INVESTIGATIONS INTO FINDINGS OF FMD SEROPOSITIVE SHEEP AND GOATS IN CYPRUS, AN FMD-FREE COUNTRY

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1. INTRODUCTION

Foot-and-mouth Disease (FMD) has not been recorded in Cyprus since 1964 and there has been no vaccination programme since 1984. In October 2007, clinical suspicion of Bluetongue led to the testing and detection of FMD specific antibodies in sheep and goat flocks. According to the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code, infection with FMD virus is confirmed by findings of specific antibodies in association with clinical signs of the disease.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Clinical histories, age profiles and large numbers of samples for virus and antibody detection were collected from farms close to the index case where antibodies to FMD virus were found. Wider clinical and serological surveillance was conducted throughout the areas which are under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus.

3. RESULTS

Antibodies to structural (serotype O) and non-structural proteins of FMD were found in several flocks of sheep and goats in south east Cyprus, but not in other parts of the country. Only one seropositive flock showed clinical signs of FMD. Virus could not be recovered or detected from large numbers of samples collected from serologically positive flocks. Nearby cattle and pigs did not show clinical signs and were seronegative. The seropositive animals were homebred and at least three years old.

4. DISCUSSION

It was concluded that the most likely cause of these findings was an unreported and self-limiting incursion of FMD virus infection into south east Cyprus more than three years ago.