



**TWENTY-NINTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR  
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

**Caracas, Venezuela, 24 to 28 April 2006**

**STRENGTHENING REGIONAL CAPACITY FOR THE  
PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF AVIAN INFLUENZA IN  
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is a transboundary animal disease, and as such, has considerable economic, commercial and food security impact on individual countries or groups of countries, rapidly spreading and reaching epidemic proportions. HPAI occasionally affects human beings and is therefore also a zoonotic disease. The control and elimination of transboundary diseases require inter-country cooperation. The scale involved can be gauged from the international health emergency that occurred in 1988 with the first outbreak outside the Americas of the Newworld Screwworm (NWS) in Libya, North Africa. Its introduction from South America placed Europe, the Middle East and Southern Africa at risk. It was eradicated in 1992, before spreading to other territories, through an FAO-led emergency international health programme that cost US\$79 million and had a cost-benefit ratio of 1:50.

2. As part of its work to prevent and control transboundary diseases and on the basis of lessons learnt from the NWS animal health emergency in North Africa, FAO created its Emergency Prevention System for Transboundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases (EMPRES). The initial priority for crop production was control of the desert locust; for livestock production, the Global Rinderpest Eradication Programme with a target date of 2010. It was subsequently extended to other important transboundary diseases with serious health and economic implications for affected countries and regions.

### **Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs)**

3. In December 2003, Vietnam notified the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) of the first case of H5N1 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in its commercial poultry, marking the onset of a rapid spread of the virus among species of domestic bird in ten countries of Asia. There were also a number of human fatalities. Epidemiological studies in the region indicate that the virus spreads easily between poultry farms with inadequate biosecurity measures, through the

presence of infected live birds on markets and through the legal and illegal international trade of commercial or wild birds carrying the virus.

4. A more coordinated form of operation was set up to deal with this new emergency situation: the Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs), a joint FAO/OIE initiative drawing upon the strengths of both organizations to achieve commonly agreed objectives. This initiative was formally established in May 2004. The GF-TADs acts as a support mechanism to facilitate partnerships between countries and regions in dealing with transboundary animal diseases, providing capacity to implement and advise on the establishment and control of programmes for the specific control of selected diseases considered regional priorities. The GF-TADs also includes other international organizations and agencies associated with animal and human health, thus avoiding duplication of effort. Asia was the first region to implement the new arrangements for the control of transboundary diseases.

5. FAO and OIE initiated the GF-TADs in the Americas in Buenos Aires in April 2005, working with the following organizations: Andean Community of Nations (CAN), Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Permanent Veterinary Committee (CVP), Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), North American Animal Health Committee (NAAHC), Regional International Organization for Plant Protection and Animal Health (RIOPPAH), Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO). Six priority transboundary diseases were established for the GF-TADs to focus its actions in the countries of the region: Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Newworld Screwworm, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, Classical Swine Fever and Rabies. Because of the size of the region and the specific characteristics of individual countries, it was decided to hold consultation meetings on the Framework, the first for the countries of Mesoamerica and the Caribbean in Havana in June 2005; second for the Andean countries in Guayaquil in November 2005. These consultations resulted in the publication of a document on the GF-TADs' vision and plan of activities for the region, and two further diseases were added for the Andean countries: Newcastle Disease and Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome.

## **II. HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN INFLUENZA**

6. There have been five outbreaks of HPAI in the Americas since 1983, affecting Canada, United States, Mexico or Chile. The identified strains were H5N2 and H7N3. The four countries incurred significant economic losses from the international trade embargoes that were applied in their regard and from the time it took for trade to recover. The outbreak in Chile (2002) alone, which lasted six months from detection to eradication, represented an economic loss of US\$31 million. There is a risk of transfer of the H5N1 strain of the HPAI virus from Asia to the Americas through migratory birds or the legal or illegal entry of commercial or ornamental birds. It is therefore essential to consolidate harmonized plans and programmes for the Americas, based on scientific knowledge and international experience in disease control.

7. Introduction of the H5N1 virus into the region would have extremely serious consequences, given the existence of an estimated 4.6 thousand million commercial birds in the Americas (FAOSTAT). Chicken is the meat with the highest consumption in the region because of its quality and low cost, and growth of poultry and egg production in the Americas and the world has outstripped the rate of population growth. Poultry production in the Americas is estimated to have increased by 17% in recent years, compared to global production growth of 14%. The sale of poultry products accounts for between 1.4% and 35.7% of the Gross Domestic Product of the continent's ten main producer countries: Brazil, United States, Mexico, Canada, Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Chile and Ecuador. Growth of poultry product exports from the Americas is 30% of an estimated 41% at world level, which means that the activity requires regional support to safeguard its state of health and to ensure the availability of high-quality foods for a resource-poor population.

8. FAO and OIE set about tackling the problem in an integrated manner. In collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), under the GF-TADs and with control activities in Asia, they undertook global and regional actions associated with preparation of the Global Strategy for the Progressive Control of HPAI<sup>1</sup> (October, 2005). FAO also attended the Second Meeting of the Inter-American Committee on Avian Health (CISA) which is part of the Latin American Association of Poultry Farming (ALA) and is recognized as the OIE's regional commission on avian health. Among the issues discussed at the meeting was the importance of strengthening HPAI prevention actions through follow-up to the FAO and OIE global strategy (Panama City, April 2005).

9. The Joint FAO/WHO/OIE/World Bank Conference on Avian Influenza and Human Pandemic Influenza<sup>2</sup> (Geneva, 2005) recommended focusing all efforts on the progressive control of the disease in the animal population, while at the same time making preparations for a possible pandemic. All actions should be undertaken within the framework of the global strategy presented by the institutions concerned. They would meet again at a donors' meeting in Beijing in January 2006 to support actions for the prevention, control and eradication of the disease.

10. The Hemispheric Conference on the Surveillance and Prevention of Avian Influenza (AI)<sup>3</sup> (Brasilia, November 2005) was attended by top-level representatives of the animal and public health sectors of the countries of the Americas to review, examine and spread global and hemispheric knowledge of the H5N1 virus in the animal population and of the risk of a pandemic, in order to build a regional alliance against the disease. The Conference also discussed the basis of a public and private multisectoral plan for the surveillance and prevention of the disease in the Americas. The Brasilia Declaration resulting from this Conference was signed by 22 countries, representatives of producer and industrial associations and delegates from international organizations. The document assumes a political, technical, budgetary and financial commitment to initiate joint actions to deal with the current risk posed by HPAI. The declaration will have to be implemented under the GF-TADs for the Americas to avoid duplication.

11. At the Donors' Conference in Beijing, January 2006, FAO presented a detailed proposal for a Global Programme of Avian Influenza Control and Eradication<sup>4</sup>, which at the time had an estimated cost of US\$475.9 million. It includes global, regional and national coordination; the adoption of prevention measures in countries at risk; control and eradication activities in affected countries; and measures for rapid containment in countries where the disease is detected. The OIE presented a complementary plan to strengthen national veterinary services<sup>5</sup>, with an estimated cost of US\$26.3 million. The plan aims to globally upgrade resources, organization, structure and equipment to deal with this and other transboundary animal diseases.

12. In recent months, FAO has received numerous requests from various countries of Latin America and the Caribbean for technical assistance for the prevention of HPIA. In response, the Director-General has pre-approved four technical cooperation projects to provide emergency assistance for the early detection of Avian Influenza in Central America, the Caribbean, the Andean Region and the Southern Cone. These projects seek to improve the diagnosis of HPIA, the epidemiological surveillance of backyard birds and wildfowl, especially migratory aquatic species, to

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<sup>1</sup> A Global Strategy for the Progressive Control of HPAI, FAO/OIE  
<http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/documents/ai/HPAIGlobalStrategy31Oct05.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Joint FAO/WHO/OIE/World Bank Conference on Avian Influenza and Human Pandemic Influenza, Geneva, 7-9 November 2005. <http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/en/health/diseases-cards/geneva-docs.html>

<sup>3</sup> Hemispheric Conference on the Surveillance and Prevention of Avian Influenza (AI), Brasilia, 30 November to 2 December 2005 <http://www.panaftosa.org.br/Aviar/aviar.html>

<sup>4</sup> Avian influenza Control and Eradication – FAO's Proposal for a Global Programme  
[http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/documents/ai/Global\\_Programme\\_Jan06.pdf](http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/documents/ai/Global_Programme_Jan06.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Ensuring Good Governance to Address Emerging and Re-emerging Animal Disease Threats  
[http://www.oie.int/download/Prep\\_conf\\_Avian\\_inf/A\\_Pilot%20programme.pdf](http://www.oie.int/download/Prep_conf_Avian_inf/A_Pilot%20programme.pdf)

reinforce social communication programmes and to identify methods of compensating producers in order to improve the reporting of this and other avian diseases.

13. The First Extraordinary Meeting of the GF-TADs on Avian Influenza (Buenos Aires, February 2006) was attended by officials from the veterinary services of the countries of the Americas and representatives of their private sectors. The meeting drew up the "Strategic Outlines for Avian Influenza Prevention in the American Countries" which, following the GF-TADs tenet of maximum use of regional expertise and institutions, were drawn up by an ad hoc group of HPIA experts of the Permanent Veterinary Committee of the Southern Cone and reviewed at the Third Meeting of the CISA, which preceded the GF-TADs meeting where they were supplemented and finally adopted. The main purpose of the outlines is to prevent the entry of the virus among backyard poultry, developing early detection methodologies and procedures and determining actions for the control and eradication of an outbreak of HPAI for the earliest possible recovery of disease-free status in accordance with OIE and WTO regulations. All this would take place by strengthening prevention systems, control and eradication actions, diagnostic capacity and financing. It was also agreed to continue making maximum use of regional expertise and institutions, in a framework of cooperation, with the FAO and OIE regional offices spearheading the coordination of regional bodies and national and international agencies and donors in the 33 member countries of FAO in Latin America and the Caribbean.

14. It is hoped that the "*Guide on the prevention and control of Avian Influenza in small-scale poultry farming in Latin America and the Caribbean*", published by FAO in March 2006, will be widely publicized and distributed by the FAO member countries in the region and the ALA so that it can help with the early detection of AI and other diseases, improve biosecurity measures on small-scale poultry farms and help reduce contact between domestic and wild birds in order to improve the prevention of this and other avian diseases. FAO's website on avian influenza provides daily information on the global development of this epizootic disease to all countries and relevant institutions of the region and world.

### **III. RECOMMENDATIONS**

15. The Conference may wish to request that FAO support the countries of the region in pursuing the following animal health actions:

- Training and institution building for national veterinary services through technical assistance plans, programmes and projects.
- Technical assistance and policy-making assistance for the control and eradication of transboundary diseases in Latin America and the Caribbean.