



# **Macra na Feirme**

**Macra na Feirme submission to the National  
Farmed Animal Health Strategy**

**October 2016**

## **Introduction**

Macra na Feirme welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the National Farmed Animal Health Strategy being implemented by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. A successfully carried out farmed animal health strategy has the potential to provide both the government and farmers with a significant financial saving. Macra feels to complement the proposed strategy, a variety of additional measures need to be implemented to the benefit of all farmers.

## **Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme**

Macra strongly supports both the Department's views that prevention is better than cure and the need for animal health to be viewed as an investment in the farm business. By preventing a disease from ever occurring or encroaching on farm, the need to treat the animal is decreased therefore decreasing cost and the resistance to various medications. Methods which do not use medication should be promoted to prevent the build up of resistance to this invaluable resource.

Several of the *Animal Health Ireland* (AHI) publications recommend the best method to prevent disease infiltrations on farm are to run a closed herd/flock. This is by far one of the most effective bio-security measures for all farms. Macra is proposing the Department of Agriculture include an animal health section in the already existing animal welfare section of TAMS. Bio-security infrastructure along the lines of bio-exclusion and quarantine, need funding to encourage their uptake by farmers.

### *Bio-Exclusion*

According to Animal Health Ireland, bio-exclusion is referred to as '*Actions taken to reduce the risk of infectious disease coming into your farm*'. Bio-exclusion is akin with the Department's thinking of prevention is better than cure. Macra feels an effective national animal health strategy requires particular measures to promote bio- exclusion on a regional basis.

Particular regions of Ireland have suffered outbreaks of a variety of diseases being transmitted by wildlife. The implementation of bio-exclusion measures in areas particularly affected by these problems is required. In conjunction with advice being offered by AHI, Macra proposes under TAMS funding be made available for fencing, along with other measures, to prevent wild life encroaching on farms.

For example, AHI suggests to prevent wildlife encroaching on farm fencing should be erected at least 2.5m in height to keep out deer and buried at least 0.6m to prevent badger entry. Macra's proposal for wildlife proof measures funded by TAMS, should be permitted only to regions with significant risk caused by wildlife populations.

### *Quarantine Measures*

For many young farmers and new entrants in the initial days of establishing a farm business there is an inevitable need to build stock numbers. In an effort to build stock, young farmers who do not receive the family farm or own stock, need to purchase stock. As such, their farm's bio-security has the potential to be compromised from the get go hugely impacting their business in terms of finance and production levels.

Quarantine measures are recommended in many of the AHI publications when introducing new stock on to the farm. Quarantine strategies have much merit in protecting both the health of the farm's herd and that of the new animals coming on farm. To successfully implement a superior animal quarantine programme a well constructed quarantine area, away from the rest of the herd, is required. Such a structure needs to be situated far enough away from the rest of the herd so to prevent quarantine animals getting in contact with the rest of the herd.



At present, TAMS does provide funding for quarantine housing such as isolation boxes. Macra understands the uptake of this valuable quarantine infrastructure has not been very high. Macra is proposing, in a bid to increase the uptake of isolation boxes, the higher 60% threshold for funding under TAMS grants is made available to all farmers. The cost of constructing a well equipped animal quarantine area has the potential to prevent farmers, both young and old, from constructing such infrastructure.

Macra believes every effort should be undertaken to increase the uptake of quarantine measures on farm. By encouraging farmers to invest in quarantine measures on farm, disease transmission between farms has the capability to be decreased therefore complementing any animal health strategy in Ireland.

Quarantine infrastructure runs vertically with the Department's view that prevention is better than cure and animal health being viewed as an investment on farm.

### **Brexit Protection**

With Brexit on the horizon, there is a need for animal health plans to be developed. With Northern Ireland exiting the EU along with the rest of the UK, the future is unclear how this will impact Ireland from an animal health prospective. For example, post Brexit should the UK change its animal health standards in theory the transport of animals between main land UK and Northern Ireland could bring animals with sub optimal health conditions on to our island. Also to consider, after Brexit there is no legislative reason to stop Britain legalising the use of growth hormones and other banned substances within the EU.

Macra na Feirme, like other organisations, is strongly against the introduction of a hard border between the North and South. However, Macra feels the Department should consider measures to prevent animal disease transmission between the North and South prior to a problem becoming a reality.

Macra feels, in an attempt to prevent potential disease transmission between Northern Ireland and the Republic, the Department of Agriculture should develop plans that can be easily put in place, should the UK's standards for animal health decrease.

Macra is proposing the Department of Agriculture consider providing funding to those farmers living along the North/South border, who have a farm that runs parallel to a Northern Ireland farm, to erect appropriate fencing to ensure disease transmission between North and South doesn't occur due to direct animal to animal contact. To prevent disease transmission between farms running alongside each other, AHI recommends constructing double fencing to prevent animal contact between neighbouring farms.

## **Medication**

Antimicrobial resistance is beginning to darken the future for all animal health strategies. With every administration of antibiotic, we are inevitably selecting for resistant strains of bacteria. The impacts of over using medication, particularly when it is not necessarily required, are already being seen in the sheep sector.

Currently the sheep sector is facing extreme problems due to anthelmintic resistance. Calendar dosing has led to the unnecessarily routine usage of worm doses therefore leading to the unintentional selection of resistant worm genetics and the ineffectiveness of white drenches.

Macra feels it is crucial an effective antibiotic recording system is established to aid any strategy being developed to battle antimicrobial resistance. A carefully cultivated recording system has the power to yield priceless information that can be used to help control the spread of resistance.

Macra suggests the Department and other industry stakeholders invest in a practical recording system. IT applications already exist, such as the ICBF website and the FRS phone app *Herdwatch*. In conjunction with these apps, Macra would like to see farmers being able to record what antibiotics they are using. This data can then be analysed by animal health professionals to see what antibiotics are being over used therefore allowing for more accurate policy decisions to be made. Financial benefit or legislative compliance could be used to ensure effective record keeping is carried out, however the appropriate up to date IT applications need to be made available to farmers.

## **Conclusion**

Ireland has an extremely reputable image globally in terms of the standard of animal products we produce. The up keep of this image is crucial to the future of the Irish agriculture sector.

Macra na Feirme feels medication should be used as a last resort to combat disease on farms. Over usage of medication has already impacted the sheep sector and similar impacts must not be felt across the other sectors. Effective controls for use and recording of antibiotics must be carried out to prevent their further over usage.

Macra supports the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in their belief that prevention is better than cure. Macra feels effective quarantine measures, a readily implemented Brexit health strategy and effective bio-exclusion measures, all work together to greatly assist any prevention actions.