Assistance to brucellosis control in Armenia

Brucellosis is dangerous not only for animals but also for humans. The disease can spread through non-pasteurised dairy products as well as through direct contact with infected animals. Despite government programmes that were implemented through the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health, since the late 1990s brucellosis has been increasing in Armenia in small ruminants and cattle.

In May 2007, FAO supported an Armenian government initiative, the objective of which was to develop sustainable mechanisms aimed at controlling brucellosis. This initiative complements the Poverty Reduction Strategy of Armenia and is funded by the Italian Government.

The overall goal of the project is to analyse the epidemiology of brucellosis in order to design and implement proper cost-effective control strategies. Several parallel technical methods for controlling the disease have been considered in pilot studies and have been effectively implemented in the Syunik region. Close cooperation and coordination between all partners is crucial to success; this partnership is being jointly led by the Ministries of Agriculture and Health.

Impact

The activities have been implemented in one pilot province, selected after a nation-wide brucellosis prevalence survey (in livestock) carried out early 2008. The objective of this was to determine a baseline measurement by gauging the prevalence of the brucella disease in cattle, sheep and goats in Armenia.

The survey provides scientifically based guidance on designing a national control programme against the disease and it provides an estimate of the true prevalence of the disease in animals, communities and households throughout Armenia.

Numerous training sessions were organized aimed at challenging public and animal health authorities to improve their epidemiology surveillance and organise prevention campaigns.

Specific attention has been given to public awareness and an educational campaign aimed at reducing the risk of transmission from animals to humans by encouraging safe practices such as pasteurising milk before consumption, reporting abortions so that infected animals can be isolated and infected premises can be disinfected, and the participation of villagers in managing the control programme.

Authorities now believe that it is possible to achieve a measurable reduction in the prevalence of brucellosis in small ruminants. The fact that this is now a realistic goal is a major accomplishment and is a result of the effective cooperation between the Ministries of Agriculture and Health.

Challenges

Numerous technical meetings and field trips were organized to challenge the public and animal health authorities to carry out epidemiology surveillance and prevention campaigns. These activities include building capacity for public health and veterinary services in undertaking
responsibility for the implementation of the brucellosis control programme, enabling laboratory activities for brucellosis surveillance and control, and strengthening the study of the epidemiology of any outbreaks of brucellosis through field and/or laboratory investigations.

Results

We encourage further collaboration among the relevant technical units of the Ministries of Agriculture and Health so that they can come up with a joint programme to improve brucellosis control in the country. Through a consultative process based on the prevalence of brucellosis and field pilot studies, a national brucellosis control programme will be proposed to Government decision makers and donors in order to gain funding.

As a result of the advanced epidemiology training and technical discussions on brucellosis control options, Armenian authorities and academics have a better understanding of brucellosis prevention mechanisms and issues thanks to the sharing of international experience.

Analysis of the national baseline survey means that the national brucellosis situation is now well understood. Seven scientifically sound and cost-effective recommended actions have been proposed and discussed.

Major outputs will follow from the final Joint Summary Brucellosis Control Workshop to be held at the end of the project, after the results of the pilot brucellosis control programme have been gathered.

Feedback

Support for the development of a cost-effective and technically efficient brucellosis control plan is seen as a high priority by policy makers, as such a plan would aim to progressively reduce the incidence of brucellosis in small ruminants and cattle to a level at which it is no longer a public health risk or a significant cause of wastage in the animals themselves.

The project activities integrate veterinary and public health campaigns to increase public awareness of brucellosis and provide information about ways that people can reduce the risk of the disease being contracted by humans and animals.