New animal health strategy for the European Union (2007-2013)

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PURPOSE: to present a new Animal Health Strategy for the European Union (2007-2013) entitled “Prevention is better than cure”

BACKGROUND: in December 2004, the Commission launched an external evaluation to thoroughly review the outcomes of EU action on animal health and the direction it may wish to take in the future. Policy re-evaluation was necessary for several reasons: the main elements of the existing policy were drawn up when we were still a Community of twelve Member States; new challenges and diseases have emerged; trading conditions have changed radically; and science, technology and the institutional framework have evolved substantially.

Based on the evaluation results and the stakeholder consultation, the Commission is now presenting its proposal for a new EU Animal Health Strategy (2007-2013). The strategy provides direction for the development of animal health policy and will facilitate the establishment of priorities that are consistent with agreed strategic goals and the revision of, and agreement on, acceptable and appropriate standards.

CONTENT: the EU Animal Health Strategy covers the health of all animals in the EU kept for food, farming, sport, companionship, entertainment and in zoos as well as wild animals, animals used in research and those transported to, from and within the EU. The strategy is aimed at the entire EU and builds on the current animal health legal framework in the EU and the standards and guidelines of the World Organisation for Animal Health.

Strategic goals: to ensure a high level of public health and food safety by minimising the incidence of biological and chemical risks to humans; to promote animal health by preventing/reducing the incidence of animal diseases, and in this way to support farming and the rural economy; to improve economic growth /cohesion/competitiveness assuring free circulation of goods and proportionate animal movements ; and to promote farming practices and animal welfare which prevent animal health related threats and minimise environmental impacts in support of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy .

Action plan: the action plan to deliver the strategic goals will focus on four main pillars:

- prioritisation of EU intervention: the strategy must be seen as an integrated risk assessment and management strategy focusing on biological and chemical risks of EU relevance;
- a modern animal health framework: towards a single regulatory framework, with a greater focus on incentives rather than penalties, consistent with other EU policies and converging to international standards;
- animal-related threat prevention, surveillance and crisis preparedness: identifying problems before they take hold, and being ready to manage outbreaks and crisis;
- science, innovation and research: to stimulate and coordinate risk analysis, science, innovation and research, hence contributing to a high level of public health and to the competitiveness of EU animal health businesses.

The strategy can only bring about real change if everyone involved in animal health works together and with all interested citizens. Animal health is a concern for all European citizens, stemming from the public health and food safety aspects of animal health but also from the economic costs that animal disease outbreaks can trigger and animal welfare considerations. The Commission is, therefore, committed to

pursue its objectives of clarity and transparency when communicating with consumers and stakeholders what the EU is doing, and there will be annual reporting on the strategy's progress and wider communication of policies and initiatives.