

APHIS Site Visit Report – Republic of Latvia Evaluating for CSF, SVD, and FMD Status

Introduction

APHIS conducted a site visit June 20-23, 2005, to complement and verify information previously provided by the Republic of Latvia in support of a request to be considered free from classical swine fever (CSF), swine vesicular disease (SVD), and foot and mouth disease (FMD). The site visit team met with Latvian veterinary officials at the Food and Veterinary Service (FVS) headquarters then split into two groups for the remaining visit. The teams visited district FVS offices, border inspection posts (BIP), a combined swine farm and slaughterhouse, a cattle farm, a goat farm, and a sheep farm. The teams did not visit the diagnostic laboratories; these will be evaluated at a later date.

The composition of the site visit team was as follows:

Kelly Rhodes	Veterinary Medical Officer Regionalization Evaluation Services, APHIS
Tom Kasari	Veterinary Medical Officer/Senior Analyst Risk Analysis Team, CEAH, VS, APHIS
Jay Mitchell	Director for Trade Policy Trade Support Team, International Services, APHIS
John Schiltz	Iowa State Veterinarian
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Latvian officials indicated that they are unaware of any current plans for exporting live animals or products but had requested the APHIS evaluations in order to open future trade opportunities for Latvian producers.

Visits to official veterinary services offices

Throughout the visit, Latvian veterinary officials were very transparent and willing to answer all questions fully. The organizational structure of the veterinary services is sound and there appears to be ample opportunity for communication with private veterinarians. All veterinary officials interviewed appeared to be knowledgeable within their area(s) of responsibility and confident in their skills. The site visit team found that the peripheral facilities (district offices and BIPs) relied heavily on instruction from the central FVS in the event of an animal disease emergency; however, officials at these facilities appeared to be aware of the initial actions to be taken.

Contingency plans for CSF, SVD, and FMD appeared to be very complete, although not adapted to the local veterinary units. Surveillance practices may be made more scientifically sound and better supported statistically than the current method, likely without additional cost. Implementing risk-based surveillance would be advisable and most likely beneficial.

Food and Veterinary Service headquarters

The site visit team met with representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and the central FVS at the FVS headquarters offices in Riga. Presentations were given on the transposition of EC legislation and the legislative process, the structure of the FVS and the internal quality management system, the organization and activities of the Sanitary Border Inspectorate (SBI), the TRACES system, the contingency plans in place, and animal identification and holding registration. The headquarters offices were located on the fifteenth floor of a building under renovation and appeared to be sufficient for the needs of the FVS. The majority of the personnel at the central FVS was young and enthusiastic, and appeared quite knowledgeable within the scope of their duties.

1. Legislation

The Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for promulgating all legislation affecting the FVS. The Ministry's Veterinary and Food Department is responsible for transposition of all such EC legislation. The basic process involves initial translation of an EU directive (performed by the EC), writing of the proposed Latvian transposing legislation, review by the FVS, announcement in a meeting of the heads of the various ministries with discussion and debate, then forwarding to the Cabinet of Ministers for adoption by Parliament. EC decisions and regulations are directly applicable. The EC translates these into Latvian, but not quickly, and the translation may be faulty – Latvian officials obtain copies of all EC legislation in English to check the translation.

Latvia created a table of correspondence for all EC legislation for use only by Latvian and EC officials. It takes considerable time to transpose EC directives – from 3 months to several years, depending on how contentious the material is (e.g. animal welfare issues). Affected parties are notified of new legislation via publication on the internet and in the official legislative journal. The FVS does not draft legislation, but rather is responsible for carrying out the provisions and monitoring compliance.

Current Latvian legislation is posted on an intranet system; officials are anticipating adding all pertinent EC legislation soon. There is also a page on the official FVS website to register complaints. CVO-CVO contacts are common with third countries.

2. Organization of the veterinary services

There are five main divisions within the headquarters FVS: the Veterinary Surveillance Department, the Food Surveillance Department, the Informatics Department, the Research Department, and the Administration Department (see Annex 1). The directors of these departments report to the CVO. Other entities under control of the CVO are the Research Department, the Internal Control Division, the Quality Department, and the State Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Center (SVMDC).

The regional FVS offices and the SBI also fall under the control of the CVO. The individual heads of the veterinary surveillance and food safety divisions of the regional FVS offices report to the respective headquarters representatives, who report to the CVO. Similarly, deputy directors for sanitary inspection, phytosanitary inspection, and food safety control the respective divisions within the SBI and report to a director at the headquarters level, who in turn reports to the CVO.

There are 1008 FVS employees in total, with 117 at the headquarters level, 506 at the regional level, 105 in the SBI, and 280 at the SVMDC. Of these, approximately 60% are veterinarians. There are 26 regional FVS offices and 1 FVS office in Riga. There are also 665 authorized private veterinarians who contract with the FVS to conduct certain disease surveillance activities on farms and in slaughterhouses. These veterinarians must be certified by the Latvian Veterinary Society. FVS officials supervise the activities of private veterinarians per established procedures – the two entities sign an agreement on tasks to be performed (authorization agreement), which is discontinued if not met.

3. Quality management system (auditing)

This is process voluntarily adopted by Latvian officials. The network of laboratories is currently ISO 17025 accredited, the SBI is EN 45004 accredited, and the regional FVS offices are seeking EN 45004 accreditation. The goal is to have a common quality system and integrated management system under ISO 9001. At headquarters there is an Internal Audit Division of the Quality Department which is responsible for quality management and performance evaluations, as well as an Internal Control Division, which is responsible for supervising the activities of the FVS.

An internal audit system is organized pursuant to ISO standards, primarily for the regional FVS offices although some auditing occurs at the headquarters level. The Internal Audit Division of the Quality Department audits the regional offices annually and issue a report signed by both the inspector and the head of the regional unit. If problems are noted, they are worked out between the central and regional management.

A basic principle of quality assurance in the Latvian system is monitoring the objectivity, independence, and competence of veterinary inspectors. Inspectors must sign a statement of objectivity when initially hired, and all FVS employees must sign a statement of confidentiality regarding information and samples.

4. Training

The Training Division of the Quality Department carries out training for new inspectors, after which they undergo a probationary period. This division also provides continuing education for established staff.

Veterinary inspectors undergo annual training which includes current legislation and disease recognition for former List A diseases, though not all diseases are covered each time. The central FVS assesses the need for additional training based on legislative and procedural changes. There have been three recent simulations: FMD in 2001, CSF in 2002, and HPAI in 2004. These simulations were each centered in a different district and included both theoretical and practical aspects. The target audience consisted of district FVS inspectors, private veterinarians, headquarters personnel, laboratories, and other emergency services. An owner education provision addresses special conferences for help in identifying diseases, general biosecurity, and best management practices.

5. Financial resources

About 75% of the FVS budget is allocated from the State budget. The remaining part comes from paid services through the SBI, meat inspection, registering and approving feed establishments, and laboratory diagnostic services. Latvia has also received funding through EU PHARE projects, primarily now for vaccine testing. No EU financing is

received for surveillance of CSF, SVD, or FMD since these diseases have not been seen in several years and are not considered problematic.

6. Sanitary Border Inspectorate (SBI)

The SBI is responsible for inspections on the outer EU border and for customs warehouses. Each BIP is managed by a head of operations and has units for veterinary, phytosanitary, and food safety inspections. Current EC-approved BIPs are seaports at Ventspils and Riga; road ports at Terehova, Grebneva, and Patarnieki; and rail ports at Daugavpils and Rezekne. There is another approved BIP at the Baltmarine Terminal, which is also an approved customs warehouse under Directive 97/78/EC. All BIPs were initially surveyed by the FVO and are now approved under EC legislation.

The main legislation governing import, export, and trade are Directives 97/78/EC (food products of animal origin) and 91/496/EEC (live animals), Decisions 20002/349/EC and 2000/208/EC (transit), and Regulations 136/2004 and 282/2004 (both concerning the Common Veterinary Entry Document (CVED) and obligatory veterinary checks). There are currently 43 veterinary inspectors.

TRACES is used to track intra-Community trade of live animals and products of animal origin. The system was implemented throughout Latvia on 31 December 2004. All 27 regional FVS offices are connected to TRACES, and there are 77 veterinarians authorized to issue certificates. The system is in Latvian.

7. Veterinary control of passenger traffic

There are colorful and comprehensive brochures available for passengers at all border ports regarding FMD, rabies, prohibited products, etc. EC legislation dictates that posters indicating prohibited products must be posted at all border crossings. The SBI delegates to the Customs Service the duties for veterinary inspections at purely passenger crossings. The Customs Service has received additional training for these activities. Pets can consequently move through all 18 external BIPs, whether or not veterinary inspection is present – there is a brochure on pet entry.

8. Transit/transshipment controls

Transshipment concerns movement from ship to ship or plane to plane. If transit or transshipment is completed within 7 days, only notification is required. If the consignment resides in Latvia for 7-20 days, a document check is performed, and if it stays for over 20 days a full veterinary check is performed. Shippers are allowed no more than 30 days between entry into the country and arrival at the customs warehouse, and between departure from the customs warehouse and exiting the country.

9. Emergency response

Emergency response to animal infectious diseases is coordinated by the FVS. The legal basis is the Law on Veterinary Medicine and Cabinet of Ministers regulations, which lay down the diseases subject of compulsory notification (all former List A diseases). A general contingency plan sets out the basic principles of emergency response, including the legal basis, financial resources, and logistics. There are also specific contingency plans and manuals in place for all former List A diseases (samples given). Only those

plans requiring approval by the EU have been translated into English (general plan, CSF, and FMD). The FMD plan is undergoing revisions due to new EC legislation.

The last case of rinderpest was in 1921, CBP in 1922, FMD in 1982 (swine) and 1987 (cattle), and CSF in 1996. No other former List A diseases have been reported in Latvia.

The FVS provides brochures to animal owners and organizes seminars on how to recognize infectious animal diseases. These emphasize the need for good working relations with a private veterinarian, the importance of isolating newly arrived animals and restricting outsiders from entering the farm, and the importance of keeping records of treatment and medication. The FVS also provides instructions to private veterinarians regarding disease notification, who to report to, and obligatory measures to be carried out in case of suspicion. The regional FVS is obliged to hold monthly meetings with authorized veterinarians, who report on monthly activities. These meetings are not compulsory, but reporting on monthly activities is, so the private veterinarians generally want to come to the meetings. Attendance is also considered a performance measure.

All emergency measures and indemnity payments are covered by government financing via emergency reserve funds of the State and the FVS. The FVS can “draft” private veterinarians to participate in emergency response measures.

FVS officials indicated that the greatest risk for introduction of CSF is wild boar, whereas the greatest risk for introduction of FMD is most likely illegal imports, probably via the Russian border.

10. Animal identification and holding registration

Animal identification includes ear tags, passports, central databases, and on-farm registers. Registration of cattle started in 1998 – cattle must have an ear tag in each ear with a unique code that indicates the farm of origin and individual animal identification. The system is similar for small ruminants. Cattle and horses must have passports in which the farm of origin and all significant events are recorded. There is a group marking system for swine – for movement, pigs must have an ear tag or tattoo with the farm identification number.

Latvian officials demonstrated an electronic database (internet based) for registration of animal holdings, quarantine places, slaughterhouses, etc. This database is maintained by the Agricultural Data Center (ADC) and incorporates registered herds and animals, veterinary activities, and pedigree activities. Every holding must maintain a register which contains individual information on the number of animals, boars, and sows. New events must be entered within 3 days.

Animal movements are documented at the farm level and in the central database. There is an official form called an animal movement declaration with four carbon copies – two each for the seller and buyer. Both entities are responsible for sending one copy to the central database for notification of animal movement. Compliance can be checked on the farm, on the roads, or at slaughter. Animal movement is a separate inspection item on the farm inspection checklist. A farm suspected of noncompliance may be subject to repeated inspections or unannounced checks. Sanctions include fine, whole or partial movement restrictions, market prohibitions, and disposal of animals. Officials indicated that

registration is a work in process and that compliance was variable; officials also indicated that all farms are registered (approximately 70,000).

11. On-farm inspections

Full inspections are based on risk analysis. Risk factors include the number of animals on the farm (more animals = more risk), indications of disease issues, results of previous inspections, previous breaches in mandatory surveillance, and previous restrictions. The FVS is responsible for developing the risk criteria, and the ADC generates the list of “at risk” farms. This list is distributed to all districts monthly to guide on-farm inspections.

Latvian regulations indicate that an authorized private veterinarian should visit every farm at least once per year, and an official veterinarian should visit all farms at least once every five years. The risk analysis describes the basis for selecting farms to visit. Inspections are also conducted for export, since a CVED is needed, as well as for import. All animals from third countries are inspected and quarantined, whereas inspection of animals from other EU Member States is based on risk analysis of the country of origin.

District FVS office – Tukums

This district has 20 parishes with approximately 20,000 head of cattle, of which 11,000 are dairy cows; 239 swine herds with 3500 pigs, including 2 herds with over 700 pigs; 1000 sheep; and 650 goats. There are approximately 20 herds with more than 100 dairy cows. There are also 6 slaughterhouses, some of which are dedicated for swine (none are FSIS certified), and 3 milk processing plants.

The site visit team met with the head of the district office and the chiefs of the veterinary and food departments. This office has 3 veterinary inspectors (including the chief) with 1 vacancy, and 8 food inspectors (including the chief).

1. History of previous CSF outbreak

This district experienced an outbreak of CSF in domestic swine in 1996. A farmer on a small farm (16 pigs) called an approved private veterinarian to the farm, who initially suspected erysipelas and treated for it. After 3 days, the veterinarian called the SVMDC. The Director of the SVMDC came to the farm and took blood samples, which confirmed CSF (though clinical signs were “not significant”). Restrictions were imposed, including slaughter of all pigs on the index farm and establishment of a quarantine zone [Note: this was under the pre-EU rules, so there was a single quarantine zone that was not defined by a geographic radius, but rather by those areas considered to be risky through potential contact, etc.]

All pigs were reportedly vaccinated in the quarantine zone after confirmation of infection (they had not been vaccinated previously on the index farm, though some surrounding farms had undergone vaccination as part of a management strategy for CSF). The central FVS office sent an epidemiologic investigation team that concluded that the source of infection was blood contamination from a wild boar hunted and brought onto the farm by a hunter who lived there (in violation of the regulations then, as it would be now).

Upon confirmation of CSF, a District Operational Committee was convened, an eradication plan for the affected farm was created, and information was provided to the

mass media. They also took the following actions on the affected farm (they showed us the actual document dated April 24, 1996):

1. A sign was posted on the single road to the farm saying “affected farm,” a physical (wooden) barrier was set up, and disinfectant was used on all vehicles entering;
2. Movement restrictions were placed on people and animals (including dogs, cats, and cattle), and no trade was allowed with other farms;
3. All animals were slaughtered (9 animals died and the 7 surviving animals were killed and incinerated on the farm);
4. Feed on the farm was destroyed by incineration (together with the pigs);
5. Mechanical cleaning was carried out on the farm and all wooden “parts” were destroyed;
6. Manure was composted, clothing destroyed, and a solution of 4% NaOH used to disinfect the premises;

District officials also banned trade in small piglets, the sale to market of pigs slaughtered at home, and the sale of pigs for breeding, and also banned pigs from leaving the district (though they could go to the slaughterhouse in the district). District officials showed the site visit team the documents (Acts by District Operational Committee) that officially imposed and lifted restrictions for this outbreak. District officials indicated that they would check whether any other wild boar had tested positive for CSF, but an answer was not forthcoming. Officials said that they did not discover the source of CSF infection in the wild boar that tested positive; they did not think the local wild boar was a host for CSF, but they did not carry out surveillance in wild boar after the outbreak (they did vaccinate wild boar from 1997-2001).

2. On-farm inspections

In 2004, district veterinary inspectors visited 530 of the 4,007 farms in the district. Farms are selected according to “risk factors” that include gaps in reporting animal movements or reports of health problems. The first choice of farms to inspect is those that have not registered any animal movements over a period of time; the second choice is farms that have some type of animal ID issue. Inspections also focus on commercial farms (i.e. “farms that sell to market”). District officials indicated that the private veterinarians have a good idea of what is happening on all farms, including small “non-commercial” farms, because they have to visit 20% of all cattle holdings each year to conduct mandatory testing for brucellosis, tuberculosis, etc.

The site visit team received a copy of a detailed checklist that district veterinary inspectors use during on-farm inspections, which includes confirming information in the central database on animal identification/movement, the animal health situation, animal welfare, feed controls, medication controls, etc. Feed control monitoring includes BSE-related restrictions and adherence to the ban on feeding catering waste to swine (they reported no noncompliance).

3. Disease surveillance

The district office provides monthly reports on animal infectious diseases to the central FVS office in Riga. The reports are sent in electronic format (the site visit team viewed the May 2005 report, which included some results for CSF testing in artificial insemination centers – all negative).

CSF domestic swine: The site visit team viewed the national CSF monitoring plan for 2005, which indicated that 1000 domestic pigs and 400 wild boars would be sampled this year. They also test all animals in artificial insemination centers (this is not included in the 1,000 animals noted above). There is a separate surveillance plan for each district. For the Tukums District, 32 domestic pigs are to be sampled in 2005, 8 each in Feb, May, Aug, and Nov. District officials determine which farms are sampled each year, and indicated that they target larger farm and “problem” farms. Most samples from domestic pigs are taken by official veterinary inspectors, although some are taken by private (accredited) veterinarians. The samples are sent to the diagnostic center in Riga.

CSF wild boar: The national surveillance plan calls for 20 samples from wild boar in this district, 5 in January and 15 in November. State Forestry workers indicate where samples should be taken in each district, but sampling should represent the entire district. Hunters usually take the samples in the field (the veterinary services have “oral” agreements with hunters but do not pay any money or provide other incentive); an official veterinarian takes the samples if the hunter fails to do so in the field. An official veterinarian issues the certificate that accompanies the sample to the laboratory (this is done by the hunter in the field only in those cases where the hunter is also an official veterinarian). Official veterinarians meet with hunters prior to each hunting season to discuss wild boar testing for the coming year.

This district sometimes has problems getting enough samples; if they fall short early in the year, they may make up for it by taking additional samples later in the year. District officials indicated that hunters are obliged to report any fallen wild boar and even showed the site visit team a book that tallies fallen wild boar, but there were no entries for recent years. The surveillance plan is based on “available finances and the population of animals by district, as well as previous experience with CSF.” District officials did not know if the CSF sampling plans were designed to detect the disease at a certain prevalence.

In 2004, approximately 50% of the estimated wild boar population in the district was hunted (there were 1398 WB licenses issued; 1158 WB hunted out of an estimated population of around 2369). No specific age of WB is targeted for hunting.

SVD surveillance: This district is to sample 6 animals in 2005 (3 in Feb, 3 in Aug).

FMD surveillance: No FMD surveillance has been conducted in Latvia since 2003; before that surveillance was conducted annually.

4. Movement control and marketing practices

The Tukums District office has access to TRACES. There is one assembly center within the district for shipment of animals to other parts of Latvia (in Bauska). This center was recently approved by the EC but is not operational yet. No veterinary certificate is required for animal movement within Latvia, just a declaration of animal movement. This district does not export any meat outside of Latvia, and no farms in the district have been

certified to ship products to the United States. Marketing practices within the district, and within Latvia, are generally farm-to-farm transactions since there are no auctions or large livestock markets as seen in other countries.

5. Emergency response

The site visit team viewed contingency plans for CSF (dated 2004), SVD (dated 2004), and FMD (dated 2002) that resembled the plan at the national level.

District FVS office – Ludke

This district consists of 249 sq km with 35,000 inhabitants. There are 19 parishes and 2 cities. The district borders with Belarus for 8 km and with Russia for 120 km. Within the district there are approximately 8,000 cattle (5,000 dairy), 12,000 pigs, and small numbers of sheep and goats on mixed farms. There are 73 holdings with only cattle, 4 with only swine, 15 with only sheep, 5 with only goats, and roughly 3200 mixed holdings. As of 1 April 2004, there were an estimated 1200 wild boar, 600 moose, and 40 deer in 6 hunting areas (Forest Service estimates). The district office employs 12 people with 4 positions for veterinary inspectors (currently there are only 2 animal health inspectors). There are also 16 authorized private veterinarians.

This district has not registered any infectious disease other than enzootic bovine leucosis (EBL) since 1999. There are currently 37 holdings affected with EBL, 19 of which have clinically ill animals. Vaccination of wild boar against CSF occurred in 2001, twice with 550 doses each time in 26 major feeding areas.

The site visit team met with the head of the district office and an inspector.

1. Authorized private veterinarians

Each private veterinarian must undergo a test-based course with a written examination in order to become authorized. This examination is given at the district level. Most of the authorized private veterinarians are over 40 years of age and experienced practitioners. The private veterinarians enter into contract with the district FVS office (a copy of this contract was viewed by the site visit team). They receive government support for performing their duties. These private veterinarians must participate in a continuing education course once per year and provide monthly reports on their contracted activities (no monthly meetings). Oversight occurs primarily via the monthly reports.

2. On-farm inspections

On-farm inspections are performed only by official veterinarians. The plan is to inspect all farms once every 3 years; 20% of the farms within the district have been inspected so far this year. Farms are selected for inspection based on risk factors such as: (1) no animal movements registered in a long time; (2) a calf registered without a dam registered; (3) parent animals in different herds; (4) registering of animals previous indicated to be dead; (5) fallen stock reported; (6) multiple abortions reported; (7) an overly large number of ear tags used; (8) a calf born to a cow that was previously reported dead; and (9) a cow calving at less than 20 months of age. Many veterinary inspections are prompted by irregularities in the central database. A list of farms with identification irregularities is also received from headquarters.

Inspection forms (viewed by the site visit team) are lengthy and fairly comprehensive, with a summary sheet on the first page that gives the holding name and owner, reason why the inspection was conducted, who performed the inspection, and a summary of the findings regarding animal identification, animal health and welfare, animal feed, veterinary medicines, and other topics. Each topic is marked approved or not approved. The inspection report has a section for nutritional surveillance that notes compliance with the BSE feed ban for cattle, but officials indicated that no inspections are conducted to monitor compliance with the waste-feeding ban for pigs.

If noncompliance of any sort is noted, a plan is put in place for corrective action. Movement restrictions are placed on the holding if irregularities in animal identification are noted. Inspectors can check with the central database to see if these problems have been corrected; for other noncompliance issues, a second inspection is conducted. Any movement restrictions would be noted in the central database. Fines may be levied as well, but the inspectors find that movement restrictions generate better compliance.

3. Administration

The district FVS office is notified of new legislation via the internet and intranet; new Latvian legislation arrives regularly from the Quality Management Department. The budget for the district comes from the central FVS. Fees are collected for vaccination, passports, vehicle registration, new holding registration, etc, but these are forwarded to headquarters.

4. Disease surveillance

CSF wild boar: A sampling plan is set at the central level. This district is required to take 10 samples total, 3 in January and 7 in November (6 organs and 2 blood). They try to take samples from older boar but otherwise there is no risk-based sampling – there is no perception of increased risk along the border. Hunters take samples of blood, kidney, liver, and spleen, and are obliged to bring the samples to the district office. Official veterinarians deliver them to the laboratory in Riga for testing. The district FVS works with the Forestry Service to collect the samples.

CSF domestic swine: The district FVS samples all boars at semen collection centers twice per year – there is one such center in this district with 21 boars. The sampling plan calls for 40 additional samples, 10 each in February, March, August, and November. District officials indicated that they sample each year from different farms, usually selecting farms with 2-3 pigs. Officials take 2-3 samples per farm. (The site visit team viewed sample collection forms and central surveillance plan.)

SVD: The central sampling plan calls for 6 samples from domestic swine in this district, 3 samples each in February and August. Sampling on herds is similar to that for CSF.

FMD: There has been no national sampling plan for FMD since 2003.

No positive serologic results or field suspicions have been reported.

5. Movement control

Health certificates are issued only by official veterinarians. In this district, official veterinarians have issued health certificates for export to Russia (pets) and trade to Germany. There have been no imports of live animals or products to this district. The

district officials have access to TRACES and are informed of all consignments in transit through the district. There is no cooperation on the district level with officials from neighboring third countries.

6. Emergency response

This district has copies of all of the emergency plans for former List A diseases (viewed by the site visit team). These have not been modified for use at the district level.

District FVS office – Daugavpils

This district contains 25 parishes and 2 cities, and borders with Belarus for 20-30 km. There are a number of substantial lakes along the border. There are 8200 holdings registered with 22,000 cattle (11,000 dairy), 7000 pigs, 2000 sheep, and 300 goats. Each parish on average has 1 cattle farm with 150-200 head and a lot of smaller farms. There is one large pig farm with 5000 head, one with 1000 head, and a lot with smaller numbers (1-3 pigs). There are approximately 3500 pig holdings in total. The Forest Service estimated 796 wild boar in 2003 and 851 in 2004.

The district FVS offices have 5 veterinary inspectors for animal health and 5 for food safety. There are also 16 authorized private veterinarians. Funding is received from the central FVS – user fees are pretty small and generally stay in the district budget.

The site visit team met with the deputy head of the district office and two inspectors.

1. Authorized private veterinarians

Contractual agreements with private veterinarians are renewed once per year as an automatic process. No new private veterinarians have been hired in several years. The official veterinarians set the required duties for private veterinarians and provide oversight via required reporting once per month. Continuing training is provided for private veterinarians through the monthly meetings – primarily regarding new legislation and the required duties for the next month. Seminars are also provided for private veterinarians by the FVS and the Veterinary Society approximately 3-4 times per year.

2. Quality management practices (auditing)

This district office has been audited by the Quality Management Department 3 times already in 2005. A report is generated after each visit and a plan for improvement developed, then a follow-up visit is conducted. Training is provided for FVS officials 3-4 times each year as well – the most recent was on BSE in February 2005; prior to that on animal welfare during transit. This district participated in the theoretical aspects of simulations for HPAI, FMD, and CSF – all districts participated in the theory portion, whereas only one district participated in the practical applications for each simulation.

The district office is notified of new legislation via TAIEX, the internet, and the intranet. New Latvian legislation is passed on by the Quality Management Department.

3. On-farm inspections

Inspections are carried out to check compliance with animal identification, health, and welfare requirements, as well as animal nutrition and control of veterinary medications.

Noncompliance is seen fairly often, although less so in recent years. Most noncompliance concerns animal identification, animal health requirements for sheep and goats, and milk pretreatment. Inspectors work with the producers to resolve the issues but may issue a fine or movement controls as necessary. Each year approximately 1000 holdings are inspected (1/8 of the total).

Farms are chosen in part on applications for milk standard reviews, which take priority. An inspection may occur due to complaints of people living around the farm in question, lack of animal movements registered with the central database, and other risk factors as noted at the Ludke office. This district also receives a list of “at risk” farms from the headquarters offices. Inspectors make a point of checking on the ban on feeding kitchen waste to swine, although acknowledged that small producers may feed leftovers.

4. Disease surveillance

CSF wild boar: The district office receives a plan each year from the FVS headquarters. In 2005 they are to sample 10 boar, 3 in Jan and 7 in Oct-Dec. However, they sampled 9 boar already in the spring because they will not be able to hunt in the fall if there is no snow on the ground. They still plan to take 10 samples total. Parishes are not targeted according to risk, but simply where the wild boar are to be found. The majority of the samples are taken by the head of the district office, who is a veterinarian and a hunter; therefore, the majority of sampling occurs northeast of the Daugava river, where he prefers to hunt. Samples include blood and tissue.

Oral vaccine for wild boar was distributed in the district in 2001; however, no serology-positive wild boar have been detected since then.

CSF swine: The sampling plan for 2005 calls for 44 samples from domestic swine, 11 each in Feb, May, Aug, and Nov. The inspectors target the largest farms since they consider animal movement on and off farms to be the greatest risk for CSF. The first two herds sampled this year were the largest herds in the district. There are no regional risk considerations.

One serology positive pig was detected on surveillance in 2001. Records and a tattoo indicated that this sow had been vaccinated against CSF in 1998 – all vaccinated domestic swine were tattooed. The sow was killed.

SVD: The sampling plan calls for 8 samples from domestic swine, 4 in Feb and 4 in Aug.

FMD: Sampling for FMD ceased after 2003.

5. Movement control

The district veterinarians have not written any health certificates in recent years, nor any CVED or certificates for exports. Animals have been received through intra-Community trade – deer from Austria and the Netherlands – but none have been sent. An official veterinarian checked the incoming consignments.

No live animals come through the BIPs with Belarus; the district officers stated that they have had no need to work with the BIP staff. The district office has access to the TRACES system and checks daily for incoming or transit consignments; however, there is little transit across this region. There is a border control point with Lithuania for passenger traffic, with no veterinary inspection.

6. Emergency response

The district office keeps copies of all of the contingency plans, but they are not adapted for the district level. In case of suspicion of CSF, a district veterinarian would be dispatched within 2 hours to take samples and report. An epidemiological investigation would be started, movement controls placed, and a report to the central FVS generated. Control measures in the protection and surveillance zones would also include wild boar. Samples would be sent to Riga and other reference laboratories.

Visits to border inspection posts

The general impression of the site visit team is that Latvia is expending too many resources checking a minimal amount of cargo traffic, while missing a much larger volume of passenger traffic. This problem may be due in part to lack of adequate cooperation between veterinary inspectors and customs officials. Latvian officials appeared to recognize the problem and stated that they are working to better incorporate and integrate the Customs Service into protection of the agricultural industries. There is no appreciable importation of live animals through any of the BIPs visited. No BIPs with Russia were visited on this trip.

Riga seaport

This seaport was built in 2004 with 50% EC funding, was inspected by the FVO in 2004, and has been in operation since 17 January 2005. It is EC-approved to accept products of animal origin for human and non-human consumption at ambient, refrigerated, or frozen temperatures. It is also EC-approved for transit or transshipment of consignments to or from Russia. Riga seaport is open 24/7 with 7 veterinary inspectors, 6 food safety inspectors, and 5 phytosanitary inspectors. The majority of commodities received here are frozen fish, as well as beef liver and poultry in transit from the United States to Russia.

The site visit team toured the facility and examined records: CVED, inspector checklists, pertinent legislation, internal audit statements, etc.

1. Import controls

Each ship must make sanitary, phytosanitary and veterinary declarations. The BIP must receive pre-notification 24 hours in advance, which consists of the first page of the CVED. Photographs are taken of the incoming seals and identification numbers. Incoming consignments undergo documentary, identity (including the establishment number and approval number), and physical checks. The physical check is performed according to a checklist filled out by the inspector. This lists the relevant EC and Latvian legislation, the CVED number, name of product, customs number, veterinary seal placed on the vehicle or consignment, and the samples taken. Photographs are taken of all consignments in transit as well as any for which problems are noted. Video cameras record the physical inspection for verification if necessary.

Samples are taken according to a plan set annually by a division of the SBI, based on traffic through the port in the previous year (sampling plan viewed by the site visit team).

Inspectors also check daily with the EC's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) to guide sampling. All sampling is recorded in a journal kept for this purpose and signed/stamped by the inspector. Samples are hand-carried to the laboratory in Riga, and a duplicate sample is given to the owner. The owner must sign that they have received the sample and understand the conditions under which it must be kept. The owner can use this sample for verification in case of dispute. Sampled containers are sealed with special tape that lists the email and telephone contacts for the SBI.

There are bins in place for disposal of Category 1, 2, and 3 materials, as well as a small incinerator (capacity of 30 kg/hr). There is a larger incineration facility outside of Riga available for disposal of off-loaded waste collected at BIPs, but no off-loading is allowed at any seaports in Latvia, so the inspectors here have not had cause to use the larger facilities. Cleaning and disinfection is carried out by the maintenance people with supervision by the inspectors.

After veterinary inspection, the inspector signs the CVED and it is cleared by the Customs Service. The CVED has four copies: one stays at the place of issuance, one stays with the Customs Service, one goes with the consignment to the point of destination, and the last goes to the broker (if there is one). This border port has rejected 1-3 consignments since January, mostly due to problems with temperature regulation and document control.

2. Transit controls

Some products can transit through customs warehouses that would not be allowed import, if the epidemiological situation is considered to be sufficient (for example, poultry products from the United States to Russia).

3. Internal audit system

The SBI has an internal audit system separate from that of the central offices. Each month, the directors go through the inspection records and find any mistakes that were made. A report is generated and signed by both the negligent inspector and the director. These reports are sent to the central office and every 6 months a summary is sent to the EC.

4. Information systems

All pertinent legislation is kept in binders in both Latvian and English. One headquarters staff member is responsible for notifying all BIPs of new legislation and which old legislation to replace. Each BIP also has access to an internal information system for inspectors, an intranet system containing all pertinent legislation, and an archive system for summarizing all products that pass through all Latvian BIPs (required by EC regulations).

5. Training

The veterinary inspectors are required to take one week of training each year including written and practical examinations. They receive a certificate upon successful completion. New inspectors receive on-the-job training for 3 months and then are examined by a deputy director. If they pass, they can start working; if they do not pass, they receive one more month of training and are re-examined. All inspectors must sign a

form describing their duties when they first start. Each veterinary inspector also must pass a medical exam once per year. Inspectors have the opportunity to attend other training as well.

Baltmarine Terminal

This is a privately built and owned facility, though it is run by the SBI. It started operation on 17 January 2005. It is in good condition, with offloading areas, inspection facilities, sampling equipment, and storage areas for frozen consignments. Veterinary inspectors from Riga seaport are also responsible for inspections at this BIP. The Baltmarine Terminal can act as a BIP, but as yet there have been no veterinary inspections – the river is currently too shallow to accommodate the container ships; consequently, the consignments are offloaded and inspected prior to arrival at the warehouse. The BIP is equipped to store frozen consignments in transit. Currently they have stored only frozen meat and fish.

A CVED is presented on entry of the consignment into the warehouse. Veterinary checks on consignments in transit are performed on the schedule described in the opening meeting. A new CVED is issued when the consignment leaves the warehouse, on which the incoming CVED number is noted.

There appear to be shared areas for the BIP and the customs warehouse – the officials explained that this is not a problem since all products through are for transit and none are for import.

Patarnieki road port

This BIP on the main road from Belarus was completed in October 2003. Veterinary inspectors conduct all inspections at this port. No meat or meat products are allowed from Belarus or Russia. Dogs, cats, horses, and circus animals pass through this port, but no cattle or pigs are allowed entry. There is a charge of 3.5 Lats/metric ton of cargo, with a minimum of 18.95 Lats/cargo. There is also a charge of 3 Lats/metric ton for animal-origin food. Primarily beef livers and chicken legs have been shipped through this port.

1. Movement controls

All imported consignments receive an identity and document check; all non-harmonized commodities also receive a physical check. There are reduced physical checks for certain products specified in EC Regulation 1994/360. Inspectors check the passports of all live animals, confirm the route plan, and perform a physical check on 100% of the animals. Duplicate samples are taken from products: one set goes to the laboratory and the other goes to the owner to keep in case of a positive result, at which time the owner may elect to get another analysis done. The violation most commonly noted is improperly filled out documents.

Veterinary inspectors have access to TRACES, SRDoc (an internal Latvian system that is redundant with TRACES but is more reliable and user-friendly), RASFF, VetLex (in Latvian), an intranet system, and a database listing all consignments inspected at the BIP

in the past 18 months, as well as an accounting program used to issue invoices and send weekly reports to the central FVS office.

Most confiscations are made by the Customs Service from passenger traffic, although there were not many in the past year. The inspectors have not confiscated any pork or beef, just salo (bacon fat). When Customs confiscates a banned product, they write a “confiscation ticket,” enter it into a journal kept for that purpose, and the technical staff are responsible for cleaning and incineration. This BIP has a small incinerator on site that serves their needs and also handles product from other BIPs, including nearby Silene (which borders Russia and has relatively heavy passenger traffic, but no veterinary inspection). A third party is contracted to bring the confiscated products from other BIPs for incineration. A veterinary inspector receives the cargo and oversees incineration.

2. Training

The BIP director went to Austria for 5 days of training, and 2 EC inspectors (from Germany and Spain) spent 1 month at Patarnieki BIP training the inspectors there.

3. Emergency response

During the 2001 FMD outbreak in the United Kingdom, this BIP set up a disinfection barrier for 1 month, sprayed sides and underneath vehicles, used sodium hypochlorite solution to disinfect. Overall they spent 180,000 Lats from emergency reserve fund. BIP officials showed the site visit team special instructions on FMD issued in March 2001. All vehicle disinfection was handled by the technical staff, which works for the overall BIP, not just the vet inspector.

If the veterinary inspector suspected CSF (a hypothetical question, since pigs are banned), they would isolate the animal(s) in an individual room, take samples and send them to Riga for analysis, close the building, notify the central authorities in Riga, and wait for further instructions. If confirmed positive, officials would wait for instructions from the central FVS, but would probably slaughter the animal at the BIP, cut the carcass into smaller pieces and incinerate here or send it to the Valmer district where a large incinerator is located (currently the only large incinerator in Latvia, although they are planning to add a second one recently acquired second-hand from Finland).

Daugavpils rail port

This BIP with Belarus opened in January 2005 and has not seen much use since then. There are 5 veterinary inspectors and 7 phytosanitary inspectors. Most of the cargos received here are plant based, including animal feed for pigs and cattle that is transiting from Ukraine to Estonia and Scandinavia. There have been no imports of animal-based products for human consumption, only some commodities in transit (NFDM, Frozen fish). The inspectors have access to TRACES, SRDoc, TAIEX (Technical Assistance Information Exchange, and EU program), and APOVS (a non-EU system developed with Russia and Belarus in Russian that identifies all rail cargos passing through, not just food products). The site visit team viewed the APOVS database, where most of the consignments listed were non-food (mostly timber).

1. Inspection procedures

The BIP receives at least 4 hours notice from the APOVS system and the inspectors decide what type of inspection (veterinary or phytosanitary) needs to be done. Rail cars are separated and brought individually to the side of the BIP – there is also mechanical equipment for removing cargo from the rail cars if necessary. All cargo receive document and identity checks, and physical checks are conducted according to a set monitoring plan.

2. Passenger traffic

The Customs Service performs inspections on passenger traffic. The veterinary inspectors indicated that only a small percentage of food and beverages are likely confiscated, and that they intend to work with the Customs inspectors to increase confiscations. The veterinary inspectors have sent information to the Customs Service regarding this issue.

3. Quality management

All BIPs are audited twice yearly by a team of 6-7 people from the central FVS office. There is also an annual audit performed by the Latvian organization that accredits the BIPs. The heads of all BIPs attend monthly meetings in Riga.

Visits to animal farms

Dairy cattle farm

This farm in the Jelgavas District has approximately 250 milking cows (550-560 animals total). The average production is 5555 liters per cow per year, with 4.3% milk fat and 3.3% protein. The herd consists of Latvian brown, Holstein, and mixed breed cattle – the owners indicated that they are gradually moving towards all Holsteins. They operate on a closed system using primarily Swedish bulls for artificial insemination. The farm raises the fattening bulls to approximately 500 kg then sells them to slaughter.

The premises were built in 1986 and are in fair condition, old style with stanchion ties and group calf pens. There are two main barns, one for the Latvian brown and mixed breeds, and one for the Holsteins. There is no milking parlor – the cows are milked individually in the stalls. The cows are on pasture as many days as possible and in the summer only come in for milking. Most feed is grown on the farm, which has a large acreage (2200 hectares = 5,436 acres).

The site visit team, accompanied by representatives from the central FVS, met with the owner, the herd manager, the zootechnical specialist, the private veterinarian for the farm, and district officials from the local FVS office.

1. Private veterinarian

The private veterinarian indicated that this farm is her only job. The primary disease of concern is calf diarrhea – they rarely see the more common production diseases of dairy cattle (displaced abomasum, metritis, milk fever, etc). This farm was not involved in FMD surveillance. There is a zootechnical specialist in charge of artificial insemination and developing the breeding program for the herd.

2. Animal identification

After a calf is born, it is marked with a temporary band indicating its dam. The zootechnical specialist fills out an official form and sends it to the regional office of the animal identification unit, which then enters the information into the central database. Calf tags and a passport are usually received within 3 days (the owner pays a registration fee for the ear tags). The owner puts the tags in the ears. All calves and most cows appeared to have two ear tags.

At the same time, the birth is marked in the herd register. This farm keeps three herd registers: one for male calves, one for female calves, and one for the milking cows. The identification number for each animal is the holding number, a species code, and a 4-digit individual number. Each animal is also given a name. The site visit team viewed the herd register and passports, which seemed to be in order. The last entry in the herd register was the previous day.

Sheep farm

This farm has 107 ewes and 14 rams, and averages 170 young per year. There are currently 114 male sheep in various stages of fattening. The primary breed is the Latvian blackface. Sheep which are not kept for breeding are usually sold around 6 months of age to other farms or to market – there is little demand for sheep meat in Latvia. Nonetheless, the owner is working on increasing meat over wool, for which there is even less demand.

The main building was constructed in 1934 and added onto around 1970. The facilities are generally run down and poorly ventilated, although the owner indicated that the sheep spend considerable time on pasture. Pastures are rotated every 3-4 years to avoid parasitic diseases. There is a selenium deficiency problem in this region. Sheep on this farm were diagnosed in 2003 with Maedi-Visna disease and there has been one clinical case since the initial diagnosis. The farm has a control plan in effect. The herd is tested twice per year and seropositive animals are sent to slaughter. This farm was not involved in FMD surveillance.

The site visit team, accompanied by representatives of the central FVS office, met with the owner, the private veterinarian for the farm, and the district officials from the local FVS office.

1. Animal identification

Newborns are registered with the central database shortly after birth via the official form, copies of which are kept by the owner (viewed by the site visit team). The central database is notified of other events, such as deaths, via an event notification form sent in by the owner, who keeps a copy (viewed by the site visit team). The herd register was examined and seemed to be well kept. The site visit team noticed that several animals were missing ear tags – the owner indicated that he had ordered new ones for replacement. The identification number consists of the holding number, a species code, and a 4-digit individual identification number.

2. Movement control

Copies of the animal movement declaration forms were viewed by the site visit team. These contain information on the place of origin, place of destination, number of animals in the shipment, identification numbers, etc. The form is signed by the owner, and the purchaser must countersign indicating that a veterinarian has been informed of the new arrivals. The copies were faded and difficult to read.

Dairy goat farm – Licisi

This farm has been in production since 1992 and is one of only 3 farms in Latvia with over 150 head; there are 10 other farms with 30-40 head. Currently there are 60 milking goats on the farm (133 total). They operate a closed system and raise their own replacements. This farm has difficulty selling their animals since they have CAEV. The primary species is Sanaan from the Czech Republic, although there are also some “Latvian goats.” The average output is 2 liters per goat per day, milking twice per day. The owner blames the low production on the CAEV infection.

The site visit team noted that a large number of goats had only one ear tag – the owner indicated that the requirement was for one ear tag through 2004, and now is for two. She is displeased with the requirement to tag young goats within 20 days of birth, since the tags are too heavy for the ears. The site visit team viewed the herd register, copies of animal movement declarations, copies of forms for registering birth, and copies of event notification forms, all of which seemed to be in order.

Swine farm and slaughterhouse – Ulbroki

This 13-hectare farm was established in 1971 and the current owners took over in 1992. There are 16,000 pigs, of which 1,000 are sows. It is an all in/all out operation with a 30 day cycle, and sows are separated 7 days before farrowing. They have their own slaughterhouse (EU-approved) that handles only their pigs – no pigs are brought in from other farms and no pigs leave the farm for slaughter elsewhere. The farm has 30 employees. There is one main swine herd but the farm is divided into 3 facilities – the pig barns, the slaughterhouse, and the quarantine facility. Farm vehicles transport meat to market each day before the new kill starts. The farm uses a computer management program developed by Latvian farmers but similar to programs used in United States to track mortality, the number of farrowings per year, etc.

The site visit team met with the farm manager, the private veterinarian for the farm, the head of the Riga District FVS office, and both veterinary and food inspectors from the Riga District FVS office.

1. Biosecurity

This farm is in the process of introducing HACCP-like procedures that are aimed at specified hazards such as rodent control – the site visit team viewed the manual that they developed for implementation, which was very complete with individual staff instructions for work tasks, disinfection procedures, swine health managements, details of vaccination program, and various acts. Trucks entering the farm with feed pass over

disinfection mats and are cleaned more thoroughly with pressure washing if deemed necessary. Rendering trucks pick up any dead animals from a “box” that is outside the perimeter of the farm, so the truck does not actually come on the premises.

Visitors to the farm have to sign a statement saying they had not been on another pig farm in last 72 hours. Employees entering the farm change clothes and shower (in the future, each part of farm will have its own employee shower and changing facility – the team saw a new locker room and shower facility being built for the farrowing barn. No farm employees own pigs, which did not appear to be a mandatory practice but simply worked out that way since all employees lived in the city.

Boars are brought in from Austria and Estonia. The new arrivals are tested for obligatory diseases (CSF is not obligatory) and quarantined for 1 month. This farm also imports semen from Austria.

Farm officials indicated that disease spread from foxes is their main concern, as there are few wild boar in the vicinity. They have a perimeter fence (solid concrete) around the farm and also a patrolling hunter who periodically shoots stray animals.

2. Animal identification and movement control

Sows have ear tags with the herd number and an individual identification number, while fattening pigs destined for slaughter receive a tattoo with the herd number on the ham. The herd number consists of LV + 7 digits. The site visit team viewed the farm movement register (the farm sends a paper copy to the central database), a monthly report on changes in animal numbers, and animal movement declaration forms. Even though the pigs move at most a few hundred yards from the finishing area at one end of the farm to the slaughterhouse at the other end of the farm, all pigs movements are accompanied by a movement declaration document

3. On-farm inspections

The last visit by an FVS official was on 19 May 2005, when a veterinary inspector checked animal identification, animal welfare, and infectious disease status. The inspector did not check for compliance with the catering waste ban because another inspector (food safety) does that. While there is a line on the inspection report for “animal feed” they said it was not mandatory and did not necessarily cover catering waste. When the head of the Riga District FVS office was asked about noncompliance with the catering waste ban in the district, he avoided answering the question.

4. Disease surveillance

No cases of CSF have been detected on this farm, although they vaccinated until 2000. They have Aujeszky’s disease (traced back to a rat problem they are taking care of) for which they have vaccinated for 3 years and intend to be free of in 6 months, and they have problems with respiratory diseases (including PRRS). Thirteen boars were tested in May 2005 for CSF, Aujeszky’s disease and Brucellosis—all negative. One boar was seropositive for PRRS.

5. Emergency response

If CSF was suspected on the farm, they would notify the head of the Riga District FVS office, close entry to the farm and stop all movement in and out, take samples from the

suspect animals and send them to the SVMDC (the laboratory would send their own transport to pick up the samples), and measure the animals' temperature (note: question was asked to private farm vet, but was answered by vet from Riga District office).

6. Slaughterhouse

This slaughterhouse is small, EU-approved, and only handles pigs from farm (about 120 animals in 8 hours, though the capacity is 150). The meat from this plant does not leave Latvia. It is a very impressive facility designed by the farm. Prior to the tour the site visit team viewed the HACCP plan, a map of the facility, and a Government certification of approval. Employees change clothes and shower before entering. The slaughterhouse has its own laboratory where they test for trichinella (no CSF testing occurs at the slaughterhouse). The slaughterhouse is inspected 4 times per year by FVS inspectors.

Ante-mortem inspections: the slaughterhouse has 1 official and 1 private veterinary inspector performing ante-mortem checks that include taking temperature and checking whether the animal is lame, has skin lesions, is coughing, or has any respiratory signs.

Kill process: The slaughterhouse uses consecutive numbers applied with "magic marker" ink to the shoulder of each pig killed to coincide with the number designated for the sample of diaphragmatic muscle for mandatory trichinella testing. The carcass is held until testing is completed on-site by a veterinary inspector.

7. Miscellaneous

A 3-day CSF simulation was held 2 years ago in Dobeles District (southwest of Latvia). Day 1 was practical on-farm training (what to do if CSF suspected on farm), Day 2 was theoretical training, and Day 3 was special training for the official veterinarians only.

Closing meeting

A closing meeting was conducted at the end of the site visit at which the APHIS team summarized their findings and presented additional information needs, many of which were addressed immediately. The site visit team also indicated that a subsequent visit to evaluate the diagnostic laboratories would be necessary.

Strengths of the Latvian program include the excellent infrastructure and communication at all levels, the quality management system, and the animal identification systems. Identified weaknesses include the lack of a sound statistical basis for surveillance sampling and apparent under-sampling for CSF in wild boar in higher risk regions, the apparent deficiencies in checks by the Customs Service on passenger traffic, and problems with monitoring compliance with the ban on feeding of catering waste to swine (Latvian officials subsequently indicated that this parameter is checked during all on-farm inspections). The site visit team also expressed concern that no seropositive wild boar were detected during or following periods of vaccination.

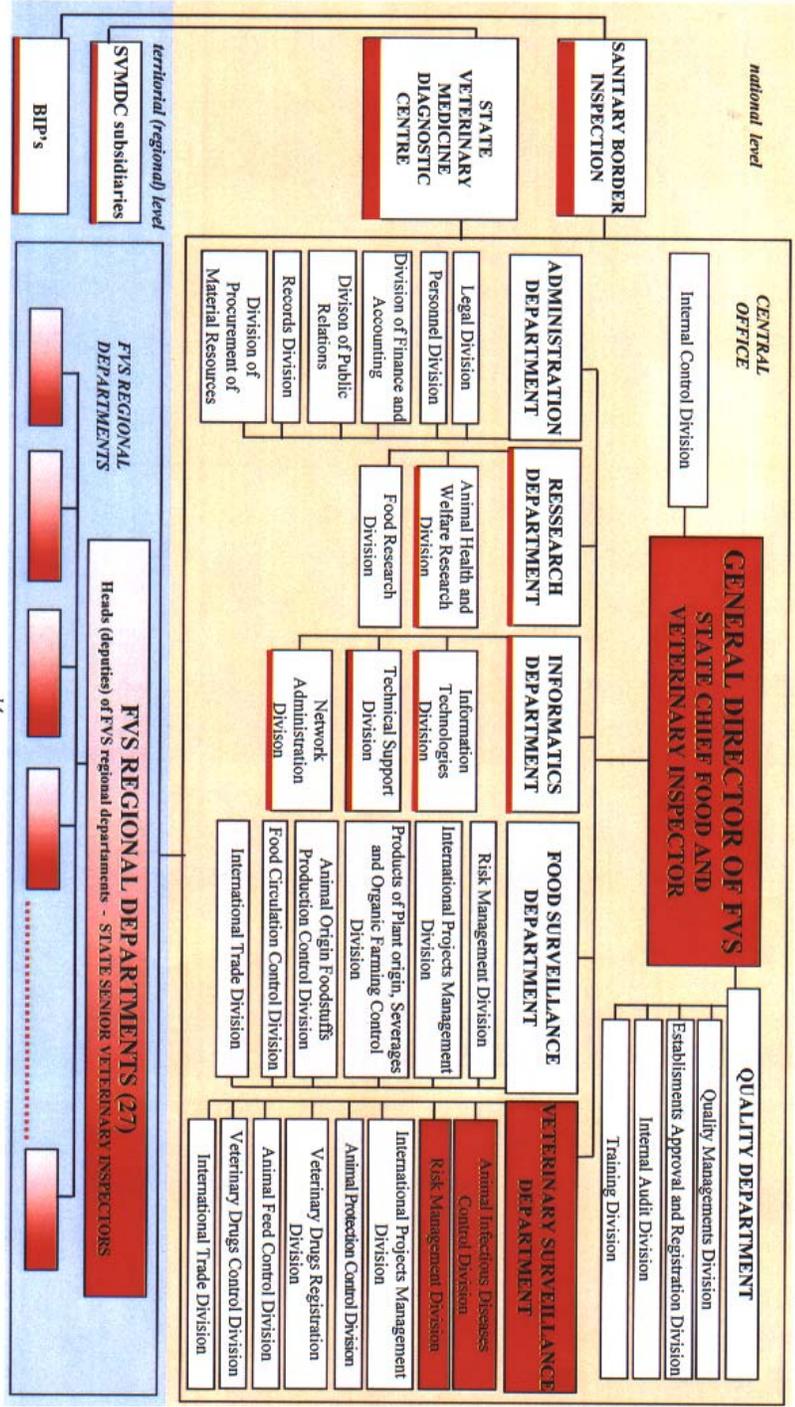


Fig. 1