



# ANNUAL REPORT ON THE SINGLE INTEGRATED MULTIANNUAL NATIONAL CONTROL PLAN

## Executive Summary 2019

### 1. OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF CONTROLS

#### • RESULTS OF MAIN PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

**The Directorate has set high level strategic objectives, in particular** to ensure that there is a comprehensive and integrated system of official controls from 'farm to fork' which contributes to protecting public and animal health and safeguarding consumer interests, to promote the welfare of animals and protect the interests of the wider economy environment and society by preventing, controlling and eradicating disease, and to encourage international trade.

The Directorate moved towards achieving these high level strategic objectives **by setting operational objectives**

#### • Strategic:

##### 1) **Reduction of food borne illness by monitoring and reduction the incidence of *Salmonella* sp in Poultry flocks.**

The aim of the Salmonella National Control Plan (SNCP) is to monitor and control zoonotic *Salmonella* infection in *Gallus gallus* flocks (broilers and laying hens) according to provisions laid out in Commission Directive 2160/2003. Over 540 samples were tested .

#### • **Broiler Flocks**

238 flocks of broiler were tested under the SNCP. Two positive broiler flocks were found in 2019 and the Serovar isolated was Monophasic *Salmonella typhimurium*.

- **Layer Flocks**

The prevalence in 2019 of targeted serovars decreased with respect to 2018. The target was achieved in broiler flock (0.45%) and in the laying hens flocks (0%)

## **2) Prevention, Controls and disease eradication**

Laboratory analyses of samples have been carried out according to the exigencies of the monitoring/control and eradication schemes for a number of animal diseases as required by the Animal Health Unit.

**Bovine tuberculosis:** Controls were carried out in all dairy farms through an intradermal skin test. 15,348 tests on bovine animals were performed on dairy farms in the Maltese Islands. All bovine and caprine were tested negative to the intradermal comparative skin test for Tuberculosis, except 6 bovines that resulted positive, and 6 bovines that had a doubtful reaction two consecutive times, for a total of 12 animals. All positive and doubtful reactors were detected in 9 farms. Confirmatory tests resulted all negative.

All dairy farms were considered officially TB free at the end of 2019 and were visited at least once a year, or more, depending on risk assessment.

15,348 tests on bovines were performed on dairy farms in the Maltese Islands.

**Brucella reactors:** No ruminants tested positive to the Brucellosis test in dairy farms. As regards non-dairy farms, all ovine and caprine that gave a positive reaction to the Rose Bengal Test (screening test) resulted negative in the confirmatory test.

During 2019, no cases of **leucosis** were found on dairy farm or on non-dairy farms sampled in the Maltese Islands.

**This strategic target has been met.**

## **Operational**

- 1) To set up official control programmes on establishments requiring approval from the Veterinary Regulation Directorate, based on a risk categorisation of these establishments and with appropriate frequency.**

The risk assessment has been followed up and it reduced burden on all stakeholders involved.

**The administrative objective target has been met.**

- 2) To digitalise all official control programmes on establishments requiring approval from the Veterinary Regulation Directorate. Checklists, risk categorisation and score-**

**point system to be included based on a risk categorisation of these establishments and with appropriate frequency.**

During 2019, training sessions were organised for VRD officers on the use of the digitised checklists for official controls in approved establishments processing meat, and for official controls in other establishments. During this year, the online system was also modified to include risk-based frequency of Official Controls, and further streamlined by resolving certain IT issues. These online forms are also intended as a self-assessment forms for FBOs and to facilitate compliance with legislative requirements, such as the hygiene package regulations, prior to actual inspection. All data input, including verification of self-assessment Forms will be done online. During 2019 the system was introduced to FBOs via seminars using a staggered approach in relation to the Approved activity in question.

Further VRD Sections will be gradually involved in this digitised system.

**The administrative objective target has been met.**

**2) To improve controls at border and in particular on transit and transshipments and to finalise an MOU between different CA on the shared use of the BIP facilities**

The Section is now adopting the System Intertrace for consignments in transshipments. A total of 1,251 consignments for total of 2,220 containers were in transshipments and were checked by the Section.

A Memorandum of Understanding on how to manage the shared use of the BIPs facilities has been signed between Veterinary Regulation Directorate, Plant Health, Customs and Port Health, after several meetings held with the different authorities involved.

**The administrative objective target has been met.**

**3) Reduction of FBO non compliances.**

In general, and from the tables present in the relevant section of the report, the number of enforcement actions have decreased from last year. The enforcement actions were taken on various business types, and reflect the overall increase in official controls on approved establishments.

**4) To verify that Official Controls are consistent and meet the target of 882/2004**

Within the Veterinary Regulation Directorate there is an internal audit system developed and implemented in line with provisions of Article 4(6) of Regulation (EC) No 882/2004. Audits are implemented according to the instructions provided by the Food Safety Commission, a public entity which is legally required to carry out internal audits on the CAs in terms of Regulation (EC) 882 of 2004 on official.

Internal audits were well received, with constructive discussions and positive outcomes observed and reported during the audits. A continuous improvement of the capacity to reach the targets defined in the Annual National Control Plan with a good organization of the activities and a definition of more detailed standard operational procedures was recommended to strengthen the

implementation of such activities. However, during 2019, due to HR problems the internal audits were not carried out, although a Coordinator has been appointed.

**5) To improve further collaboration with other competent authorities and especially with the Environmental Health Directorate.**

Joint inspections has been performed to prevent fraudulent or illegal activities including monitoring of illegally imported/traded food and feed. A number of enforcement actions have been carried out. A specific taskforce has been created and a memorandum of understanding has been drafted with the various competent authorities in order to further improve the controls.

**The objective has been met**

**6) To improve the welfare of the animal on farm.**

The emergency on farm system has worked on 24/7 basis throughout the year providing a very effective tool for the farmers who have managed to reduce distress to animals that had to be put down on farm.

**The objective has been met.**

**7) To monitor and control, in line with EU AW legislation efficacy of slat system**

The Directorate has started monitoring at farm level as well as during ante-mortem podal lesions Official veterinarians have monitored podal lesions at ante mortem as part of the department key performance indicators. This program started in 2012 and become fully operation in 2013; it helps providing information to officials monitoring animal health and welfare at pigs' farm level.

The table below indicates a steady decrease in number of animals affected that continues to 2019.

	2019	2019	2018	2018	2017	2017	2016	2016	2015	2015
	<u>Sows</u> & <u>Boars</u>	<u>Fatteners</u>	<u>Sows</u> & <u>boars</u>	<u>Fatteners</u>	<u>Sows</u> & <u>boars</u>	<u>Fatteners</u>	<u>Sows</u> & <u>Boars</u>	<u>Fatteners</u>	<u>Sows</u> & <u>Boars</u>	<u>Fatteners</u>
Total lesions	11	8	13	9	24	18	19	19	33	18
Number of affected farms					15(1)	12(3)	15	17	12	24
% of farms					<b>15.3</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>23.8</b>

**The objective has been met**

**2. KEY DATA ON CONTROLS**

- SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS IN RELATION TO MAIN PRIORITIES:
  - 1.Reduction of salmonella positivity. The prevalence of *Salmonella Enteritidis* and *Salmonella Typhimurium* has experienced a decrease over the last year. Compared to last

year, in 2019 there was a decrease in the prevalence of flocks infected with other Salmonella serovars going from 37.8% to 24.7%. The target was achieved in broiler flock (0.45%) and in the laying hens flocks (0%)

2 The reoccurrence of bovine **tuberculosis** in the Maltese island, which was first detected in 2017 with a second positivity in 2018, was a matter of concern as the last occurrence is dated back in 2001 and the country had obtained, in 2016, the Tuberculosis official free status. However, through the AHU planned controls on farms, all dairy farms were considered officially TB free at the end of 2019 .

- » MAIN TRENDS IN INTENSITY AND TYPE OF CONTROLS

### **Safety of the Food Chain**

#### **Approved Food establishments**

The increase in number of approvals for the small artisanal/traditional type of cheese producers is a trend that has continued in 2019 with 33 inspections for approval of such establishments carried out. Major emphasis is placed on FBO premises' hygiene & cleanliness, and the provision/use of medication under veterinary supervision

#### **Animal Feed**

During 2019, this section registered a total of 7 feed businesses pursuant to article 9 to EU Regulation No 183/2005 as follows: 3 feed distributors, 3 feed importers, 1 compound feed producer and 1 primary producer of feed.

#### **Vet Med**

In 2019, the section conducted 36 inspections as follows:

<b>Operator category</b>	<b>Number of Inspections</b>
Farms	6
Veterinary Pharmacy	11
Veterinary Wholesalers	13
Others	6

Furthermore, apart from processing applications for registration of medicinals, various seminars were organised by this section as part of the National Strategy and Action Plan Against Antimicrobial Resistance.

In 2019, for the first time, the section provided data on the sales of antimicrobials on the local market to the ESVAC by the European Medicines Agency (EMA). The data relates to the year 2017. The report was published on the EMA website

## **Animal Welfare**

Farm insp.	Reports on animal welfare from the public	Boarding/ Kennel insp.	Zoo or illegal zoo insp.	Pet shops insp.	Sanctuary insp.
38	14	3	31	58	10

Insp= Inspections

## **Animal Health**

<b>Tuberculosis</b>	<b>Brucellosis dairy farm</b>
Bovines	Bovines
15348	14314

All bovines were tested negative to the intradermal comparative skin test for Tuberculosis except 6 bovines that resulted positive, and 6 bovines that had a doubtful reaction two consecutive times, for a total of 12 animals. All positive and doubtful reactors were detected in 9 farms. Confirmatory tests resulted all negative.

### **3. TREND ANALYSIS OF NON-COMPLIANCE**

- STATEMENT OF OVERALL TRENDS IN COMPLIANCE: FBO in the food sector are generally complaint with regards to the application of traceability and structural requirement vis-a-vis regulation 852 and 853/2004
- MAIN TYPES OF NON-COMPLIANCE:  
Based on the reports gathered during 2019 when performing official controls in the food, feed and in the primary production sectors, the most typical non-compliance continues to be failure to comply with adequate maintenance programs.  
Other typical non-compliances include:
  - Inadequate record-keeping, especially HACCP-related.
  - Failure to implement effective cleaning schedules.
  - Incorrect frequencies in relation to microbiological sampling plans.
  - Incorrect parameters in relation to microbiological testing, including also excessive testing for non-statutory parameters (process hygiene criteria and food safety criteria), sometimes concomitant with non-testing of statutory requirements.
- UNDERLYING CAUSES: limited business opportunities and high production costs leave little funds for FBOs to invest in appropriate testing and maintenance programs, especially for microbusinesses.
- In farms and some micro-businesses, problems are related to the very low FBO educational level and little availability of private consultancies offering appropriate training or service.
- Difficulties of using TRACES; rejection of containers was due to failure of physical checks, documental checks and temperature.

### **4. ENFORCEMENT TRENDS: ACTIONS TAKEN IN CASES OF NON-COMPLIANCE**

#### **Red meat section:**

The enforcement actions took the form of Corrective Action Requests (CAR), as per internal SOP Ref No: SOP/SFC/001/2011. With regard to the Marsa Public Abattoir, 1 CAR was issued due to non-compliances found.

An inspection was conducted during 2019 at the Cutting Plant annexed to the Marsa Public Abattoir. 1 CAR was issued due to non-compliances found.

**Approved Establishments section:**

There were 23 enforcement actions, mostly ranging from written reports to Corrective Action Requests (CAR). Non-compliances were mainly related to recording deficiencies; general structural maintenance; and HACCP related records.

**Trade Unit BIP**

With regards to consignments presented for inspection at BIP MTMAR1, during the year 2019, 72 consignments were rejected, mainly transshipments.

No consignment of fresh fish was rejected at BIP MTLUQ4 during the inspections carried out in the year 2019.

**Animal Welfare Section:**

4 court proceedings were initiated and 9 warning letters were sent during 2019

**Animal Identification**

- 5 producers were given a warning letter or a final warning letter and reported to the Paying Agency for further controls and deductions from the respective premia. Three of the producers had resolved the issue by the end of the year. So they have no restriction on their herd.

**5. NATIONAL SYSTEMS OF AUDITS:**

NUMBER OF AUDITS AND SECTORS COVERED:

**The National Veterinary Laboratory** conducted or underwent the following audits:

**External Audits ( NVL)**

Two external audits by the National Accreditation Body (NAB). The outcome was satisfactory.

**Internal Audits ( NVL)**

Three types of internal audits were scheduled: witnessing, Horizontal and Vertical. The witnessing audits were performed on the following test methods: Salmonella, Trichinella, Sulphonamides, Antimicrobial residues and antimicrobial resistance. There were 20 horizontal audits grouped into 4 audits and the vertical audit was on Trichinella.

**6. RESOURCES**

- «SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ALLOCATION OF:
  - i. **FUNDING FOR PROGRAMMES:**

The programmes approved for co-financing for 2019 are:

1. Salmonellosis(zoonotic salmonella)in laying and broiler flocks of *Gallus gallus*
2. AMR- Anti Microbial Resistance
3. Bluetongue
4. TSEs
5. Avian Influenza

**ii. STAFF:**

NVL recruited 3 lab officers; within the Medicine Section, a pharmacist was recruited full time.

In 2019, VRD appointed new 3 support officers, another was promoted to a higher grade (Senior VO), and one was transferred.

## **7. ACTIONS TAKEN TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE OF CONTROL AUTHORITIES**

- TRAINING

- 1) VRD focused on a series of trainings aimed at disseminating information after a BTSF course was attended. In total, there was participation, by VRD officers, in 25 training courses during 2019. These included, but were not limited to, BTSF courses.
- 2) Simulation exercise on the contamination of milk and feed with an Aflatoxin.
- 3) Re-training of TRACES sytem use.
- 4) In line with ISO17025 the National Veterinary Laboratory carried out the following:
  - In-house training courses on general procedures for new staff
  - Specialised technical training organised with two EURLs on trichinella and brucella testing
  - Another tailored-training session was organised by the EURL for antibiotics at Fougères-France for two NVL officers.
  - External training : this training included, among others, Better Training for Safer Food (BTSF) training sessions of the European Commission, monthly European Commission/Council meetings, Standing Committees, Working Groups/Parties, Workshops, as well as trainings organised by the OIE, meetings and conferences organised by other entities such as the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and DG SANCO Health and Consumers.



5. The Trade section has participated actively to the experts meetings and the SCOPAFF and Expert meeting on Import Controls held in Brussels through all year 2019.

## **8· ACTIONS TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF FOOD BUSINESS OPERATORS**

### TRAINING PROGRAMMES:

Training courses were organised in conjunction with the Business Inspectorate Unit with the OPM for Food Business Operators prior to the digitisation of their business category. The training was intended to introduce the online 'self-assessment' checklists, which are the same used by the OVs and support staff during Official Controls. This training may be repeated each time a particular food category is ready to go online.