ANIMAL VACCINATION: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC CORNERSTONE OF ANIMAL HEALTH AND EUROPEAN RESILIENCE

Adopted unanimously at the FVE General Assembly in Limassol, Cyprus
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FVE POSITION

Amid increasing animal disease threats, climate-driven challenges, and antimicrobial resistance, improved biosecurity, surveillance, and vaccination are an investment in our collective future. Animal vaccination is a vital cornerstone of Europe's health, economy, and sustainability**.** To safeguard animal and human health and protect our economies, we need to enable and **incentivise the full use of the veterinary toolbox** and that must include vaccination.

To make disease prevention future-ready, FVE urges policymakers and the entire animal health sector to shift their mindset and **strategically invest in disease prevention**. We implore all to work together to prioritise investment in strengthened veterinary services, and ensure harmonised and adequately funded national disease prevention, surveillance, control and vaccination strategies.

In addition, FVE calls for **fostering vaccine innovation, development, and availability**, including Differentiating Infected from Vaccinated Animals (DIVA)-compatible vaccines and for **promoting international acceptance of vaccination programmes against listed diseases (1,2) alongside stringent surveillance, to alleviate trade obstacles**. Crucially, FVE stresses the **urgent need to avoid, whenever possible, mass killing and disposal by strengthening biosecurity, surveillance for early detection and specifically vaccination,** as the cornerstones of animal disease prevention and control.

BACKGROUND

Momentum is growing following the devastating animal disease outbreaks, which have been increasing in frequency and severity over recent years (3). FVE supports timely recommendations from the European Parliament (4) and the European Council (5, 6) underlining the urgent need to avoid, whenever possible, mass killing and disposal **by strengthening biosecurity, surveillance for early detection and vaccination.** Europe, based on the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) scientific opinion (7), has ongoing discussions on this topic, such as on amendments to Reg (EU) 2023/361 on vaccination for specific diseases. This paradigm shift – from reaction to prevention – is essential under a **One Health** approach and is anchored as an overarching principle in the Animal Health Law. At the European and global level, the **World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH)** has echoed this call, adopting communications, strategies and a resolution (8, 9) that promotes vaccination as a strategic tool for disease, which shall not be an obstacle to trade.

Vaccination in conjunction with stringent surveillance is needed to demonstrate that vaccination does not interfere with disease surveillance for early detection of circulating field strains in vaccinated and unvaccinated populations. The WOAH resolution urges increased transparency, harmonised standards, and stronger public-private partnerships to improve vaccine access,

particularly in line with the UN Political Declaration on AMR, which calls for national animal vaccination strategies by 2030 (10). These calls are also supported by global animal health stakeholders and the World Veterinary Association, who jointly highlighted the urgent need for greater collaboration on zoonotic disease prevention (11). FVE firmly believes that regulatory frameworks should not disincentivise vaccination-to-live policies, in order to prevent the unnecessary mass killing and disposal of healthy animals solely because their vaccination status complicates freedom-from-disease recognition.

Socio-Economic and Trade Dimensions

Transboundary animal diseases – such as Highly Pathogenic **Avian Influenza (HPAI)**, **bluetongue (BTV), Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD)** and **Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD)** - pose serious and growing threats across Europe and the world which have serious consequences for animals, people and the environment. These outbreaks — often managed and controlled through 'stamping out', involving mass killing and disposal — have huge costs to the EU and its member states (12), both monetarily and non-monetarily, as they cause severe **economic disruption**, undermine food production and waste of animal proteins, risk animal welfare, devastate farming economy, and take a serious toll on the mental well-being of farmers and veterinarians. The consequences reach beyond the farm gate, affecting neighbouring European countries and entire communities and **raise concerns about long-term sustainability.**

Just a few examples highlight the scale of the problem. In 2025, FMD outbreaks in the EU led to the culling of over 18,000 cattle and caused economic losses exceeding €1 billion, FMD outbreaks in the UK in 2001 were estimated to have cost more than 10 billion pounds (13). Also in 2025, around 5 million poultry were culled due to Newcastle disease, and the EU continues to cull millions of birds annually in response to HPAI - with costs reaching the high hundreds of millions of euros (14). Estimates of previous outbreaks demonstrate the critical economic impact on affected regions.

Consequently, the frequency of animal disease outbreaks exceeded EU budget capacities between 2020 and 2022. In response, co-financing rates for emergency veterinary measures were cut by 60%, forcing Member States to cover an unexpected share of costs (15). Without coordinated support and additional measures, disease outbreak management becomes fragmented, exacerbating regional inequalities and weakening surveillance systems.

Investing in preventive care, including biosecurity, surveillance and vaccination, offers a smarter, more sustainable solution. When other control measures fall short, delivering quality vaccines to immunise animals against diseases is the best preventive method to stop their spread (3). It reduces the need for drastic emergency response measures, protects animal lives and farming economies, and relieves pressure on public budgets by limiting the need for large-scale compensation for killed and disposed animals. Vaccination also lowers the burden of diseases and therefore improves animal welfare, helps to maintain food supply chains and reduces impacts on the environment. Through regionalisation, following a decision pathway, it strengthens safe trade, allowing recognised disease-free zones to continue exports in accordance with World Trade Organisation's (WTO) Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement and WOAH standards.

REGULATION NEEDS TO KEEP UP WITH TECHNOLOGICAL VACCINE ADVANCEMENT

Vaccines can prevent animal diseases and protect public health (including preventing human fatalities). Just to give some examples:

- **Vaccination against HPAI** is increasingly being considered as a complementary tool in disease management due to the global rise in outbreaks and the growing genetic diversity of circulating virus strains. While biosecurity, surveillance, and movement controls remain essential, vaccination can complement these efforts by reducing virus circulation within and between flocks, minimising economic losses, and lowering the risk of spillover to wildlife and humans (3).
- **Classical swine fever vaccination** helped eliminate the disease from domestic herds in many EU countries. Oral bait vaccines have been used successfully in wild boar populations (e.g. Germany, Italy) (16)
- Vaccines also **played a crucial role in controlling diseases like Newcastle disease** in poultry (17).
- Mass vaccination campaigns helped control **Bluetongue serotype 8 outbreaks** across Northern Europe (2006–2010). More recently, emergency and strategic vaccinations were highly effective in halting the spread, e.g., of BTV-3 in 2024 (18).
- In the 90' s, vaccination programs against **Aujeszky's disease** led to eliminating the disease in many European countries (19).
- The vaccination campaign between 2015 and 2018 against **Lumpy Skin Disease Virus (LSDV)** in south-eastern Europe stopped its progress and ended the epidemic. Control strategies against 2025 outbreaks in France and Italy mainly rely on emergency protective vaccination (20, 21).

Advances in technology have significantly improved vaccine development and deployment, e.g. latest HPAI vaccines can be administered *in ovo*. Many vaccines now also incorporate DIVA technology, enabling more effective disease control while supporting stringent surveillance and trade, when used with targeted post-vaccination surveillance (e.g., periodic serology, PCR in risk groups). It is therefore vital that **regulations enable, not constrain, innovation** and that **international trading partners support each other** in the implementation of robust vaccination and surveillance regimes to **safeguard global trade of animals and their products**.

PREPAREDNESS, PUBLIC HEALTH & SUSTAINABILITY

The **EU's Preparedness Union Strategy** (22) calls for "preparedness-by-design" – a proactive approach that anticipates crises rather than reacting to them. **Preventive Animal Health visits, as mandated by the Animal Health Law,** are a vital tool to support farmers for early disease detection and for implementing preventive measures, including biosecurity, surveillance for early detection and vaccine planning. However, FVE have shown that these visits remain underutilised, and their implementation varies significantly across Member States, limiting their potential to improve animal health and welfare, reduce antibiotic use, and enhance sustainability and economic efficiency (23).

The FVE is calling European and national decision makers in Europe to **make "prevention is better than cure" a lived reality**. This means improving a regulatory framework for vaccination-to-live policies when emergency vaccination is performed, boosting investment in and incentives

for preventive measures, including **ensuring Animal Health Law visits are properly implemented** across all Member States, and **fully harnessing the potential of vaccination**.

Strengthening biosecurity alongside veterinary advice and with proper vaccination can reduce the frequency and severity of disease outbreaks, boost animal health and welfare, food safety, and public health while cutting costs and reducing environmental impact. Veterinarians are on the front line of the implementation of vaccination programmes - bridging clinical care and public health. Their responsibilities include setting up surveillance systems, biosecurity and vaccination plans, while also being actively involved in implementation and enforcement of management and control measures. All vaccination programmes, especially large-scale or rapid ring-vaccination requires secured supply chains, buffer stocks, rapid procurement and distribution logistics.

WHAT EUROPE NEEDS NOW

To make disease prevention 'future-ready', FVE calls national, EU, European and global decision makers, global trading partners, pharmaceutical companies, farmers and allied veterinary associations to work together to boost recognition of and incentives for preventive measures, e.g. increased biosecurity and preventive care through **proper implementation of preventive animal health visits** in all countries and sectors. In particular, Europe needs to

- Ensure **strategic priority investment in veterinary services and logistics** in all countries to deploy and enable **harmonised vaccination strategies**, ensuring adequate funding, and budget stability across Europe
- Promote international agreements and acceptance of **vaccination programmes against listed diseases** to reduce trade barriers and establish a legal framework that embraces a vaccination-to-live strategy for emergency vaccination without hampering the freedom-from-disease recognition.
- Support and ensure **vaccine availability and innovation**, e.g. through antigen banks, stockpiling, prioritised approval for all Europe, including DIVA-compatible vaccines and advocate for widespread uptake and establish a **legal framework** that embraces innovation and scientific progress in vaccine development.

FVE AND ITS MEMBERS ARE COMMITTED TO WORKING WITH STAKEHOLDERS, THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS, WOAH, ALLIED ANIMAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND FARMERS TO STRENGTHEN EUROPE'S PREPAREDNESS AND RESILIENCE AGAINST ANIMAL DISEASES.

In alignment with global partners, we emphasise that vaccination is a key component of the animal health toolbox, working alongside biosecurity and other preventive measures to effectively control and stop disease. By investing in prevention and fully unlocking the potential of vaccination, we can protect animal health and welfare, safeguard livelihoods, protect society and build a more resilient, sustainable, future —prepared for the challenges of tomorrow.

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