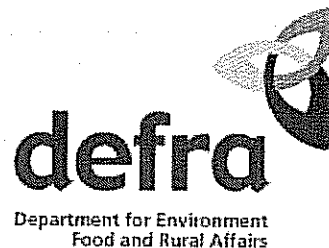


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20 November 2007

From Jeff Rooker
Minister for Sustainable Farming and Food, and Animal Welfare

BLUETONGUE VACCINATION

Thank you for your letter of 13 November about Bluetongue vaccination.

On 1 November, Defra issued a tender to supply between 10 and 20 million doses of Bluetongue vaccine for a vaccine bank. The tender closes on 15 November and an order will be placed as soon as possible after that. We have decided to take this step on the advice of the Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer and the core group of bluetongue stakeholders, in light of the potential benefits that vaccination could provide in managing disease should it re-appear next year.

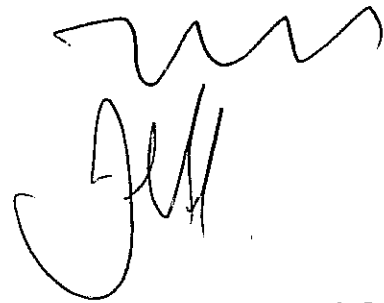
No suitable vaccines are currently available for Bluetongue serotype 8, the strain of Bluetongue in circulation in northern Europe and parts of England. However, we are aware of several companies which have a vaccine in development and we expect that this would be available from next summer.

Production at one of those companies, Merial, was temporarily halted after tests revealed a possible link between the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease and Pirbright, and the use of live virus at Merial was suspended. Following detailed inspections at the site, on 6 November we allowed Merial to use begin using FMD and Bluetongue viruses for vaccine production at the site.

Following further inspections and documentary evidence from Merial, we are now satisfied that they comply with all of the required licence conditions and have in place all the necessary measures to ensure strict biosecurity throughout the site. Significantly, we did not prevent Merial from conducting development of vaccine as their Pirbright site is primarily a production, rather than research, facility; Merial conduct the majority of their research elsewhere.

In the meantime, this tender will provide a commitment to all those companies which will help to support the development and production process. In keeping with the principles set out in the Bluetongue Control Strategy, which was developed in partnership with the farming industry, livestock keepers will be offered the opportunity to purchase vaccine from the bank. We expect that the benefits of vaccination will be of clear economic value to many farmers.

We are also developing a detailed plan with Bluetongue scientific experts, representatives of the farming industry and others as to how a vaccination programme would work. We are also discussing possible approaches to vaccination with the European Commission and other Member States affected by Bluetongue.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Rooker', with a stylized flourish above the name.

JEFF ROOKER