

# Foot And Mouth – Will The Lessons Be Learnt?

**In this special report, Animal Aid details the essential facts about foot and mouth (FMD) and its implications.**

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## The Disease and Its Transmission

### What is foot and mouth disease?

The disease and its transmission is caused by picornavirus, of which there are seven main types already identified and various sub-strains. It is in the nature of viruses to mutate so as to survive in the environment in which they find themselves. Being a 'moving target' is just one reason why a vaccination policy is of dubious merit.

### What illness does it cause?

It depends on the species and the underlying health of the individual animal. Those raised in crowded factory conditions or otherwise neglected are especially vulnerable to the severest symptoms. Fever is followed by the development of blisters, chiefly in the mouth or the feet. This can make eating impossible, with obvious consequences. There are reports of cows' tongues being so severely damaged they fall out of their mouths.

### I've heard that the very young are most badly affected

Up to 80% of newborn lambs can die from the disease – but then about 15-20% die within days of birth at the best of times. The FMD lamb deaths are probably because they can't get proper feed from their mothers, who would also be sick from the disease, or because their mouths are too sore.

### What about pregnant animals?

During a recent outbreak in Tunisia, spontaneous abortion occurred in 80% of ewes. In dairy cattle, there is also a high incidence of abortion, sterility, chronic mastitis and lameness – again, all conditions that are already endemic in dairy herds.

### What is the impact on healthy animals?

Scientist Sir Albert Howard carried out research in 1920s India into what were later called organic systems of animal farming. Over many years he found that his own cattle never became ill with FMD even though it was endemic and his animals literally rubbed noses with diseased cattle. (*Private Eye*, March 9, 2001)

### Can people get sick from it?

The official version is that this is 'very rare'. The effects are flu-like, with some blisters.

### How is FMD spread?

By direct or indirect contact with infected animals. The virus can also become airborne. This has led to some frankly incredible public statements about animals contracting disease from virus that crossed oceans from foreign countries.

### What about the closed countryside policy? We can't have people wandering over the countryside and spreading the disease further, can we?

'The closure of all footpaths – even in woods and in areas away from livestock – has been exposed as having no scientific justification,' stated a report in *The Observer* (March 25, 2001) 'There has never been a single example anywhere of a casual walker not in contact with animals spreading the disease,' the paper was told by Professor Alex Donaldson, head of the laboratories at the Institute of Animal Health at Pirbright.

### Can culled animals, left rotting on farms prior to disposal, spread the disease?

The government says no, and yet it believes that people walking on footpaths and in woods some

distance from possibly-infected animals represent a disease risk. Equally, foreign meat from long-dead animals is regarded as risky, while the bodies of recently-dead British animals are considered safe.

**But what about infected foreign meat as the likely source of this particular outbreak?**

Pinning down the precise origin of the 2001 outbreak is not possible. Certainly it has been politically and commercially convenient for some to blame meat imports from countries such as China.

**But isn't China over-run with FMD?**

China had around 20 FMD cases last year. (*The Observer*, April 1, 2001)

**You can't deny that foreign meat could be the source?**

Meat and dairy products are a global trade, involving the endless criss-crossing of live and dead animals, both within and between countries. Some of this trade is regulated, a great deal isn't. The source could just as easily be intensively reared, processed beef from Argentina, or live British sheep fed a pelleted diet of undetermined origin and then bartered through a succession of UK markets before being exported to, say, Spain. Or it could have originated through the feeding of pigswill.

**What's the pigswill story?**

Much attention has focussed on a Northumberland swill farm – by all accounts a filthy, stinking 'hillbilly' operation. Its job was to take sows from farms around the country – animals too worn out to produce more piglets. The Heddon-on-the-Wall operation rapidly fattened and then despatched them for slaughter to Cheale Meats abattoir in Essex, where the first confirmed case was found. FMD was then traced back to Heddon-on-the-Wall from where it was said to have wafted to neighbouring farms and then been carried around the country via the medium of sheep dealers and markets.

**How many swill farms are there?**

Pigs on about 120 UK farms (at the time of going to press) are still being fed swill comprising bin waste from hospitals, schools, hotels and the like. This

mess is supposed to be boiled at 100c for one hour, but Animal Aid has produced evidence illustrating that these rules are flouted.

**What's in the bins?**

Plate scrapings and other foodstuffs of animal, vegetable and fruit origin that are considered unfit for human consumption. Included are pork, ham and bacon. In other words, pigmeat fed to pigs.

**Cannibalism?**

Exactly so, even though a main lesson of the BSE crisis was supposed to be never to force animals to be cannibals. What's more, the industry recently put out an advert claiming that British pigs weren't fed pigmeat, unlike pigs on the Continent.

**Presumably feeding pig to pig was considered less dangerous than feeding cattle to cattle**

There were warnings enough that it was just as dangerous. In the early '70s, British pig farms were decimated by an outbreak of swine vesicular disease, whose symptoms are practically indistinguishable from those of FMD. The source was traced to swill farms and to the feeding of pigmeat to pigs.

**What part does factory farming play?**

Whatever the specific starting point of the 2001 outbreak, modern meat production systems ensured that more animals got FMD more rapidly. There is today increasing pressure on all farmed animals, by way of feeding and breeding regimes that are designed to extract more milk, more offspring and to get the 'slaughter stock' (as distinct from the breeding animals) fattened in the least time possible. Whether 100,000 chickens in a single shed or 1,000 sheep on a few lowland acres, farmed animals are raised in increasingly crowded conditions and have diminishing personal attention from those who breed them.

**What's your objection to markets?**

See Animal Aid's most recent markets report, called *Bartered Lives*. This details the squalor and cruelty to be found in livestock sales. Aside from animal suffering, markets bring together large numbers of animals of different disease status from all over the





country. Many sheep are driven from market to market in search of a few extra pounds. Around a million sheep and 100,000 pigs are then sent on marathon journeys abroad – live exports. The potential for spreading disease is obvious.

**What part have animal dealers played?**

There are about 30 major dealers involved in trading animals through markets and consigning them on live export journeys. They are part of and not separate from the rest of the farming industry. Many farm themselves. Sheep farmers know who they are dealing with when they put their animals in the hands of these men.

**The Cull**

**Do you approve of the cull?**

Animal farming is a killing business. Scenes of animals being ruthlessly killed and trashed have shocked many people. But these images are merely the visible part of the suffering, squalor and death that are the everyday reality of modern animal farming.

**But do you approve of the cull?**

We oppose the cull, just as we oppose the fattening and killing of animals for meat. For the animals themselves, there's little to choose between on-farm destruction and death in an abattoir.

**At least death in an abattoir is efficient and humane?**

No. Animal Aid has seen for itself, many times, the chaos, incompetence and callousness that are the hallmark of modern abattoirs. We've seen animals, with blood gushing from their throat wounds falling from overhead shackles and thrashing on the ground. We've seen animals beaten and kicked from the lorries to the stunning area... and lots more.

**Has the cull been more humane?**

The on-farm culling has been equally depressing. There is evidence that some animals, having been shot with a captive bolt gun, are recovering consciousness and experiencing their own slow deaths piled up with their fellows. While still alive, according to reports, the victims are being drenched with disinfectant.

**What's captive bolt gun?**

This fires a retractable metal bolt – it is a stunning rather than a killing device and is used in abattoirs to render animals insensible. It is throat-cutting that actually kills the animals. Animals killed as part of FMD do not have their throats cut – many are merely shot with the captive bolt.

**So animals are not being killed outright?**

Even in slaughterhouses, with their systems of pens and boxes, animals are frequently improperly stunned and are therefore conscious when throat-cutting takes place. During the cull, there is even greater probability that there will be widespread failures in stunning. Numerous reports from farmers demonstrate that this is indeed happening.

**What about the army's involvement? Surely they tolerate no inefficiencies**

A particular concern relates to the army's involvement in the rapid burial of hundreds of thousands of sheep in a disused Cumbrian airstrip. There is the real and horrifying prospect of animals regaining consciousness and being buried alive.

**What else about the cull troubles you?**

The unwitnessed suffering of pigs. Unlike the sheep, they are being destroyed in sheds behind closed doors. It is also clear that all species are being killed in the sight of their fellows – a practice prohibited in slaughterhouses because of the distress it causes.



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**Are culled animals being fed properly while waiting despatch?**

That is perhaps the most worrying aspect. The farming press routinely has stories about the bottom falling out of one market or another (cull ewes, spent sows, baby calves) and there not being enough money around to feed them properly. Given that farmers get 100% compensation for the culled animals whether or not they are fed prior to slaughter, we worry about a great many animals going un-fed between the time of their destruction being confirmed and the actual killing. This could be seven or eight days.

**Why haven't you spoken out against this cull if it's so awful?**

Animal Aid – in common with other animal rights groups – has sent out a ceaseless flow of press statements and Letters to Editors. Through our network of supporters, we've staged demos around the country, during which we've distributed vast quantities of literature explaining the background to FMD and urging people to go veggie – the only rational response to the crisis. We have also sought to take part in debates on television and radio but have mostly been rejected. This is presumably because our message is indigestible to important sections of the media.

**What is your message?**

It is that the 'pointless' and painful-to-witness culling is a logical consequence of industrialised meat production. Producing meat for 60 million Britons can never be a smiley cottage industry. That infectious disease flourishes in modern farming systems is no accident. Salmonella, E coli, bovine TB, campylobacter, BSE, swine fever, foot and mouth... these outbreaks signal that farming is in a state of perpetual crisis.

**But what are ordinary people supposed to do?**

The general public has been forced to witness a small part of the animal suffering and human

incompetence that is usually concealed behind closed doors. People now see what they have been conditioned to accept as normal. A great many have now pledged to change to a humane diet. We celebrate that fact. To everybody else we say: please reject eating animals and adopt a plant-based diet. This is the lesson of FMD. It is the only civilised and sustainable way forward.

**The FMD Cull And The Environment**

**Are there any environmental concerns raised by the culling policy?**

Burying and burning hundreds of thousands of animals (probably millions by the time the crisis is deemed over) has posed a serious contamination threat to groundwater and to the air. The use of thousands of litres of disinfectant will also have a major impact on plant and animal life. There were early warnings from environmental bodies that the use of kerosene, creosote and red diesel to ignite the burial pyres was pumping lethal dioxins into the air. Dioxin exposure can lead to cancers, genital malformations and learning difficulties. There are also concerns that burying so many sheep will pollute the water table. The air of panic even led the government into abandoning its BSE-related safety-first rules on the disposal of cattle over 30 months. Such animals previously had to be incinerated at high temperature because of the virtual indestructibility of the disease agent, which can cause CJD in people. By mid-April, the government was about to give permission for over 30 month cattle simply to be shot and buried in landfill sites.

**Support For Farmers**

**Concern for the animals is all very well, but what about the farmers? It's they who need help**

And they're getting it. Before we look at FMD-related payments, let's consider the subsidies and other aid packages cattle and sheep farmers get under normal circumstances. In 1999, government figures show that sheep farmers' total income was £1007 million. Around 40 per cent of this (£412 million) consisted of subsidies.

**Who pays these subsidies?**

British and European taxpayers, including vegetarians/vegans.

**What about payments to cattle farmers?**

Their total 1999 income was £1,996 million, of which £890 million (about 44.5%) was by way of public subsidies.

**How does that compare with payments to other industries?**

As Tony Blair told the House of Commons in March 2001, the total subsidy paid to UK farmers is more than that paid to all other UK businesses combined.

**But FMD has surely meant no income from animals they reared for meat, but who had to be destroyed?**

Farmers have received 'full market value' for animals slaughtered as a result of the outbreak, whether they



**How do you know some farmers have been deliberately infecting their animals?**

It was reported in their own trade magazine, *Farmers Weekly* (March 23). The method is to take a rag and wipe it over a diseased sheep's mouth and then rub the rag onto an uninfected animal. 'Although illegal,' said FW, 'the practice demonstrates how desperate some producers are to secure what they believe is fair compensation...' The article went on to acknowledge that these abuses 'could cause the disease to spread

have been infected or simply classed as 'dangerous contacts'. Payment per dairy cow is as much as £1,100 and they have been granted £60 for each lamb. Even spent ewes – for whom the regular market had collapsed – were each drawing £32 compensation.

even more quickly than it is at present'. There have also been persistent stories (reported on BBC *Newsnight* programme) of some farmers thrusting the feet of live sheep in to boiling water to produce FMD-type blisters. And there are numerous cases under investigation by the prosecuting authorities of animals deliberately moved into FMD 'hotspots'.

**How much does that add up to?**

The totals aren't known as we go to press but a headline in the *Independent on Sunday* (April 8) caught the flavour: 'Farmers in the money after cull payouts'. It reported that 'just over 300 farmers have received compensation payments totalling more than £35 million, with the largest sums going to some of Britain's wealthiest landowners.' Willie Cleave, the Devon farmer and live exports dealer whose widespread buying and selling of sheep helped spread the disease into that county, has received a £1.3 million payout. Cleave was reported to have been down his local pub gloating over his good fortune and toasting the Ministry of Agriculture (*Mail on Sunday*, April 15) (see full story overleaf). Another happy recipient (£50,000) was Bobby Waugh, the Northumbrian hillbilly pig farmer whose stinking swill operation is also identified as a starting point for the outbreak.

**Are farmers guilty of other scams?**

Under EU quota rules, animal dealers and some farmers claimed hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of subsidies for sheep they didn't in fact own, according to media reports (e.g. *Private Eye*, March 23; *Daily Mail*, April 11). To cover their backs, sheep were 'bussed' around in order to be in place for the official head-count. These so-called 'black sheep' were then moved on to the premises of the next fraudster. It is thought that many such animals were bought at Longtown market near Carlisle – an FMD hotspot. In this way, FMD is said to have spread from Cumbria, via the Welsh borders down to Devon.

**Aren't all these movements supposed to be traceable?**

Yes, but they haven't been. A clue to the scale of improperly logged sheep movements came in a March 28 House of Commons statement by Tony Blair in which he corrected a previous assertion made to the House. Rather than there being 2,000 sheep movements before the disease was detected, said the PM, 'it is now clear that that was an understatement – that probably about 1.35 million sheep were exported or moved during the month of February.' Quite a difference!

**Surely, there have been some real losses within the meat sector?**

Livestock markets, hauliers and abattoirs took a knock, particularly in the early stages of the outbreak. Off-the-cuff help has come from sources as divergent as Prince Charles, the Royal Bank of Scotland, newspaper appeals and the racing industry. Additional help has come from government in the form of a £167 million so-called 'agrimonetary compensation' available to beef, sheep and dairy

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Willie Cleave, Devon live export dealer and farmer, recently stood as a character witness in court for a neighbour, Maurice Young, who was found guilty of 34 charges of causing unnecessary cruelty to goats, cattle, ponies, hens, dogs, rabbits and guinea pigs on Young's Shallowford Farm in Devon. Police Constable Mark Hoar told Tiverton Magistrates court: 'What I found that day still haunts me. I have never seen animals kept in such appalling conditions.'

The vet on the scene said: 'The conditions are the most disgusting that I have experienced on a farm in my [18 year] career.' The RSPCA said that it was: 'one of the worst cases [they had] ever prosecuted'.

Rotting cattle carcasses lay scattered around the farm. The skulls of pigs and sheep were piled in a corner of a field. Starving livestock were kept in darkness with no food or water. Calves were tethered so tightly they couldn't move their heads. Chickens and rabbits were kept in old oil drums.

The court was told that, just as the RSPCA inspectors were loading animals on to a wagon, Cleave turned up and seized eight calves and four ponies, claiming ownership – and he turned away one of the Society's livestock lorries. Cleave went on to tell the court that he knew the accused well and that the animals were 'in very good condition, and I had no concerns about their well-being'.

farmers. At least £20 million more was on the cards as we went to press.

#### **But isn't it only right, given the importance of farming to the British economy, that this support should be there?**

Farming represents just 0.8% of the UK's gross domestic product, valued at around £2.3 billion. It employs around 1% of the working population – a total that's diminished from 15% in 1950. Tourism on the other hand is worth £64 billion annually and employs 2 million. There has been nothing like the compensation packages for this sector.

### **Vaccination**

#### **Do you favour vaccination for FMD?**

Vaccination will not prevent the cruel treatment and slaughter of animals destined for the food chain, so it provides no benefit for them. But if vaccination ends live exports, we favour it. We would also favour it, if it prevents the destruction of sanctuary animals in FMD areas.

#### **What's your view of the vaccination debate so far?**

Early resistance to vaccination, as has been openly admitted by farmers' leaders and DEFRA, was driven not by welfare concerns but by an attempt to protect profits derived from the export of live animals and meat products. Europe, prompted by the UK government, has a no-vaccination policy. This is

because – according to government statements – international rules say that if any country has an FMD outbreak and animals are then vaccinated, there can be no exports for between one and two years from the end of the last outbreak.

#### **What is the reason for that rule?**

The vaccine tends to have the effect of suppressing the disease symptoms even though a vaccinated animal can be infected and go on to transmit that infection to others. A blood test on a vaccinated animal won't reveal what his or her disease status is (notwithstanding claims that this will be possible some time in the future).

#### **Why is that a problem?**

If symptoms are suppressed and you can't establish through blood tests whether or not an animal is infected, then disease carriers are likely to be exported and cause FMD to spread further.

#### **But if symptoms are suppressed, doesn't that do away with the problem?**

No. Not only can symptoms break out at a later date, research indicates that by suppressing symptoms of disease through vaccination, other, possibly more serious and longer-lasting health problems can be caused.

#### **But doesn't the scientific evidence prove that FMD vaccination works?**

The evidence is confused. An official report written five years after the 1967 British outbreak, but suppressed under the Official Secrets Act until March of this year, found that vaccines would have failed to halt the spread of the virus in four out of five '67 outbreaks. In fact, it may have made them worse. Evidence with regard to the fifth case was inconclusive.

#### **Doesn't vaccination work for other diseases in farmed animals?**

Farmed animals are subjected to a vast array of drugs – vaccines included – whose purpose is to suppress symptoms of various diseases that are a natural consequence of the oppressive systems in which these animals are bred, fattened, transported and slaughtered. The main aim of the drugs is to prevent animals from dying before they can be slaughtered. Bear in mind that most farmed animals are killed for meat after a lifespan of just a few weeks (poultry) a few months (pigs, sheep) or three or four years (the larger breeding animals).

#### **But if vaccines keep these animals from dying prematurely isn't that a good thing?**

It could be argued that early death is a mercy. The vaccines might keep a percentage alive who would otherwise have died before being slaughtered. But consider this: soon after birth, lambs are typically given a cocktail of eight vaccines against conditions such as pulpy kidney, black leg and dysentery. Even so, between 15 and 20 per cent of all lambs die within days of birth – that's about 4 million a year. They perish mostly from exposure, disease and malnutrition.



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factfile

### What is European vaccination policy?

The completion of the single European market required the introduction of 'a level playing field'. This means that Britain can send animals and animal products to other EU countries or to countries further afield only when it can be demonstrated that British animals are FMD-free. This status cannot be achieved, according to most commentators, where vaccines are in use. Exports can only resume, we have been told, when all vaccinated animals are dead, or when it is assumed that the biological impact of the vaccination programme has completely disappeared.

### The Vegetarian Option

**Going on about vegetarianism is all very well – and it might suit some – but we have an emergency on our hands. What's your answer?**

There has never been a better time for individuals to consider whether they want to be part of an industry that involves the brutal deaths of hundreds of thousands (millions if you count poultry) of animals every day. The scenes of fear and death now shown on television news are no more vile than what goes on every day in slaughterhouses. Under normal conditions, 'healthy animals' are slaughtered in equally bloody and barbaric conditions.

#### 'But we need meat. It's natural'

All the nutrients we need for good health (protein, carbohydrates, fats, minerals, vitamins and fibre) are easily obtained from a vegetarian diet. The variety of grains, cereals, pulses, beans, nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruit is almost endless and they can be used in many different ways. Some are already part of our staple diet (such as bread, rice and pasta); others may be less familiar (chick peas, cracked wheat, tofu or cous-cous). So why kill when we could be kind?

### Vegetarianism And The Environment

**If everyone went vegetarian the environment would be devastated?**

Vegetarianism is far more food efficient than meat eating. You can produce 3-10 times as much by growing nutritious crops for direct human consumption than by using land to grow feed for animals who we eventually eat. Therefore, far less land would be needed to feed a vegetarian population, leaving more opportunity to create a rich and varied environment for people and wildlife.

#### Sheep farmers are predicting a ravaged wasteland if sheep go from uplands?

Thousands of animals drowned in the fields or died as a result of the recent relentless rain and wind, from which they had no shelter. Ann Sansom, a rural land use officer in the north-east, told *The Guardian* (Nov 15, 2000) that sheep farmers were themselves part responsible for this flooding. With so many more sheep trampling the ground and stripping back the vegetation, rain pours off the hills ever faster. Riverbeds are gouged deeper and deeper; lethal flash floods become common. Topsoil is washed into rivers, killing fish and wildlife, and choking

reservoirs. Overstocking of sheep also prevents water soaking into the ground as a result of the surface becoming sealed. With water unable to percolate into aquifers – a crucial source of drinking water – floods are followed by droughts. (*The Guardian Society*, November 15, 2000).

#### But we can't have hills without animals?

Eliminating livestock from the food chain would lead to radical changes, but overall effects should be beneficial. For traditionalists who would like to see areas of upland maintained by grazing animals, some land could be set aside for reasonable numbers of animals to be looked after on managed sanctuaries, free from the betrayal of the slaughterhouse. There would be more than enough land available to achieve this.

### After It's Over

#### Will we learn lessons from this dreadful epidemic?

In the short-term we must reform livestock production, outlawing the systems that are creating waves of infection and disease. Prioritising animal welfare means a ban not only on factory farming, but also on long-distance transportation. Live exports must be stopped and animals should travel directly from farm to the nearest available abattoir. Livestock markets should also be consigned to the history books. But the real long-term challenge is to move away from livestock production towards a plant-based agriculture. As individuals we can all help to swell the demand for rational food policies by eating only vegetarian food, and, as far as possible, by supporting local growers (preferably organic) to supply food for our local communities.

### Help For Rescued Animals

If you have rescued animals threatened with destruction under the FMD measures, see Animal Aid's website for legal advice. Or contact the office. Please do the same if you wish to join the network or people supporting those with threatened sanctuary animals.

