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SCRAPIE IN THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

On request of Dr D J Goosen, P O Box 109, Letsetele, 0885, RSA on the status of Scrapie in South Africa, the following remarks:

1. HISTORY OF SCRAPIE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Scrapie was first diagnosed in South Africa on 14th May 1966 in two Hampshire Down ewes on the farm Broadacres of Mr C M Knight of Donnybrook in Natal.

These two ewes were two of four ewes imported from the UK in 1964 by Mr Knight.

The diagnosis was confirmed by the Veterinary Research Institute, Onderstepoort.

Control measures implemented

1. Mr Knight's farm was put under quarantine for 4 years and his whole flock of 35 Hampshire Down sheep plus 600 Merino sheep which were in contact with the infected sheep were slaughtered and compensation paid to the owner.
2. All imports of sheep since 1961 were traced, especially those from the UK, Netherlands, USA and Germany. All these farms were placed under quarantine and examined monthly for signs of Scrapie.

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18/22

3. All movements from the infected farm and farms with imported sheep were traced, placed under quarantine and examined monthly.
4. Farms under quarantine could only move sheep and goats to an abattoir for direct slaughter.
5. A prohibition on the importation of sheep and goats from countries where Scrapie is known to occur was already imposed in April 1965.

Subsequent outbreaks

1. Suspected cases

11/5/1966 Mr H A Williams, Ubala, Mount Curry, Natal reported that two Hampshire Down ewes died weeks ago. His veterinarian who treated the animals was convinced that this was Scrapie. Mr Williams imported 6 ewes from the UK in 1964. His whole herd of 447 Hampshire Down sheep was destroyed.

8/11/1966 A suspected case was found on the farm Upper Clifton, East London of Mr A W Pringle. Sheep were bought from Mr Levey of Tarkastad.

This farm was kept in quarantine with regular examinations for Scrapie.

8/11/1966 Onderstepoort diagnosed suspected Scrapie in a South Down and Merino ram from Mr C T Watrus, Craigland in the Eastern Cape. This ram was bought from Mr C Antrobus of Mortimer.

The farm was kept under quarantine.

2. Positive cases

The following positive cases were diagnosed by Onderstepoort and all sheep which were in contact with infected sheep were destroyed.

27/11/1967 Mr C Antobus, Glen Steward, Cradock, Eastern Cape.
1 Hampshire Down ewe positive.
This ewe was bought from Mr A N S Levey from Tarkastad.
27 Sheep destroyed.

22/1/1968 Mr A N S Levey, Fairview, Tarkastad, Eastern Cape.
This farm was under quarantine since 1966 and 2 positive Hampshire Down ewes found positive on 22/2/1968. Sheep were imported from the UK in 1959 and 1961.
299 Hampshire Downs destroyed.

- 9/9/1968 Mr M Orpen, Avoca, Barkly East, Eastern Cape.
1 Hampshire Down ewe positive.
This animal was an off-spring of ewes imported from the UK in 1964.
470 Sheep destroyed.
- 21/4/1969 Mr N van Zyl, Vergenoeg, Barkly East, Eastern Cape.
1 Hampshire Down ewe positive.
This animal was an off-spring from sheep bought from Mr Levey of Tarkastad. Mr Van Zyl bought sheep imported from the UK in 1960.
167 Animals destroyed.
- 16/6/1970 and
14/9/1970 Mr G Lordan, Libian, Clocolan, Eastern Free State.
2 Hampshire Down ewes positive.
Sheep originated from Mr Levey from Tarkastad.
66 Sheep destroyed.
- 13/10/1972 Mr J A Joubert, Mokoadi, Clocolan, Eastern Free State.
1 Hampshire Down ram positive.
Sheep were bought from Mr Lordan of Clocolan.

No Further cases were diagnosed in South Africa and quarantine was lifted on all farms by 1975.

2. SCRAPIE FREEDOM

- 2.1 South Africa is free from Scrapie.
Scrapie is a notifiable disease in terms of the Animal Disease Act, 1984 and the country has been officially free from Scrapie for the past 23 years.

The first ever outbreak was diagnosed in imported sheep in 1966, after being introduced from the UK. A total of six farms were infected; all of which could be traced to imported animals from the UK. The last case was diagnosed in 1972. Scrapie has never been diagnosed in goats in South Africa.

When the outbreaks occurred, a policy of stamping out was followed and the disease was eradicated by means of total depopulation of infected farms. This was accomplished by compulsory slaughter with compensation. A total of 2424 sheep were slaughtered. All farms where animals had made contact with sheep from the infected farms, were quarantined for a minimum period of 4 years. The disease was successfully eradicated and no further outbreaks occurred since 1972.

Small ruminant imports from countries where Scrapie occurs are prohibited. The only countries where live sheep & goats and genetics may be imported from, are Australia and New Zealand (embryos only).

Scrapie has never occurred in our neighbouring countries (viz Namibia, Zimbabwe & Botswana) who follow the same strict import requirements as South Africa. As Scrapie is regarded as an exotic disease to Southern Africa, a policy of stamping out and total depopulation would be followed in these countries, should it occur.

- 2.2 In our strive to uphold Scrapie freedom status, ongoing active and passive surveillance are maintained.

Active surveillance:

Government subsidised veterinary diagnostics are the responsibility of the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute (OVI) which falls under the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and 14 veterinary laboratories which fall under the Department of Agriculture (Directorate of Animal Health). If a notifiable or exotic disease is diagnosed, it is immediately reported to the local State Veterinarian.

Dr L Prozesky, head of the Diagnostic Programme (biggest program within the ARC) at the OVI, reported that no suspect or positive cases of Scrapie have been diagnosed at OVI since the last outbreak in 1972.

The OVI is constantly monitoring the national disease status in the country. Currently, all brain samples of food animals submitted to the OVI for Rabies and those which are negative on the fluorescent antibody test, are examined histopathologically. This is one of the precautions taken to assure that the country is free from Bovine Spongyform encephalopathy (BSE) and other conditions, including Scrapie.

- 2.3 Passive surveillance:

The control of animal diseases and eradication of foreign and erosion diseases, are chiefly the responsibility of the Directorate of Animal Health in the Department of Agriculture. The Directorate is presently divided into 9 regions, each with a Regional Director and approximately 10 State Veterinarians, strategically placed within each region to serve about 5 to 10 districts each. Every State Veterinarian has technical personnel (3 year diploma course and in-service training) in the field responsible for inspections, collection of specimens, regulatory aspects (movement control, import control, quarantine, border control), extension to stock owners, census figures, surveys etc. They are the eyes and ears of the State Veterinarian and depending on the area of control, visits to farms vary from weekly (FMD control area) to twice a year.

Regular inspections (passive surveillance) for diseases (foreign and known) occurring on any farm is done by these highly trained technicians. Special attention is given to post quarantine observation of imported animals and products.

- 2.4 In view of the above it can be stated that South Africa is free from Scrapie. Animals should therefore not be required to enter into any post-importation Scrapie control programme.

Yours sincerely

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