

IMPROVED ANIMAL FEED CONTROL AND "FARM TO FORK" FOOD SAFETY POLICY

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As part of the policy of the Israeli Governmental aimed at improving the safety of food for human consumption, it was decided in the Ministry of Agriculture (MOAG) in the last few months to gradually move the control of animal feed within MOAG to the Veterinary Services and Animal Health (VSAH). In so doing, it was understood that VSAH will implement a considerable upgrade in the present feed control systems. The changes and improvements will be made concomitantly with the introduction of a new Feed Law and many accompanying new Regulations. In addition, this whole process will be done in parallel with an 18 months-long "Twinning" project supplied by the European Union (EU). The EU adopted in 2003 a new framework for its relations with its neighbours, including Israel, the so-called European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), whose overall goal is to foster economic reform processes, promote closer economic integration, legal and technical approximation and sustainable development. The ENP is backed by financial and technical assistance to bring about reforms that will bring benefits in terms of economic and social development with the potential of greater trade and other access to the EU. This is done through approximation or harmonisation with the relevant *acquis communautaire* (the body of EU laws and policies already in place), that may be required in order to be capable of fully reaping the benefits of such participation. For instance, for more efficient trade, it is necessary to harmonise with parts of EU labelling rules and with food safety (veterinary and phytosanitary) standards and to use EU customs procedures. "Twinning" is a project tool within the ENP, enabling the EU to send out officials from EU Member State administrations to work together with their counterparts in the administration of a partner country, so as to prepare together for the implementation of the *acquis* in a particular sector. Such a Twinning Project is paid for by the EU and demands both thorough preparation and a long-term official commitment from the partner to act according to the protocols of the Project. In the next few months a Twinning Project will be agreed upon and signed between the EU and its partner, the Government of Israel, the overall objective being to strengthen the means of the VSAH/MOAG to implement the "Farm to Fork" food safety policy. This food safety policy will be within a new legislative framework compliant in quality with EU provisions and international standards allowing for the enhancement of food and feed quality. The Twinning Project aims at multiplying the chances for Israeli agricultural products to land on EU and international markets. In order to reach this goal, improvements in the fields of animal feed, animal health, and animal welfare will be approximated or harmonized to the EU *acquis*, institutional capacity will be strengthened, training will be instigated, and information recording and registration systems developed. The Twinning Project, which will start most probably in January 2011, will mainly comprise the planning, establishment and training of

an Animal Feed Control Unit (AFCU) within VSAH/MOAG at the Bet Dagan campus, which will be responsible for all aspects of feed control, as detailed below. AFCU will comprise mainly field inspectors highly-trained in regulatory inspection and sampling, a well-equipped toxicology laboratory with a well-qualified staff to enable analysis for the necessary natural and synthetic toxicants at the level of a National Feed Reference Laboratory, and a small administrative staff. Other tasks of the AFCU will be the registration and control of medicated feeds, feed additives, and companion animal feeds. A major role will be the much-improved control of the very large amounts of imported feedstuffs arriving at the port terminals of Ashdod and Haifa, including state of the art sampling techniques of immense cargoes. The AFCU, as envisaged by the Twinning Project, will comprise a total of up to about 20 permanent staff members in all of these activities. Although some compulsory fees will be charged by the AFCU, the Government of Israel will have the overall responsibility for providing funding to employ the recommended staff and to acquire the analytical equipment needed for the toxicological examinations. The new legislation, the training and guidance in the Twinning Project, and the consequent development of the AFCU, will bring about marked changes in animal feed control in Israel, to ensure maximal food and feed safety. These changes will address various obligations (taken from EU food and feed legislation), still to be finalized, but basically comprising:-

1. **Responsibility.** Feed operators will be registered and are responsible for the safety of the feedstuffs which they import, produce, transport, store, sell or provide without cost. Farmers are responsible for the feedstuffs that they use in animal production. This is the basic principle of Feed Control. In order to ensure food and feed safety, feed suppliers and producers will be responsible for examining feedstuffs for potential toxicants. AFCU will periodically sample and analyze feedstuffs from all feed operators to ensure compliance with the responsibilities of the feed operators;
2. **Prevention.** Feed operators will identify and regularly review the critical points in their processes and ensure that pre-determined controls are applied at these points;
3. **Safety.** Feed operators will not supply any feed thought, known or found to be potentially harmful. The new Feed Regulations that will be part of the Feed Law will list all the feedstuffs regarded as being suitable and safe. Any substance not in that list, including "non-conventional" feedstuffs, will have to be shown to be suitable and safe, as they are supplied, and also during conditions of storage;
4. **Traceability.** Feed operators will have to be able to rapidly identify the source of any feedstuff and to ascertain the route of supply to all recipients. This will be done mainly by identification / marking of feedstuffs, and computer-enabled tracking;

5. Transparency. Feed operators will immediately inform the competent authorities if they have any reason to believe that any of their feed is potentially unsafe. Feed operators will be encouraged to ensure availability of feedstuff control practises and results to their clients through newsletters and the internet;
6. Emergency. Feed operators will immediately inform the competent authorities and all recipients if they suspect, know or find that a feedstuff is potentially unsafe. They will immediately start a withdrawal of feedstuffs (recall) from all supply routes and recipients;
7. Cooperation. Feed operators will cooperate with the competent authorities in actions planned and taken to avoid or reduce risks.

Development and approval of the Feed Regulations and the implementation of the Feed Law and Regulations will take many months to complete. There will be time to invest in comprehensive discussion and interaction with other government bodies and feed operators, and to ensure that whilst food and feed safety is the prime objective, there may be approximation in some obligations to suit the unique facts of feedstuff supply in Israel.

Overall, this is a very positive step that the Government of Israel has committed itself to take and our veterinary profession will be at the forefront of both bringing the changes into action and in benefiting from the improved animal health that they will doubtless engender. As citizens, we shall have an optimal feed control system to ensure that food of animal origin will be both wholesome and safe to eat.