

Center for Bio-diversitet

European smallholders rights

Letter to the EU council about bird flu (Aviean Influenza) from civil society organisations representing 28 countries

The Netherlands, 9 December 2005

To the EU Council, att. Ministers of Agriculture:

Bundesministerium für Gesundheit und Frauen, Austria
Agence Fédérale pour la Sécurité de la Chaîne Alimentaire, Belgium
Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic
Veterinary Services and Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment, Cyprus
Danish Veterinary and Food Administration, Veterinary Service
Ministry of Agriculture, Estonia
Maa- ja metsätalousministeriö Elintarvike- ja terveystoimisto, Finland
Ministere de l'Agriculture, de la Pêche et des Affaires Rurales
Direction Générale de l'Alimentation Sous-Direction de la Santé et de la Protection Animale, France
Bundesministerium für Verbraucherschutz, Ernährung und Landwirtschaft, Germany
Ministry of Agriculture, Directorate General of Veterinary Services Directorate K.A.F.E., Greece
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Department of Animal Health and Food Control, Hungary
Department of Agriculture and Food, Agriculture House, Ireland
Ministero della Salute, Dipartimento della Prevenzione e della Comunicazione,
Direzione Generale della Sanità Veterinaria e degli Alimenti, Italy
Ministry of Agriculture, Latvia
Ministry of Agriculture, Lithuania
Administration des Services Vétérinaires du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg
Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment Food and Veterinary Regulation Division, Malta
Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit, The Netherlands
Veterinary Inspection, General Veterinary Inspectorate, Poland
Direcção Geral de Veterinária, Portugal

Ministry of Agriculture of the Slovak Republic

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, Slovenia

Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación

Dirección Generale de Ganaderia, Subdirección General de Ordenación y Buenas Prácticas, Spain

Jordbruksverket, Sweden

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Exotic Disease Prevention and Control Division, United Kingdom

Dear Madam, dear Sir,

Last week the European Parliament voted for the amendments which were approved by the Agriculture Committee, concerning the Proposal for a Council Directive on Community measures for the control of Avian Influenza (a proposal for a Council Decision amending Council Decision 90/424/EEC on expenditure in the veterinary field).

After Parliament's vote, on Thursday last week, the ball will be in the court of the Council, which plans to push through the legislation (a priority of the UK Presidency) before the end of the year.

The Council will assemble on December 19th - 21st.

We would like to emphasise the view of non-commercial/pet holders' organisations to the Council: there are no more excuses not to vaccinate!

Up till now the authorities - whether they are the Ministers, the MP's, MEP's or the politicians in general, the WHO, OIE or the FAO - have all been holding back on a definite YES to vaccination.

Either trade issues are at stake, or the available vaccines are said to be not yet effective enough, more research is said to be necessary, there would be no registered vaccines in Europe and the costs are said to be too high (each bird has to be injected twice with an interval of 4 weeks).

But we - the EU - cannot afford to hold back. Bird flu is out of control in Asia, where China and Indonesia (with the help of Dutch experts) have started a vaccination programme. From Romania and this week even from Ukraine (not the EU, but Europe nevertheless) the reports of new outbreaks keep coming. And very alarmingly in Zimbabwe HPAI H5 has been found. What if it turns out to be H5N1, Africa will not be able to control this disease, not logistically and not economically! Another continent out of control!

Even the poultry industry itself, which has been objecting to vaccination for years, is now asking for abandoning the non-vaccination programme, but demands trade guarantees.

The European Parliament has accepted amendment 112, art. 58, par. 3 (new): to permit vaccination if a threatening international situation arises, without this leading to restrictions on Community trade and amendment 105, art. 53, par. 1 sub a: vaccination against avian influenza is prohibited on their territory, except as provided for in Sections 2 and 3 and except if the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) anticipates an international threat of avian influenza or if a Member State intends to introduce extra measures for poultry.

This combined with the news of Dutch research *) on the effectiveness of vaccines should take away any hesitation to start a vaccination programme in Europe. Especially the conclusion of the named research is very convincing:

Vaccination is a means to stop the spreading of these very virulent bird flu viruses and therefore a means to take away the source of human contamination.

All supporting non-commercial/pet holders' organisations insist, like many times before, that the EU takes its responsibility and orders all member states to start vaccinating commercial poultry, the best way to control an outbreak of H5N1. This way, non-commercial and smallholders of pet poultry and other birds are no longer obliged to keep their birds inside for months, which is not even practicable for holders of waterfowl (without open space and water their birds die).

It must, however, be clear that non-commercial/pet holders should have the possibility to vaccinate if their situation demands such; but by no means should non-commercial / pet holders be obliged to vaccinate, because the risk of these holdings is almost zero, as many experts have stated many times.

Now is the time for the European Union to show what is in fact the worth and added value of being a union to all her inhabitants.

EU Ministers of Agriculture: this is a wake up call. "Act before it's too late!"

With the utmost regards on behalf of

Paula Polman MPH, chairman NBvH (Dutch Smallholder Association)

Christine Bijl, Secretary For more information, please contact:

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**) CIDC Lelystad, published on-line December 5, 2005: Proceedings for the National Academy of Sciences, DOI:10.1073/pnas.0505098102*

On behalf of the supporting organisations below:

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affiliated organisations in following countries:

Austria, Belgium, Bosnia, Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Rumania, Russia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Yugoslav Republic

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Society for the Preservation of Poultry Antiquities, USA - Christine Heinrichs, Publicity Director SPPA / christine.heinrichs@gmail.com / 5417 Park Meadow Dr. Madison, Wisconsin /www.feathersite.com/Poultry/SPPA/SPPA.html

Also read: [**Animals are not just or profit**](#)

Alternative strategies for disease control

The Netherlands, 26 January 2005

Dear sister and fellow smallholders,

In the past years we, smallholders in Holland, and you, smallholders in Denmark and Germany, have been confronted with animal diseases and the devastating consequences of government policy in fighting these diseases.

We all remember the horrifying footage of burning piles of dead animals in the UK and of the merciless cranes dumping animals into containers at farms in the Netherlands, during the FMD-crisis (in both countries).

We also remember what we all said back then: "Never again".

But only two years later the Netherlands were struck again, this time by Avian Influenza. And all the drastic measures were issued again, with the same horrifying scenes as a result. People were appalled and even resisted the officials fiercely in their butcher's work.

Now, to prevent future horror scenarios and change future policy, smallholders and people keeping chickens, ducks, goats and/or sheep in the backyard just for fun have united into a Dutch association to try to clear the way for a different policy.

At the last EU-conference, on "The Material and Immaterial Costs of Animal Disease Control", in Brussels on 15 and 16 December 2004, this association, the Dutch Association of Smallholders, has tried very hard to make its point heard. The various country representatives did listen, but as yet our plea has remained without any outcome. We greatly missed support from associations from other countries. They just weren't there.

In one year's time, the presidency of the EU will be with the UK. By that time we aim to have teamed up with organisations similar to our own in other EU countries, considering your special interest.

Together we can make a far greater impact in Brussels. For one, they will no longer be able to discard our issue as being just a Dutch problem.

To give you a more substantiated idea of what we stand for, I send you herewith the brochure and poster we made for the conference in Brussels, mentioned here above. I have enclosed a copy of the questions we asked the conference panel at the same Brussels Conference, and the press release as well.

If, by any chance, you should know of more organisations that might be interested in our cause than the ones I have written to now, please spread the word about us and/or let us know about them, so we will be able to create as wide a support as we can get.

I hope to receive your, positive, reaction at your earliest convenience.

On behalf of the Dutch Association of Smallholders (Nederlandse Belangenvereniging van Hobbydierhouders),

Yours sincerely,

Christine Bijl-van der Made email: christinebijl@planet.nl

Also read: "All Animals are Equal ?? - Towards Differentiation in Animal Disease Control" (NBVH 2004) [download PDF](#)

Press release of December 15, 2004

Dutch smallholders are uniting for a socially accepted animal disease control policy.

Preventative mass killing of healthy animals as a means to fight animal diseases is no longer acceptable to the public. There is no need and no social support for it anymore. This is the issue the Dutch smallholders will present at the EU conference on animal disease control on December 15 and 16, in Brussels.

During the large scale outbreaks of Swine Fever, Foot and Mouth Disease and Avian Influenza in the Netherlands, smallholders were, wrongfully, treated similarly to the commercial holdings. As a result hundreds of thousands of healthy animals were killed/destroyed and tens of thousands of smallholders were struck.

When we consider animal disease control, we must take into account the importance of this large group of smallholders that outnumber the commercial holdings by far. Representatives of the Dutch smallholders will plea in Brussels for differentiation of disease control without having to consider economic interest where smallholders are concerned. The issues for animal disease control concerning smallholders should be: a realistic estimate of veterinary risks, respect for life itself and for the relationship between man and animals, and the importance of genetic variety and biodiversity.

Because of the way animals of smallholders are kept there is hardly any risk of infection and of spreading the disease. As was proven in the past years. And if there are any risks these can be controlled by stand still and vaccination. According to the Dutch smallholders this is the only way we can get animal disease control socially accepted in the future.

In Brussels the Dutch smallholders will be represented by Paula Polman, Geesje Kuit and Sible Westendorp.

Questions for the panel, on behalf of the Dutch smallholders:

1. Smallholders pre-eminently contribute to maintaining/protecting biodiversity. They help prevent extinction of rare breeds. FAO instructs governments to protect these animals/species. The EU endorses this and so do the member states.

Could you tell us how much of the European directives on this subject have already been transmitted into the national contingency plans on animal disease control?

2. There are many more smallholders than commercial holders. In every country there are different types of smallholders (there are those who have animals just for their pleasure and those who breed special/rare breeds and also those who keep animals as a supplementary food supply for the family). During the large scale outbreaks of the past years smallholders have been treated similarly to the big commercial holders, whereas they mostly represent very different actual veterinary risks, as the research results showed.

Do you agree that the starting point for disease control should be the risks for public health and the veterinarian risks? And therefore, shouldn't there be a differentiation in control for smallholders and commercial holders? And do you agree that vaccination should be a more important means to fight animal diseases?

3. The European countries that have had to eradicate healthy animals in the past years. All had the same findings: killing healthy animals has no ethical and social support.

Do other countries have to experience the same things all over again to come to the same conclusions?

In view of a possible connection between Creutzfeldt-Jakob and scrapie, can you answer for the persevering measures of drastic selection on the basis of genotypes in breeding sheep, considering the limited scientific views on the subject?

Europe supports maintaining genetic biodiversity, but by issuing these extreme measures they only contribute to genetic impoverishment of the population of sheep, with all the risks evolving.

4. Vaccination for FMD is possible now. Yet, up to now no directives for animal disease control by means of vaccination, have been made. The various parties just can't agree on who is to pay. The choice is either kill the vaccinated animals, including the animals of smallholders, or keep them alive, in which case farmers get duped because the meat industry will not take vaccinated products. As a representative of the meat and dairy industry, you have a great social responsibility here.

Could you tell me how you are going to fill in this responsibility?

And what can the European consumer organisation BEUC do?

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