

FOOD & FARMING FORUM YORKSHIRE & THE HUMBER REGION

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive Committee held at the Yorkshire Agricultural Society, Great Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate

On Tuesday, 6th July 2010

Executive Committee

Steve Willis (Chair)
Peter Bainbridge (Government Office, Yorkshire & The Humber)
David Fraser (Government Office, Yorkshire & The Humber)
Pauline Teale (Yorkshire Forward)
Alan Hayes (Yorkshire Forward)
Dorothy Fairburn (Country Land & Business Association)
Helen Wright (East Riding of Yorkshire Council)
Dean Cook (FERA)
Nigel Pulling (Yorkshire Agricultural Society)
George Hamilton (Growing Routes, Yorkshire Agricultural Society)
Richard Ellison (National Farmers Union)
Tony Pexton (Rural Affairs Forum)

Present

Crispin Madavo MVB MSc PhD MRCVS (Veterinary Officer Animal Health)

Secretariat

Deborah Hare (Project Manager)

Apologies for absence

Andy Tordoff, (Yorkshire Forward)
Chloe Palmer (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group)
Alan Wolinski (Animal Health)
Peter Nottage (Natural England)
Dave Melling (Airedale Partnership)

1. Introduction and update

Steve Willis welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave apologies for absence.

2. What TB looks like in Yorkshire and the risk factors by Crispin Madavo MVB MSc PhD MRCVS Veterinary Officer, Animal Health (Presentation available on www.foodandfarmingforumyh.org.uk)

Key points from presentation

Transmission of bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) is primarily from purchased animals from high risk areas. TB can be spread within the herd, between farms depending on biosecurity and if cattle are taken to markets / shows where cattle from high risk areas are present. TB can be spread from badgers where they urinate or contaminate feed and it can be spread between social groups of badgers.

Infection is not evenly spread throughout the UK; the higher incidences are in the South West of England and Wales. In Yorkshire and Humber there are localised pockets of infection which is mainly due to purchased animals, but by enlarge the region is clean. With regards the number of herd incidents in the region there was a slight increase in 2009 compared to 2008, but a much larger increase in 2010 compared to 2009 and we are only half way through this year. In 2009 in West Yorkshire 4 holdings were involved in a TB incident which accounted for a large number of cattle slaughtered, this year most incidences have involved only a few animals.

Genotyping is done to help trace the likely source of infection. It was found that the origin of confirmed breakdowns in the region in 2009 were mainly due to purchased animals with genotypes identified from counties in the South West and bordering Wales. This is where the problem is coming from.

In order to keep Yorkshire and Humber free of TB we need to exclude high risk animals, prevent spread and promptly identify and remove infected animals. The main aim is to stop the disease establishing in wildlife and at this stage there is no evidence that it is in wildlife. Animal Health is only allowed to test those badgers found dead in hot spot areas and tested badgers so far have shown negative results.

There are 2 types of tests for TB:

- Tuberculin skin test (where an antigen is injected into the skin which is picked up by cells and taken to the draining lymph node, if the animal is infected 'T cells' will activate macrophages, causing them to release chemicals and a swelling on the skin can be seen.)
- Gamma interferon test (a blood sample is taken, this test is not subject to operator error where as the skin test is.)

Neither of the tests is perfect, some cattle react to one and not the other, the tests are used alongside each other.

Thoughts for the industry to consider:

- Regional trading of cattle?
- Proof of pre-movement testing a pre-condition for presenting animals at markets?
- Encourage post movement testing for cattle from high risk areas
- Make disease status of animals present at markets, freely available to purchasers?

Comments

It was stated that we are seeing incidences in Derbyshire similar to the South West 10 years ago, and there is concern we will get a slow progression into the Yorkshire region. Crispin remarked that farmers in Yorkshire have holdings in other areas (linked premises), and that these are risk factors as there is the danger of animals being moved. Testing should be run in the same place at the same time or animals could be missed, holdings should be treated as one.

George Hamilton asked what the incubation period for TB was and how long before they get a response to a test. Crispin explained that after infection the gamma interferon test takes 3-4 weeks, the skin test is a minimum of 6 weeks. For the routine testing on farm it takes 3 days to get a cellular reaction. David Fraser commented about the cost, stating it requires 2 visits to the farm by a vet, one to take the test the other to check if there has been a reaction. David questioned if there is an option for farmers to self administer testing. Crispin replied that the TB testing procedure is governed by EU legislation and there is professional responsibility of doing the test.

George asked if TB just affected badgers and cattle. Crispin said most mammals can be infected but badgers and cattle are more prone.

George remarked that all we can do is slow down the spread but that we are not going to stop it. Crispin believes that if the industry made the decision that we could only trade regionally, it would reduce cattle movement and he could see us eliminating TB in the region.

Dorothy Fairburn was concerned about how quick the spread is moving north and east, and queried the possible threat of hobby farmers that don't come under the Defra radar. Crispin did not regard hobby farmers as high risk as they are not likely to engage in much trading or movement. Small holdings that show animals are a different concern, as there is the risk of infection through contact with other animals at markets and shows.

Tony Pexton explained that in the pig industry there is a disease notification system in place, whereby members can be notified if an infectious disease is in the area. He suggested a similar process should be in place to make farmers aware if TB is in their area.

Steve Willis informed the group that Animal Health is looking to run a series of workshops to highlight the risks and economic effects to farmers in the forth coming months.

Richard Ellison stated that farmers are entitled to ask for testing information from other farmers. Crispin said unless the information is made officially available it will be left to the individual to ask for it and he queried if farmers were asking for it already. Dorothy thought not or we would not be getting breakdowns.

Richard queried the comment Crispin made about there been no evidence of TB in the wildlife in the region. Crispin explained with the methods available to Animal Health they are unable to establish if it is in wildlife. In high risk TB areas it is found in the wildlife. The more animals that are infected the greater risk there is of it getting into wildlife.

Steve Willis commented about dead badgers on the roadside and suggested if they could be taken in for testing, Crispin explained that individuals would have to pay for the testing as Defra only pay and test badgers in hot spot areas. Dorothy said we like to be proactive and suggested if we could get funding to test dead badgers. Helen Wright suggested this is an area that could be incorporated into the FFF business plan, put it as an action and get a formalised approach.

Dean Cook commented that TB is politically a hot topic and based upon briefings from colleagues agreed the biggest risk to the region is through trade. Dean reported that FERA have done a long term study in the South West hot spot areas, and where badgers have been culled you do get an immediate reduction in TB in that area, but the cull can disturb the badgers, survivors moving to surrounding areas which may be free of disease therefore spreading the disease.

3. RDA's – Yorkshire Forward by Pauline Teale

Pauline reported that the RDA's have been abolished and are to be replaced by Local Economic Partnerships (LEP's). There is due to be a white paper this summer to set out the government's plans.

The Chief Executive of Yorkshire Forward has had a meeting with the Local Authorities and there is support for some form of regional structure. Currently they are looking at sub regional partnerships based in the city regions of Leeds, Hull, Sheffield and North Yorkshire. This is just a proposal and has not been agreed by White Hall. Pauline stressed that everything is up in the air and a lot is speculation at the moment.

Yorkshire Forward has had a £40million cut; they are currently working through all implications with various partners on projects. There is an Environment Asset project for the Forestry Commission due to start in April 2011, this is still planned to go ahead.

Comments

Peter Bainbridge asked about RDPE funding with particular reference to the Dairy Infrastructure project. Pauline replied that RDPE is not immune to any cuts, some of the funding is matched by Brussels and some of the voluntary modulation will be cut. There is a £3 million cut across all the RDA's, this will probably affect Animal Health projects. Sally Harrison has a meeting in London on the 7th July to discuss RDPE issues.

No cuts have been announced as yet for REIP funding, but Yorkshire Forward are coming up to full commitment level for the year anyway.

Defra has said the RDA's are not allowed to use any of the roll up money which is mostly from voluntary modulation.

4. Defra farming and food policy messages & Great Yorkshire Show ministerial activity by David Fraser and Peter Bainbridge

David Fraser

David reported we have a new coalition government, it is only 2 months since the election and there is a lot of detail there already. They are either going to go extremely radical or phase in over time.

The Communities and Local Government (CLG) interface with local people and are promoting decentralisation. The CLG is run by Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State he heads a team of Ministers including Greg Clark MP, Minister for Decentralisation. Eric Pickle's opinion is 'localism, localism, localism'.

David suggested reading a book authored by Greg Clarke called 'Total Politics'. It looks at the decentralisation of political power. It is about a small simple estate, not about centralised control over everybody. It will mean different mechanisms and funding regimes for the different communities. Greg Clarke MP has a phrase 'we are giving away power'.

What does it mean for the Yorkshire and Humber region? This government is not in favour of regions, anything that has an intermediate tier is thought not to be necessary, and that accounts for the decisions already made with the RDA's.

Government is very keen that local authorities work between themselves to share services and reduce bureaucracy. Do not expect guidance from the government, it will be up to the community to go out and do things. The financial crisis makes it easier, this is used as a mechanism, and everyone makes decisions about what they really want to do.

Comments

George Hamilton asked Helen Wright what her thoughts were from a local authority perspective. Helen replied saying the Haskin's review talked about drilling down to local level but it did not happen, in some respects this was down to the local people, maybe it will happen now.

David Fraser commented that there may be a misapprehension about the LEP; they are talked about as if money is attached to them, but they will not have running costs and will have to be supported privately.

Helen reported that discussions with York City are clearly showing things are starting to happen. Helen said funding should drill down to more local levels, but questioned what

happens to the more strategic decisions, saying it will be challenging. There is so much uncertainty and lack of clarity.

David Fraser reported there are no job movements and every opportunity is taken to capture savings.

George was concerned that if the LEP's drill down to city regions, looking at Hull for example, would East Riding be included in that LEP and how can Hull try and deal with the rural issues of East Riding. David said there is no reason why we cannot have a separate LEP for East Riding.

Dorothy Fairburn felt that the changes were bad news, if nothing is localised at regional level, there will be no investments and money will be wasted.

Tony Pexton stressed that we have got to work from where we are and with what we have got. The current government is throwing everything out, so they are starting from the bottom up. If we want something to happen in the region we need to make it happen. If there is no involvement from central government we will have to raise money locally, he questioned if the government will be sat with tax payers money? If there is no central funding, taxes will fall in time once the country is out of the black. David Fraser agreed that yes they are working to a low tax economy.

Helen remarked that for so long we have had guidance, it has been the culture for many years; this will be a challenge in itself. David agreed there has been an expectation of national guidance and the ability to look around and see best practice from other places with the ability to access it, this will not be available but we need to be optimistic.

Richard Ellison commented that the opposition, i.e. labour MPs do not see rural areas as a priority.

Dorothy asked Pauline about timescales. Pauline said there is due to be a white paper and they expect there will be a gradual demise of the RDA's over 18 months to 2 years.

George remarked that the Food and Farming Forum should be used to formulate policy. Helen supported that by saying the forums have an importance of influencing upwards and downwards. Need to make sure we are knocking hard on doors and engaging more locally with Local authorities.

Peter Bainbridge

1. With regards to the future of SFFS, Government Office have been told the Food and Farming Forum can carry on with their activities in the business plan, which is good news for this financial year, but unknown beyond that at this stage. The Regional Chairs had received an email from Katrina Williams and Steve Willis reported that it had a positive slant, and the message he took from it was to carry on doing what you're doing until you hear differently. Peter said we have an opportunity to get momentum up which will carry us in good stead.
2. With regards to the Food 2030 strategy Peter reported that the government wants to look at a 5 year focus with immediate actions. The Food Policy Unit submitted an implementation plan for the end of June which retains the six key themes. They have asked for comments back and are expecting a detailed action plan within the calendar month from the coalition government. The view from Government Office is the plan is still quite government led, they feel it is a bit premature to take the plan forward as it stands now and have decided to wait to get the coalition view then will pass it around key stakeholders in the region for comment.

Comments

Tony Pexton asked to what extent the food chain is involved. Peter said there is clearly a key interest in local food networks.

Tony urged that if as a region we are going to take initiatives then should we not be putting ground work in now rather than wait until the action plan is issued.

Alan Hayes commented that in the strategy there are some things that are difficult to do at regional level such as GHG emissions from the food chain and reducing waste. The BRC and Food and Drink Federation have interest and drive. We need to find out more about regional growth funds and decide what is of value and important in the region. In the city regions there is not the level of knowledge about agriculture and it does not focus.

Peter said it is good they want to keep the 6 themes and said there are indicators about national obesity and how that was going to be delivered. Steve Willis reported that St Aidan's High school have asked to be involved in the Food 2030 work areas going forward and obesity is a key thing they are looking at. Steve said that St Aidan's had their 4th national food conference last week with 100 delegates from all over the country. The school focuses on local sourcing and healthy eating and is producing over 2,000 meals / day, they have been operating this policy for 10 years now.

Peter informed the Executive that Caroline Spelman is due to attend the Great Yorkshire Show on the Thursday and her program would involve visiting the NFU, CLA, Natural England, YAS and the food hall to see small SME's and local food producers.

5. Commission for Rural Communities – abolished and Upland Communities Report by Deborah Hare

Howard Petch was unable to attend the Executive meeting but kindly provided us with some key issues to report.

The Commission for Rural Communities is to be abolished, this will take some time to work through, probably the best part of a year, with quite a lot of the CRC work taken back into Defra.

In terms of the uplands report 'High ground, high potential – a future for England's upland communities' they are still hopeful the government is going to respond and are expecting a response this Autumn on the recommendations.

A parliamentary group of 20 MPs met week commencing 28th June to discuss the report. These 20 MP's have a significant area of upland in their constituents. The group was chaired by Tim Farron who is an MP from the Lake District, Tim is very keen to take the recommendations forward.

The report was based on an inquiry and listened to evidence of a number of people in the upland community, not just hill farmers. The recommendations are distilling the opinions of these people.

The first core message which came across strongly was the importance to look after the land. This message actually came from those that were not farmers.

The second core message was the conflicting views of the large number of organisations impacting on the uplands for example the National Parks, Environment Agency and Natural England amongst others. People managing the land felt bewildered by the conflicting views and felt totally disempowered, saying that everything was from the top down.

There are around 30 recommendations in the report. The one core recommendation says that there needs to be a specific framework for the uplands, a single strategy. This needs to be managed by an individual who would be responsible for implementing the strategy and

ensuring coordinated delivery. Although this is controversial, they are standing behind it as they feel if this one recommendation is not put in place then many of the other recommendations will not happen.

Some say you cannot have a single strategy as there is great diversity in the upland areas, but the policy is to engage and take much more account of local opinion.

In summary there is a lot of support for the uplands, people realise the potential of the uplands and there needs to be some cohesion with someone with responsibility to deliver it.

Comments

Tony Pexton said at the next RAF meeting on 3rd August they are hoping to have Howard Petch presenting the report and Choe Palmer from FWAG as she has a Nuffield Scholar and has done a lot of work in the uplands.

6. Food and Farming Careers Event

Steve Willis informed the Executive about a careers event being planned for the Autumn. The rationale behind the event is that quite often agriculture is seen as only offering technical career options, and there is a need to build awareness of the many highly skilled opportunities that are available.

The event will be held at Askham Bryan College and the target audience for the event will be careers advisors as it is felt they are the link to informing students of the opportunities.

Steve explained that we are currently looking for a celebrity headline speaker. Zones will be set up around the college incorporating all the sectors of the industry. Debs Hare outlined the different zones saying they would include Livestock production, horticulture and crop supply chain, research and development, food and drink, engineering, regulation/advisory/training and environment.

Comments

Nigel Pulling was concerned that this event sounds very similar to the Countryside Career Days that are run by the Yorkshire Agriculture Society. Steve explained that it is a different target audience, the YAS event is for school children and schools tend to send the lower achievers / D grade pupils to that event. He stressed we are losing a lot of potentially talented individuals as they are not aware of the opportunities.

Helen suggested including the Local Authorities in the zone set up as they are involved in elements of trading standards and considering the move towards LEPs it would be good to start including them.

Dorothy would prefer to see the environment zone called land management and suggested including RICs and the climate change agenda.

Tony Pexton suggested if LEAF would be appropriate and to include NIAB for the science side.

Action: Debs Hare to inform the Executive once the date has been confirmed.

7. Any Other Business

Steve Willis updated dated the Executive about the activities of the Forum's Farmer Group. There was a meeting last week in Middlesmoor kindly hosted by Stephen Ramsden. Stephen showed the group around his estate, discussing farm upland management and the 6kW wind turbine he has. There were 3 speakers for the afternoon session and these were Mike Smith from Quest Future Solutions, Vicky Wren from CO₂ Sense Yorkshire and Julian

Martin from ICE Renewables. The aim of the farmer group is that the members impart knowledge back to their own networks following meetings.

Nigel Pulling reported on the Great Yorkshire Show:

- Anne McIntosh, local MP will be at the show on Wednesday
- The Innovation Centre will be launched on Wednesday at 10am.
- There is a renewable area
- There will be practical demonstrations of the new ear tagging of sheep