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**Strict embargo till 18.00hrs**

165/15 23 September 2015

**MINISTERS COVENEY and O’NEILL ANNOUNCE MAJOR CHANGES TO BRUCELLOSIS CONTROLS - FARMERS TO BENEFIT FURTHER FROM SUCCESSFUL ERADICATION OF BRUCELLOSIS**

The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Mr Simon Coveney TD, and the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland, Ms Michelle O’Neill today jointly announced the ending of pre-movement Brucellosis testing on both sides of the Border with effect from 28 September.

Minister Coveney, speaking at a reception at the National Ploughing Championships in Ratheniska, said that, following the effective eradication of Brucellosis on the island, they had decided to remove the legislative requirement for pre-movement testing for Brucellosis. In this regard, the Minister said that, “*following the progressive and incremental removal of compulsory controls over the last number of years, the most recent of which was the ending of Annual Round testing from the beginning of 2015, the cessation of compulsory pre-movement testing means that routine on-farm brucellosis testing will no longer be required in the State. This, he said, is a major landmark in the history of disease eradication in Ireland and will result in significant savings for livestock farmers in testing costs, estimated at €6m per annum”*.

Commenting on the changes, Minister Coveney stated *“My Department has pursued a cautious approach to the phasing out of Brucellosis testing since we achieved Officially Brucellosis Free status in 2009 in order to comply with EU legislation but also in view of the fact that the disease continued to be present in Northern Ireland. However, against a background where there has been no Brucellosis outbreak in the national herd since 2006 and none in Northern Ireland since 2012, it is now appropriate to end all routine compulsory on-farm testing in this part of the island”*.

The Minister stated that, notwithstanding the decision to end compulsory routine on-farm testing, the disease will continue to be compulsorily notifiable and the Department will continue with appropriate monitoring measures for Brucellosis, such as testing culled cows at slaughter plants, aborted foetuses sent to regional veterinary Laboratories and post-abortion blood samples at no cost to farmers as part of its commitment to animal health surveillance in support of the livestock industry. In this context, Minister Coveney said that, in order to ensure the early detection of any outbreak of this disease, farmers should continue to report all abortions in cattle and to submit aborted fetuses, if available, for testing to the Department’s Regional Veterinary Laboratory and/or to have the animal the animal that aborted sampled for Brucellosis as soon as possible by their Veterinary Practitioner.

Minister Coveney went on to say *“I warmly welcome the fact that we can now bring to an end the legislative requirement for routine on-farm testing for Brucellosis. This is a major boost for Irish farmers and is the product of efforts put in jointly by my Department, the veterinary profession and by the farming community over many years in addressing this highly contagious and costly disease.*  *I am very pleased that significant savings in testing costs, amounting to an estimated €6m in a full year, will accrue to livestock farmers as a result of these changes”.*

Minister Coveney said that he was delighted that Northern Ireland, having been free from Brucellosis for over 3 years, has been granted officially Brucellosis free status and is also moving to scale down Brucellosis testing, including the discontinuation of pre-movement testing. The Minister said: *“This is significant in the context of North/South cooperation on animal health issues and was a major factor in his decision to discontinue pre-movement testing here”.*

Commenting on these developments in Brucellosis, Minister O’Neill said: *“I recognise Minister Coveney’s efforts in having completed their five year period of statutory testing following their achievement of OBF status, the south have been able to end most of their routine surveillance testing.  Now that the north has also achieved OBF status, it is pleasing that we can both move in tandem to remove pre-movement testing.  I look forward to continuing co-operation between our two regions as we continue to fight brucellosis and other animal health issues*.”

Concluding his remarks, Minister Coveney said *“It is vital that we identify and prevent any outbreak of this disease and I would ask farmers to continue to be vigilant in sourcing cattle from reputable outlets. Furthermore, notwithstanding the removal of the legislative requirement to test, famers should ensure that they have appropriate and proportionate bio-security arrangements in place with regard to animals introduced into their herds – to protect the health of their own herd and indeed that of their neighbours from infectious and contagious disease.”*

**ENDS**