

Brussels, 30th April 2020

To: Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius - Environment, Oceans and Fisheries

Subject: Safeguarding the health of people and animals “One Health” - to be at the core of the EU policy agenda

Dear Commissioner Sinkevičius,

Together with our partners in the agri-food chain, the European Livestock sector, has been able to maintain a stable supply of high-quality, safe and affordable food for millions of EU citizens during the recent COVID-19 outbreak. We remain very committed to continuing such work in the future. This is European food security in practice.

The European livestock sector as a whole welcomes the first measures taken by the European Commission so far to support public health, animal health, the livestock sector and Europe's food supply during this current COVID-19 pandemic.

As we look to measures to be implemented coming out of this crisis, the protection of humans and animals from pandemics such as COVID-19 and emerging infectious diseases must be a key priority for European policies. The current crisis shows us once again the disastrous knock-on effects such pandemics can have not only on our health but also on our economy, the functioning of our supply chains and the future of Europe in general.

Well-managed modern bio-secure farms where animals are monitored closely are key to continue to ensure food safety and food security. We have invested heavily in the most stringent food and animal health standards possible to reduce the risk of transmission of pathogens with clear and measurable success. In line with sustainable intensification and circular farming practices, such farms also contribute to climate change mitigation, higher animal welfare, and improved biodiversity. We are committed to continue investing in using our natural resources according to the EU framework in order to further improve the sustainability of the entire livestock sector.

We are very pleased that those high standards that are encouraged within our borders, are being used as a model globally, in an effort to reduce the risk of transmission of pathogens. We also need to make sure that any illegal and unregulated activities related to wildlife trade are eliminated. Keeping a strong livestock sector in Europe is the only way to carry weight in present and future international negotiations.

The ongoing COVID-19 outbreak shows the critical need to strengthen the sustainability and resilience of our societies and how our economies function. This is necessary to, above all, minimise the risk of similar health emergencies in the future, which are more likely to occur as climate and environmental impacts escalate. We are all convinced that there is no better option for us in health, sanitary and sustainability terms than supporting our livestock sector. This crisis proved it clearly, our livestock sector is not a weakness but a true European asset!

The idea triggered by some organisations and individuals to draw connections between animal consumption, modern farming and COVID-19 is not only wrong but it is a shock-tactic debate launched at a time when our breeders and farmers are doing their best in the EU to ensure a stable food supply.

We urge the Commission to ensure that its members, its services and the EU Institutions in general are not spreading fake news. EU action must be based on trustable information, i.e. sound science.

If we were to stop producing meat in Europe and in a situation where borders are closed and trade is affected, we would not only jeopardise food security, but also put many people at risk of nutrient deficiencies, therefore worsening their health and consequently the capacity of their immune system.

We would call on the European Commission to support food security and supply while protecting people and animals from emerging infectious diseases. The challenges arising from this crisis need to be acknowledged and faced both scientifically and logically. It is the role of the European Commission, together with Member states to protect its citizens and animals and take vigorous action to be better prepared and anticipate what will undoubtedly impact Europe in the months and years ahead.

Please find attached a document with a list of measures that could be taken by the Commission at short, medium, and long term.

Please be informed that a copy of this letter was sent to the Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Stella Kyriakides.

Sincerely yours,

Roxane Feller
Secretary General
AnimalHealthEurope



Birthe Steenberg
Secretary General
AVEC



Dirk Dobbelaere
Secretary General
CLITRAVI



Pekka Pesonen
Secretary General
Copa and Cogeca



Gustavo Gonzalez-Quijano
Secretary General
COTANCE



Ana Granados-Chapatte
Director
EFFAB



Mette Lykke Nielsen
Secretary General
FurEurope



Karsten Maier
Secretary General
UECBV



Alexander Anton
Secretary General
EDA



Alexander Döring
Secretary General
FEFAC



Jörg Seifert
Secretary General
FEFANA



Annex: List of measures to be implemented by European Institutions

List of measures to be implemented by European Institutions

With some urgency, we call on the institutions in the short-term to:

- 1) Avoid the propagation of misinformation on the links between livestock farming and COVID-19 or other emerging infectious diseases.

The currently known facts on livestock, its food products and COVID-19 are:

- According to the current state of knowledge, livestock used for the production of meat cannot be infected with SARS-CoV-2, and is therefore unable to transmit the virus to humans via this path. ([BfR](#))
- To date, preliminary findings from studies suggest that poultry and pigs, are not susceptible to SARS-CoV-2 infection. ([OIE](#))
- There is currently no evidence that food is a likely source or route of transmission of the virus. ([EFSA](#))
- Currently, there is no evidence to suggest that animals infected by humans are playing a role in the spread of COVID-19. Human outbreaks are driven by person to person contact. ([OIE](#))
- While there is ongoing research into a potential animal origin of the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), the spread and development of the current human pandemic is due to human-to-human transmission. There is no current evidence of animals playing a role in the spread of COVID-19. ([FAO](#))

In the medium-term, we would ask the Commission to:

- 2) Support European food security and independence.
- 3) Promote sustainable intensification practices to support food security in Europe and increasing global food demand and to avoid major environmental costs by increasing the area of land used for agriculture.
- 4) Promote new technologies to support improved farming practices, raise awareness on their benefits to society and their role in overcoming future health challenges.
- 5) Promote the testing and assessment of new agricultural techniques and support their deployment to allow for precision livestock farming focused on the wellbeing of animals, particularly where low productivity is caused by disease, insufficient feed, and other causes of ill health.
- 6) Provide incentives for improved biosecurity measures to be deployed and pay attention to the management of the interface between farms and wildlife (issue raised currently with African Swine Fever).

In the long-term we would advocate for:

- 7) The establishment of vaccine banks that allow rapid vaccination of people and animals in case of transmission risk, and provide incentives to develop vaccines and other tools which support early detection and prevent spread of diseases between animals and people.
- 8) The development of a more affirmative Commission policy towards facilitating vaccination without impeding trade of livestock or livestock products.

- 9) Support for development policies in LMICs that avoid encroachment into wildlife areas and support for sustainable livestock policies in developing countries to improve the efficiency and resilience of the food system, as well as making food accessible and affordable to all.
 - 10) Ramping up monitoring and surveillance of potential zoonotic diseases from wildlife that may infect animals on a global scale, and facilitate exchange of expertise between disciplines.
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