



UNITED KINGDOM REPORTS FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE Belize on alert to maintain its free status

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The United Kingdom has officially declared the reoccurrence of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in England in a beef farm in Normandy, Surrey. Due to the FMD outbreak, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has called for a COBRA meeting which he chairs in the cabinet office. The COBRA Committee, which stands for Cabinet Office Briefing Room A, is the United Kingdom's emergency response team for national crises. Contingency plans were created in the aftermath of the 2001 foot and mouth crisis when nearly 2,000 cases of foot and mouth disease were found and led to between 6.5 million and 10 million animals being destroyed and cost as much as GBP 8.5 billion [USD 17.3 billion]. The culling of cattle and other control measures such as a ban on the movement of all livestock in England, Scotland and Wales are in line with the agreed contingency plan. To date, there are two officially reported outbreaks and a total of 199 heads of cattle have been destroyed. Britain has also imposed a voluntary ban on exports of all animals and animal products.

The strain of foot-and-mouth identified is not one normally found in animals but is used in vaccine production and in diagnostic laboratories. The strain of the virus identified at the affected farm is identical to that used for vaccines and testing at a Pirbright research site and was also used in a batch of vaccine manufactured on 16 July 2007 by Merial. When the strain was identified, Merial voluntarily halted vaccine production as a precaution. In a statement, British animal health officials said: "The present indications are that this strain is a 01 BFS67-like virus, isolated in the 1967 foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in Great Britain."

The 2001 FMD crisis in the United Kingdom indirectly affected Belize because of the erroneous concept held by officials in Central America and Mexico that Belize is a "Little England". Thus, these countries considered us a high risk country for FMD and effectively closed their borders to importations of live cattle and cattle products from Belize. Thus, just as the British Prime Minister is taking this recent outbreak quite seriously, officials at the Ministry of Agriculture and BAHA are also taking it seriously and have banned live animal exports from the UK as well as meat and dairy products. The Ministry of Agriculture and BAHA will enforce regulations especially in the Commercial Free Zone areas to assure our neighbouring countries and trading partners that we are taking appropriate preventative actions.

Belize recently requested the OIE to recognize us as officially free of FMD without vaccination and it is expected that we would be recognized as such by the end of August 2007.

FMD is a disease of cattle, and very few human cases have ever been recorded, even though the disease is endemic in animals in many parts of the world, including Asia, Africa, the Middle East and South America. Foot and mouth disease only crosses the species barrier from cattle to human with very great difficulty. The disease in humans, in the very rare cases that have occurred, is mild, short-lived and requires no medical treatment.

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