



ELM FARM RESEARCH CENTRE

The Organic Research Centre

Elm Farm, Hamstead Marshall, Newbury, Berkshire, RG20 0HR

Briefing Note/Press Release

“Act now to protect outdoor poultry from H5N1 Avian Flu”

That’s the central message contained in “Vaccination Nation”...a study of the arguments surrounding the use of preventive vaccination for the control of H5N1 avian flu in poultry. It was published today (July 19th 2006) at a House of Commons reception hosted by Richard Benyon MP (Conservative, Newbury). It is the product of analysis by the UK’s leading organic research body – Elm Farm Research Centre (The Organic Research Centre)(EFRC) working with an alliance of other poultry organisations (see notes).

Says EFRC director Lawrence Woodward – “ We must be prepared for the H5N1 strain of avian flu to become endemic in the UK and deploy every civilised element in the animal health arsenal to control and manage it. The Government’s chief scientific adviser, Professor Sir David King, fears H5N1 may become endemic in wild birds here for a period of 5 to 10 years. It is no use hoping for the best, we must plan for the worst.”

And he adds - "At all costs, in combating H5N1, we must avoid the vaccine-free zone that the disastrous 2001 foot and mouth (FMD) outbreak became. We must show that we have all learned the lesson that planned and timely preventive vaccination is the **scientifically proven, politically and socially acceptable route** for controlling such serious diseases. “

At the launch of Vaccination Nation the call was for Defra to commit itself publicly and clearly to the drafting of an AI preventive vaccination plan/campaign ready for EU approval, well in time for Autumn 2006. Alongside such a plan it must ensure that the UK has access to sufficient stocks of suitable AI vaccines.

The Defra announcement of July 11th that it is seeking tenders on an option to supply 10 million doses of AI vaccine is a welcome step in the right direction. But it is not enough and the declared Defra policy is still not to use preventive vaccination as a control measure.

Without such vaccination, the only current solution in attempting to separate poultry from wild birds is biosecurity and shutting up (housing). Free-range and organic poultry are, by definition, neither free-range nor organic once they are housed. “Shutting up signals the effective end of environmentally-friendly and sustainable poultry systems in the UK. It would be a catastrophe,” says Lawrence Woodward.

In Holland, the Dutch Government has developed a preventive vaccination strategy that has the approval of the European Commission. It offers outdoor poultry keepers the option of using preventive vaccination as an alternative to compulsory housing.

Consumer commitment to such outdoor production systems is growing fast. The latest data from the British Egg Industry Council shows over 30% of all UK egg retail sales are free range (3% are organic). The Soil Association reckons that nearly 9 million organic table birds were consumed in the UK in 2005. Add to those commercial birds the breed society enthusiasts, the rare breeds, the waterfowl, show birds and there is a huge body of poultry that requires a civilised strategy of protection from H5N1 AI.

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Speakers –

Christine Bijl is secretary of the Dutch Smallholder/Hobby Farmers Association (NBvH). She has been instrumental in persuading the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture to adopt and refine policies of preventive vaccination for H5N1 AI. These are now approved by the European Commission. This autumn Dutch outdoor poultry keepers have the option of either vaccinating or shutting up their poultry for the winter period.

Andrew George is the Liberal Democrat MP for St Ives, Cornwall. He studied agricultural economics at the University of Oxford and is active and influential in Parliament on matters of rural affairs as well as matters Cornish.

Lawrence Woodward is director of Elm Farm Research Centre. He led efforts in 2001 to persuade MAFF (now Defra) to use vaccination as part of the control strategy against the catastrophic spread of Foot and Mouth Disease. Vaccination wasn't used then and the resulting firestorm of FMD cost nearly 6.5 million UK farm animals their lives. The full financial cost across the European Union was reckoned to be 12 billion Euros (£8.6 billion).

Supporters of the need for a UK preventive vaccination policy for H5N1 AI

Elm Farm Research Centre
Organic Food Federation
Organic Farmers and Growers
Farm Animal Initiative
Sheepdrove Organic Farm
Wootton Organic Farms

Poultry Club of Great Britain
British Waterfowl Association
The Henkeepers Association
Various poultry breed Societies

(**EFRC** is the **UK's leading organic farming research and advisory body** based near Newbury in Berkshire. It is grateful for the help it has received from like-minded farming and poultry organisations and individuals in the preparation of Vaccination Nation. Particular thanks is due to The Sheepdrove Trust for generous funding.)

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