

Red alert on blue tongue

As the world's climate change scientists gather in Paris at the IPCC (International Panel on Climate Change) to drive home the message of future catastrophe in a warming world, European farmers are already "feeling the heat".

Blue tongue is a serious disease of ruminants, spread by midges in hot countries and has previously seen the limit of its range in North Africa. With global temperatures already rising these midges have hopped across the Mediterranean to Spain and spread the blue tongue virus to European midges (*Culicoides*) which in turn have now infected livestock as far north as Holland and Germany.

Running total of EU Blue tongue outbreaks to date:

Netherlands = 461 outbreaks

Belgium = 695 outbreaks

Luxembourg = 8 outbreaks

Germany = 951 outbreaks

France = 7 outbreaks

TOTAL = 2122 outbreaks

Last autumn EU vets took comfort from the fact that the cold European winter would kill the midges that spread the disease and stamp out the outbreak. But one of the mildest winters on record has allowed the epidemic to continue.

There have been 89 new cases since 21 December 2006 - 6 in the Netherlands, 1 in France, 3 in Luxemburg and 79 in Germany.

There is a 150 km restriction zone in place around each of the infected premises meaning that all of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg; areas of western Germany and parts of North-Eastern France are under restrictions.

No cases have yet been reported in the UK, but with cases all along the coast of the Continent facing the South East and East Anglia, the fear is that blue tongue will be here soon.

Scientists and epidemiologists studying the spread of blue tongue say it is a perfect illustration of global warming in action and they have precisely mapped and correlated its spread to rising temperatures. They fear that other disease such as African Horse Sickness are also moving rapidly moving North.

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