

Note to the Management Board

ALPHA Unit activities – Rapid Risk Assessment on SARS-CoV-2 in mink and mandates on Animal Welfare

Introduction

In response to a direct request by the MB chair the activities covered by this briefing note in the areas of animal health and welfare are:

- SARS-CoV-2 in animals (mink and other mustelids).
- Welfare during transport of animals
- Welfare of poultry, pigs and calves kept in cages “End of Cage age”

1. Main achievements

Activities related to SARS-CoV-2 in collaboration with the ECDC consisted of producing rapid risk assessments to assess the risk of strains of concern (mink variants) to public health and a report that focussed on recommendations for monitoring of mink farms. As of January 2021, the virus has been detected at 400 mink farms in eight countries in the EU/EEA – 290 in Denmark, 69 in the Netherlands, 21 in Greece, 13 in Sweden, three in Spain, two in Lithuania and one each in France and Italy. The report concludes that all mink farms should be considered at risk from SARS-CoV-2 and that monitoring should include active measures such as testing of animals and staff in addition to passive surveillance by farmers and veterinarians.

Animal welfare, a topic where the focus has been placed on enforcement of implementation over the past 7 years, was and is an important and integral part of the European Union’s new Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy which includes a comprehensive evaluation of the Union’s animal welfare legislation. EFSA will provide new advice to be delivered from June 2022 to March 2023 that reflects the most up-to-date scientific research and data with the first five mandates focussed on the keeping of broilers, laying hens, calves and pigs as well as the transport of free living animals and caged animals.

2. Performance

Both rapid risk assessments on SARS-CoV-2 in mink which required a fast reaction were delivered on time and met stakeholders’ needs.

EFSA worked well with ECDC and EMA to produce these rapid risk assessments. Collaboration with OIE and FAO proved useful and ensured international harmonisation of the subject matter.

3. Lessons learnt

EFSA should continuously invest in effective collaboration mechanisms with sister agencies and international organisations.