

Food safety – The role of the OIE and Veterinary Services in food safety

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The control of food safety is now universally recognised as a public health priority. It requires a global approach, from production to consumption or, as it is commonly referred to, 'from farm to fork'. The elimination or control of food risks at source has proved to be a more effective way of reducing or eliminating health risks than an approach based solely on inspecting the finished product. For animal foodstuffs and other foodstuffs of animal origin this necessarily means controlling the health status of the animals from which these foodstuffs are derived.

International sanitary standards have thus been defined to ensure that consumers benefit from a harmonised level of sanitary safety during international trade in food products. These standards are adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)/World Health Organization (WHO) Codex Alimentarius Commission and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) Assembly, based on the sharing of tasks as agreed between the organisations.

In line with its mandate, the OIE has the aim of promoting animal health and veterinary public health worldwide by fulfilling its role as reference organisation for scientific standards on all matters relating to animal health and zoonoses, and animal production food safety. A working group has been set up and it should be noted that the group includes Codex Alimentarius experts.

The OIE's work in this sector has resulted in the adoption of *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* standards on a number of topics, including biosafety in farms (hygiene and disease security procedures in farms), traceability, inactivation of pathogens and vectors, animal welfare (transport of animals) and the use of certain types of veterinary medicinal products (guidelines on the responsible use of antibiotics).



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Veterinarians receive training that focuses not only on animal diseases (including zoonoses) but also on food hygiene; they are therefore particularly competent to play a key role in the field of food safety, and especially the safety of foodstuffs of animal origin, throughout the food chain.

The Veterinary Services play a central role in implementing the risk-based recommendations contained in regulations on food safety. At the farm level, the Veterinary Services fulfil a vital role, checking that animals are kept under satisfactory conditions of hygiene, ensuring the surveillance, early detection and treatment of animal diseases, including those with a potential impact on public health, and promoting the responsible and prudent use of biologicals and veterinary medicinal products, including antimicrobials, in farms. They also advise and inform animal producers on how to avoid, eliminate and control hazards posing a threat to animal production food safety, such as drug or pesticide residues, mycotoxins and environmental contaminants.

In 2004, in response to recurrent sanitary crises, the European Community introduced a raft of regulations entitled the 'The Hygiene Package', offering a 'new approach' to food safety in compliance with international standards.

The particularity of the Hygiene Package is that it involves all the players throughout the food chain 'from the stable to the table', including the control services. Thus, all operators from primary plant production through to delivery to the consumer are involved, encompassing animal feed, primary animal production and all the intermediaries (grain transporters, animal transporters, warehouses, etc.).



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Within the framework of applying the Hygiene Package, the French Veterinary Services of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries are in charge of all the controls throughout the food chain. In this way they verify compliance with regulatory requirements governing the declaration of animal production activities, traceability (through the keeping of farm registers and transmission of health information to abattoirs), and hygiene and welfare conditions relating to animal feed and animal production.

Proper control of animal production health risks can only be achieved if there is close collaboration between the Veterinary Services and all the professionals involved in animal production, namely farmers and veterinary practitioners.