TRADE NOTICE

Importation of Ruminant Animals (cattle, sheep and goats) from Bluetongue Restricted Zones

Bluetongue (BT) is an exotic and notifiable disease of cattle, sheep, goats and other ruminants. It is mainly spread through midges which are known as vectors, and it exists in a number of different strains (serotypes). Outbreaks of the disease have continued to occur regularly in EU member states in recent years, resulting in the implementation of movement restrictions, application of control zones, and other measures in order to contain the disease and prevent any spread within the community.

European Community Bluetongue rules regulate certain aspects of the control and movement of ruminant animals. Although the legislation imposes an exit ban from countries partially or completely within restricted zones, there are exemptions from this which provide for movement from or through such countries. All ruminant animals that have originated from or transited through a Bluetongue affected country and are imported into Ireland, must be sampled for Bluetongue. Currently (as of 17 May 2017), affected countries include France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Croatia, Malta, Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Austria, Slovenia, and Slovakia. A map showing the latest restricted zones is available at

http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/diseases/controlmeasures/bluetongue_en.htm

The Bluetongue movement rules are summarised as follows:

1. **Vaccinated Animals**
   May be imported provided they have immunity to the bluetongue serotypes present (or likely to be present) in the area of origin through vaccination. In particular, vaccinated animals must have been vaccinated in accordance with at least one of the following provisions;
   a. Vaccinated more than 60 days before the date of movement
   b. Vaccinated (inactivated vaccine) before at least the number of days necessary for the onset of immunity protection set down in the vaccine technical specifications, and then subjected to a virus test with negative results carried out at least 14 days after the onset of immunity protection
   c. Previously vaccinated and revaccinated (inactivated vaccine) within the immunity period of time guaranteed in the vaccine technical specifications
2. **Naturally immune Animals**
   May be imported provided they have immunity through natural exposure as detailed in points 6 and 7 of Annex III of Commission Regulation 1266/2007. These animals must have been subjected to either;
   a. Two Bluetongue antibody tests with positive results, the first carried out between 60 and 360 days prior to movement and the second repeated again not earlier than 7 days prior to date of movement or
   b. One Bluetongue antibody tests with positive results carried out at least 30 days prior to the date of movement and a virus test with negative result carried out at least 7 days prior to the date of movement

3. **Pregnant Animals**
   If such animals are being imported from a restricted zone for Bluetongue virus serotype 8, they must have immunity to Bluetongue by vaccination or natural exposure through compliance with points 1 or 2 above before insemination or mating.
4. **Animals other than above categories**
   Some animals which have either been kept in Bluetongue vector-protected establishments, or which are coming from a Bluetongue seasonally-free zone and dispatched during the seasonally vector-free period, may be imported subject to these and additional testing and time requirements. In practice, this option is very difficult to comply with.
5. **Treatment of animals and transport**
   Any animals being imported and the means of transport must be treated with authorised insecticides and/or insect repellents prior to leaving the Restricted Zones. Specific rules in relation to the application of authorised insecticides to animals and means of transport in the case of animals transiting Restricted Zones are provided for in Article 9 of Commission Regulation 1266/2007.

However, it is strongly recommended that ruminant animals are not imported from Bluetongue Restricted Zones unless absolutely necessary.

In the event that ruminant animals are imported, the following Bluetongue risk mitigation measures should be implemented by importers:

- Only import animals from reputable sources
- Do not buy or accept animals which have been recently imported without carefully checking their origin
- Ensure the animals are vaccinated against Bluetongue in line with the vaccination option described at point 1- Vaccinated animals, above)
- Seek additional assurances to ensure that animals are not infected with Bluetongue prior to departure, such as a recent negative PCR* test for BT carried out in an accredited laboratory

At farm of destination:

Following importation, a Department vet will call to the farm of destination to take blood samples from all the imported animals for Bluetongue testing. This visit will normally take place within one week of arrival.
At the farm of destination during periods of the year when midges are active (late April to early December), and pending post-import test results:
a) Isolate and house all imported animals
b) re-treat all susceptible species imports with an approved insecticide (see- http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/bluetongue/)

in accordance with manufacturers' instructions to ensure two (2) months protection for cattle or one (1) month for sheep and goats. (Treatment may be discontinued if post-importation test results are negative).
c) Use insect repellents or insecticide strategically around animal housing to discourage entry of midges.
d) Remove potential midge breeding sites such as dung from areas around animal housing at frequent intervals (at least twice weekly).

Animal Health and Welfare Division
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*__PCR__ or p__olymerase chain reaction__ is a technique used in molecular biology to detect virus genome in this case. A test for BT is usually carried out on blood. A positive PCR test essentially means that the virus is present in the sample tested.