMAL HEALTH WITHIN BULGARIA**

A series of general and specific control measures are applied to protect the health of animals in intensive production and on both public and private farms. Bulgaria has adequate material and technical resources for preventive action, including animal quarantine and isolation stations, transportation control facilities, carcass collection points, and so on.

The provisions enforced in industrialised units are based on the principles of “all in-all out” and “infected and clean areas”; required periods for depopulation are also strictly applied. The processing of carcasses and abattoir waste is handled by rendering plants integrated into the State Veterinary Union system. This system also has teams specialising in disinfection, insect control and rodent control.

**Vaccination programmes**

On the basis of the epizootiological situation both worldwide and within Bulgaria, each year the State Veterinary Union draws up a compulsory programme for the various species and categories of animals, governing the timing and number of vaccinations. All the biological products for animal immunisation, with the exception of foot and mouth disease vaccines, are produced in Bulgaria and financed out of the national budget.

The measures for achieving the second of the two objectives (early diagnosis, control and eradication of outbreaks) are:

**Disease detection**

- Regular surveys based on serological or allergic tests on all the animals concerned or a pre-determined percentage of them to monitor the situation with respect to different diseases;

- performance of diagnostic or screening tests on a specific percentage of slaughtered animals, including pathological, virological and bacteriological examination and other types of laboratory test;
compulsory mass surveys in the event of an emergency to ensure rapid diagnosis, including clinical, pathological, bacteriological, virological and histological tests, and immunofluorescence techniques.

Diagnosis

To achieve these ends, a network of diagnostic laboratories has been set up which can identify diseases very rapidly. In addition, the Central Veterinary Research Institute has its own diagnostic teams of scientists with the highest qualifications and veterinary specialists. The rapid means of transport available to these teams make them operational on a twenty-four hour basis. In cases of emergency, they can also use helicopters or special planes belonging to the Airforce or the medical services.

Control measures

When a case of disease is confirmed, the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the relevant Town Council issues an order for the implementation of a series of measures which take account of the nature of the disease and its classification in OIE Disease List A or B.

These measures, which are designed to limit the spread of the disease, are compulsory for all animal production units; they include the prohibition of animal movements, farm protection, quarantine, vaccination and the disinfection of premises and equipment. Regulations and instructions have been issued for each infectious disease, setting out the control measures to be adopted.

Financial compensation

Compensation is paid from a special “Animal Disease Prevention” fund for all losses caused by infectious diseases to public or private stock farms. Where diseases are covered by compulsory or voluntary insurance contributions, this compensation is paid by Social Security.

The economic losses caused by infectious diseases are minimised by the extensive control measures applied. Mortalities among all species of animals due to infectious diseases during the period from 1975 to 1985 constituted between 3.4 and 5.8% of the overall mortality rate for the period.

Bulgaria’s record of success in the control of infectious diseases of livestock and poultry is also due to the efforts of the staff, i.e. the veterinarians and veterinary technicians.

TRAINING OF VETERINARIANS AND VETERINARY TECHNICIANS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CONTROL OF ANIMAL DISEASES

Bulgaria has a Veterinary School which trains 130 to 150 veterinarians each year and four Veterinary Training Colleges which train 300 to 400 veterinary technicians annually. In addition, in-service training centres have been set up for staff within the State Veterinary Union. These centres organise short courses (fifteen to thirty days) and longer training programmes of up to eighteen months.
CONCLUSION

Bulgaria attaches great importance to international cooperation for the control of infectious diseases under the aegis of the Office International des Epizooties in Paris. Our country has signed twenty-eight international veterinary agreements providing for reciprocal cooperation on veterinary matters with countries on all five continents.

Given the complex epizootiological situation that currently exists throughout the world and the continuing development of trade and tourism, it is clear that greater bilateral or multilateral veterinary cooperation must be promoted. Countries must work closely together and along precisely the same lines on the crucial problems raised by the prevention and control of infectious diseases in order to increase the effectiveness of the measures adopted at international, national and regional levels.

Bulgaria will continue as always to make its modest contribution to the scientific development and organisational effort needed for disease prevention and control. Infectious diseases of livestock and poultry constitute a problem of great importance from the standpoints of veterinary science, health and economics.

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Résumé : Les auteurs présentent la structure et les principes des Services vétérinaires en Bulgarie, depuis les districts jusqu’au plan international ; ils décrivent le processus historique qui a abouti à la création de l’Union Vétérinaire d’Etat en 1986. Cet organisme autonome est entièrement responsable au niveau national, et à celui de l’administration régionale, de la mise en œuvre des services intégrés et rationalisés et de la formation professionnelle. Sa création a été rendue indispensable par le caractère de plus en plus intensif de l’élevage dans le pays.

Les auteurs soulignent également l’importance du contrôle et de la prévention des maladies. De par sa situation géographique, ses échanges commerciaux et touristiques, la Bulgarie est particulièrement vulnérable à l’introduction des maladies infectieuses animales ; les mesures adoptées et appliquées avec rigueur dans le pays et à ses frontières sont décrites en détail. La responsabilité générale de leur mise en œuvre est confiée à l’Autorité nationale pour la Protection de la Santé animale, créée en 1983, et aux Offices de Protection de la Santé animale dans chacune des régions du pays. Dans ce domaine également, la satisfaction rapide des besoins est rendue possible par la cohérence administrative des Services vétérinaires, fondée sur le centralisme démocratique.

MOTS-CLÉS : Bulgarie - Elevage intensif - Organisations internationales - Prophylaxie - Services vétérinaires.

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Resumen: Los autores presentan la estructura y los principios de los Servicios Veterinarios en Bulgaria, desde el nivel de distrito hasta el internacional y describen el proceso histórico que culminó en la creación de la Unión Veterinaria Estatal en 1986. Este organismo autónomo es enteramente responsable, tanto a nivel nacional como de la administración regional, de la puesta en marcha de los servicios integrados y racionalizados, así como de la formación profesional. Su creación se había hecho indispensable dado el carácter cada vez más intensivo de la cría en este país.

Subrayan los autores, asimismo, la importancia del control y de la prevención de las enfermedades. Debido a su situación geográfica y a sus intercambios comerciales y turísticos, Bulgaria es particularmente vulnerable respecto de la introducción de enfermedades infecciosas animales. Se describen en detalle las medidas adoptadas y rigurosamente aplicadas en el país y zonas fronterizas. La responsabilidad general de la aplicación de estas medidas ha sido confiada a la Autoridad Nacional para la Protección de la Salud Animal, creada en 1983, y a las Oficinas para la Protección de la Salud Animal, que existen en cada una de las regiones del país. La rápida satisfacción de las necesidades en este sector es posible gracias a la coherencia administrativa de los Servicios Veterinarios, basada en el centralismo democrático.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Bulgaria - Control - Cría intensiva - Organismos internacionales - Servicios veterinarios.