Working in partnership

Acknowledging roles and responsibilities

Reflecting costs and benefits

Applying the principle that ‘Prevention is better than cure’

National Farmed Animal Health Strategy 2017 - 2022

A framework for collective action by stakeholders
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Foreword

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Michael Creed TD

It gives me great pleasure to launch the National Farmed Animal Health Strategy. I see this as a very important initiative. Livestock production is at the heart of our agri-food industry and contributes hugely to the development of our Regions. Sustained optimal animal health is critical to the future profitability and sustainability of our farming and processing industries, and to the protection of public health and of the environment.

In recent years we have made excellent progress. We have achieved country free status in respect of Brucellosis and Aujeszky’s disease. BSE is well controlled. The incidence of TB has fallen dramatically and it is our objective to eradicate the disease by 2030. Good work has also been done under the auspices of Animal Health Ireland, with substantial progress being made on BVD and Somatic Cell Counts. We are embarking on a new Johne’s Disease Programme in order that we can further enhance our competitive advantage in livestock production.

This progress notwithstanding, we are subject to additional threats, such as the appearance of Schmallenberg virus and the resurgence of Bluetongue and Avian Influenza viruses across Europe in the very recent past. Maintaining optimal farmed animal health warrants strategic, coordinated action that involves all stakeholders working in partnership. In order to have the best possible Strategy for animal health, I initiated a consultation process with stakeholders. This was a very useful exercise, and the many stakeholders who responded provided their endorsement to the initiative. Their submissions will be posted to the Department’s website along with the Strategy document itself.

The strategy is underpinned by four main principles:

- We must work in partnership to improve animal health standards.
- The roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders must be clear.
- The principle of ‘prevention is better than cure’ must be consistently applied.
- Finally, animal health programmes will have clear objectives, and will be sustainably and appropriately funded.

I wish to acknowledge the important contribution being made by farmers through the disease levies and to the cost of testing cattle as part of the Bovine Tuberculosis and BVD Eradication Programmes. The State also contributes significantly to these eradication efforts. One of the objectives of the new Strategy is to set the appropriate level of State support for animal health which reflects the balance between the public and private goods involved.

My Department is working hard to prepare for Brexit and its potential trade implications for the agri-food and fisheries sectors. This Strategy will play a vital part in our ongoing efforts to enhance Ireland’s reputation for high standards of animal health and to expand our markets abroad. I believe the Strategy provides a road map for working in partnership with all stakeholders in the agri-food industry and I look forward to driving the Strategy forward.
Chapter I
Chapter I

This Chapter sets out the importance of the agri-industry in the Irish economy, the background to the proposal and the central role of farmed animal health.

1. Introduction

A. Agri-industry in the context of the national economy

The agri-food and marine sector plays a very significant role in national economic development, contributing around €26bn to the national economy, generating 12.3% of merchandise exports and, with an estimated 175,000 people employed in the sector, providing 8.8% of national employment levels. It gives a particularly strong development and employment stimulus in rural and coastal areas, where employment alternatives can be limited.

Around 1,200 food and drinks firms countrywide export to 180 countries around the world. Food & Beverage exports increased to a record value €11.15 billion in 2016, meaning they have grown by over 40% since 2010. The big performers were dairy/ingredients, (€3.4bn), meat/livestock (€3.7bn), prepared foods (€1.9bn) and beverages (€1.4bn).

Agri-food exports are outperforming manufacturing exports overall, and continue to play a major role in economic recovery. In addition, there is a multiplier effect to farm payments, calculated at 1.73, that exceeds all other manufacturing sectors in Ireland and demonstrates that such payments increase income and consumption greater than the amount of the initial payment.

Furthermore, the agri-food sector sources 74% of raw materials and services from Irish suppliers, compared to 40% for all manufacturing concerns, and the low import dependence and the low level of profit repatriation in the industry means that the net in-flow of funds to the Irish economy from these exports is much higher than that from other sectors. So, every €100 from the exports from the bio-sector (agriculture, forestry, fisheries, food and drink industries) contributes around €52 to GNP while the ‘non bio-sector’ equivalent contributes around €19.

As well as the contribution of the animal-based food production sector, Ireland also has an international reputation for the production of high quality animals for purposes other than food, in particular equines. Ireland is the largest producer of thoroughbred foals in Europe and the fourth largest in the world. It also has a significant sport horse industry. Both of these contribute to jobs, local economies and export earnings.

Ireland is a globally recognised trading nation, and has consistently provided high quality meat, milk and meat and milk products to countries worldwide. Irish agri-food exports to emerging markets have grown substantially in recent years. China, for example, is now the third largest destination for Irish agri-food exports, after the European Union countries and the USA. The international outlook for food availability and prices over the long term is underpinned by the need for global food production to increase by 60% to 70% to meet expected population demands by 2050. There is increasing pressure for land, water and energy, which creates a significant challenge for the world’s producers.

The agri-food and marine sectors are significant contributors to the national economy, with great potential to expand and grow. A reputation for high standards of animal health is a critical part of this dynamic.
B. Significance of farmed animal production in Ireland

Ireland’s primary agricultural output, on which our agri-food industry is founded, is 80% animal based. Whilst Ireland has significant natural advantages with regard to climate and environment, in order to sustain, develop and enhance animal-based production, and to maintain a competitive position in an ever-changing international market place, we must focus our attention on the four main pillars or determinants of output level:

- Breeding/genetics
- Nutrition
- Operator husbandry and management skills
- Animal health

Accepting the status quo in respect of these four ‘pillars’ will not be sufficient to sustain Ireland’s position as a leading producer of high quality animals and animal based product.

Therefore the health status of Ireland’s 6.7 million cattle, 4.6 million sheep, 1.5 million pigs, 10 million poultry, 250,000 horses, and various species of farmed shellfish and finfish in 250 aquaculture operations, is vital to the agricultural and agri-food sectors and in turn, the generation of employment – direct and indirect - across the country, and the export earning capability of the State.

C. Agriculture as a risky business

Since earliest times, when humankind first took actions to farm and to ‘keep’ animals – initially for work and for personal food sustenance reasons and latterly as a resource which could be used for barter and trade - it was evident that farming was a risky business – and in particular, the farming of animals. At its simplest level, the farming business is particularly exposed to the vagaries of the weather, often with unexpected events of heat, cold, floods, droughts, snow etc. having a direct impact on farm output. Another well recognised inherent risk is price volatility – resulting from free market forces of supply and demand, but also often associated with man-made trade barriers for national or political self-interests. With the advancement of society and the development of new processes and new technologies, agriculture production can be impacted on (both negatively and indeed positively) through technological, social or environmental changes.

Animal production systems are also particularly exposed to contagious animal disease risks – ranging from chronic endemic diseases that impose consistent relatively low level (though often cumulatively significant) production losses, to major epizootics which have catastrophic consequences at individual farm, local area or indeed national or international level. Sub-optimal animal health – whether associated with dramatic clinical disease or undiagnosed sub-clinical disease - destroys value.

2. Background

Ireland’s location and climate has meant that historically we have been free from many of the major disease epizootics of the world. We have maintained control and risk management systems over the years to address many animal disease risks and have responded very effectively and successfully to many challenges. Additionally, husbandry systems in Ireland, which reflect many natural advantages as a result of climate, water and air quality, are generally supportive of maintaining healthy animals.

Notwithstanding the many advantages that Ireland has in the rearing of livestock and its reputation for relatively high standards of animal health, there is no room for complacency. Control tools such as compulsory quarantine which were previously available to us are no longer routinely available – reflecting newer global scientifically guided risk-based trade rules - which also provide export trade advantages and opportunities.
Animal disease – be it clinical or sub-clinical – is a key influencer of on-farm productivity and indeed processor efficiency. Whilst acknowledging these local impacts, when one takes into account the development plans outlined in Food Wise 2025 - with its focus on increasing exports into a competitive global marketplace - animal health at a national level is a particular aspect of farm animal production that requires additional attention.

A. ‘Prevention is better than cure’

Poor animal health gives rise to economic losses for the farmer, the processor and the country. Much focus in the past has been on treating animals that have poor health or are diseased. In such situations, the economic output from the animal is already reduced due to ill health before one takes into account the cost of treatment and the period of recuperation necessary before an animal’s output recovers. In many cases, an animal’s long-term output potential is reduced in absolute terms, whilst in other cases the animal does not recover at all and dies.

The principle ‘Prevention is better than Cure’ seeks to change the focus from one of post-event management and treatment of disease, to one that promotes animal health as a driver of optimised production and improved margins for producers that can provide the best quality food for consumers. Managing disease in the individual or the national herd has traditionally been seen as a ‘cost centre’ or necessary/inevitable input to production that adds cost and thus should be reduced as much as possible. Animal health management by contrast is to be seen as a positive input investment that will fine-tune and optimise the efficiency of the animal as a producer of food and maximise the returns from the expenditure invested in other farm inputs such as feed, genetics, etc.

Whilst it is true that preventive veterinary medicine has advanced and developed over the years – such as with the use of anthelmintics and vaccines and the development of herd health plans in some sectors/industries – it has often been approached in a piece-meal or individualistic way and generally without a strategic focus.

Prevention, rather than cure is additionally of particular significance beyond the farm gate - in the context of two major global societal issues – climate change and the worsening situation with regard to antimicrobial resistance. Healthy animals are more productive and contribute more by way of food outputs per unit – thus per unit output of food, they have less environmental impact than animals whose health is compromised in any way. Furthermore, healthy animals do not need treatment with antibiotics; reduced use of antibiotics is a major strategy in reducing the development of AMR.

Animal Health Strategy - context

✓ Prevention is better than cure
✓ ‘One Health’ - animal, environment and human health
✓ Animal welfare
✓ All-island animal health strategy
✓ Economic prosperity
✓ Sustainable agriculture
2009 saw the innovative development, launch and support of Animal Health Ireland as a national resource, supported by both private and public funding, with the objective of addressing the negative impacts of traditionally 'non-regulated' animal diseases – with initiatives focused on improved husbandry practices, bio-security and control/eradication programmes – both at an individual farm level, but also at a sectoral or national level where appropriate.

B. Animal health in the context of ‘One Health’

The ‘One Health’ concept, endorsed by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and the World Health Organisation (WHO), in 2008 as a joint strategic framework in response to the evolving risk of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, recognises that the health of humans is intrinsically connected to the health of animals and to the environment. More than 60% of human infectious diseases worldwide are caused by pathogens of zoonotic nature, transmitted to man by domestic or wild animals, either through direct contact, the environment (including through living vectors) or food. There are historically well-recognised examples, such as tuberculosis, brucellosis and rabies and a growing number of more recent examples, such as Avian Influenza, West Nile Fever, Ebola, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). This evolution of new and re-emerging pathogens represents a growing global threat to human and animal health, including food safety and indeed food security. Therefore, preventing diseases at their animal source is crucial to protecting human health.

Farms are ‘food producing premises’ and therefore farmers must be sensitive to the potential risks – in particular biological and chemical risks – that can arise on their premises and which may impact on the safety of the food produced from their animals. Whilst many risks are well known and can be mitigated, particular care should be taken when introducing new materials or technologies to the farm environment to ensure that there is no unintended negative impact on the downstream food supply chain.

Beyond the matter of food safety, animal-based foods also contribute to human health by playing a significant role in providing for the nutritional needs of an expanding global population. Taking into account the varying nutritional needs at different life stages and with increasing life expectancy, consistent high quality milk and meat products have tremendous potential to be used as sources of food ingredients that can be tailored to meet the nutritional needs at different life stages of the human population. Sub-optimal animal health can impact on food quality and consistency.

Furthermore, within this ‘One Health’ framework, the matter of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is now universally accepted to be a major strategic global public health risk. Whilst animal health has not yet been significantly negatively impacted on by a lack of effective antibiotics arising from AMR development, the relevance for the farming and veterinary communities and the agri-industry is that animals and humans share the same environment, are exposed to the same general families of bacteria and are essentially treated with the same suite of antibiotics. Whilst the extent that the use of antibiotics in farm production systems directly contributes to the overall AMR problem is subject to debate, it is clear that resistance does develop in bacteria found in animals and in farm environments and that this resistance can transmit to humans directly through contact, through the shared environment and also through food products. Indeed, non-disease causing bacteria can develop resistance and pass this resistance on to disease causing bacteria.

It is important to note that many of the inspections and controls operated by or on behalf of the State within the agri-industry by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine have, as their primary goal, the protection of human health. These controls, with their focus on zoonotic agents and all potential risks within the food chain serve to reduce the risk to the human population. While there may be a perception that expenditure incurred and controls undertaken by DAFM are
simply to oversee and control animal production systems, in fact quite a number are focused on the ‘public good’ arising from their integral part of the Irish public health system. In line with the principle ‘prevention is better than cure’, it is important that this is more clearly recognised and specifically taken into account in decision-making regarding investment in the public health systems in Ireland.

Notwithstanding the importance of the above point, in the context of food safety, food business operators (FBOs) have primary responsibility to ensure that any food they place on the market is wholesome and safe. FBOs – including farmers - therefore have an undeniable responsibility to take actions necessary to minimise known risks to public health.

C. Animal health as a key contributor to animal welfare

Whilst this strategy initiative is focused directly on the health of farmed animals, it should be acknowledged that the health of an animal is a key element in ensuring its welfare, which is a significant societal concern.

D. All-island animal health and welfare strategy

The island of Ireland presents a distinct epidemiological entity. Farming on both parts of the island is subject to similar challenges given the similarity of production systems and of environmental and climatic conditions.

The All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy, commissioned by the North South Ministerial Council in 2001, provides a framework for the development of closer cooperation on the improvement of animal health on both sides of the border, including joint strategies with regard to animal health, animal disease control, exotic disease contingency preparedness and trade certification issues.

Currently trade between the two jurisdictions is governed by EU rules on the movement of animals within the EU. Trade between Britain and Northern Ireland is governed by internal UK rules which, in some cases, differ from EU rules. The clear veterinary view in Ireland and the UK is that it makes sense to have distinct animal health strategies on the island of Great Britain (GB) and on the island of Ireland. The Strategy also recognises the close social and economic relationships which exist and the extensive trade arrangements within the island and also between the two islands.

The two jurisdictions have adopted a strategic approach to animal health threats on the island of Ireland. A cornerstone of this strategy has been that all animals and animal products entering the island of Ireland are subject to compliance with the same EU intra-community rules. In developing policies in the respective jurisdictions, there has been a commitment to ensure that the policies pursued by both administrations are analogous and contemporaneous to the greatest extent possible.

DAFM is giving careful consideration to the impact of the UK exit from the EU including in relation to the issues of trade and certification of animals and animal products between the two parts of the island. However, work on the shared objective of optimising animal health policies and developing and cooperating on animal health and disease control matters on the island should continue for the benefit of people and industry in both jurisdictions.

E. The environment

Animals with sub-optimal health are inefficient from a greenhouse gas perspective and may contribute to the increased release of pathogens into the environment; they may also contribute to the increase of antimicrobial resistance. Thus, improved animal health makes a positive contribution to the environment. The environmental impacts of farmed animal production represent an important societal concern and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the sector.
3. Farmed animal health – a strategic imperative

Farmed animal health therefore has a central and critical role in the Irish agri-industry, the economy and society in general.

Firstly, sub-optimal animal health has an adverse impact at individual farm level, manifested primarily through clinical and sub-clinical disease involving endemic and sometimes exotic diseases, adding directly and indirectly to cost of production. Animal health and performance can also be adversely affected by poor nutrition, poor animal welfare standards and by ‘contaminant’ substances in the diet or in the environment. All of these factors have an impact beyond the farm gate - impacting at processor level due to both a quantitative and a qualitative inconsistency in supply. Cumulatively, this has negative consequences for processor profitability, international trade and domestic employment.

Additionally many animal infections or diseases have zoonotic potential – either by direct contact, through the food chain or through environmental contamination. They are thus associated with public health concerns, with resultant costs associated with human illness, including the direct cost of treatment and indirect costs such as those associated with loss of work outputs due to illness and absence from work.

Recognising the evolving societal learning and attitude to animal welfare, it is important to recall the significance of animal health as one of the major influencers on the welfare of animals. Many of the major multinational food companies now seek to source animal-based foods from welfare friendly production systems, emphasising the importance of good animal health status and systems as key elements in ensuring societal support and indeed for economic reasons.

In recent years it has become clear that animal-based production has a central and significant part to play in the environmental challenge relating to climate change, global warming and the ‘green-house gas effect’. Ruminant animals in particular produce very significant volumes of gases. In comparison with many of our international competitors, emissions from animal-based production make up a disproportionate percentage of green-house gases produced within Ireland. With the identified need to reduce such emissions on a global scale, and reduction targets being assigned to individual countries, the sub-optimal production levels consequent to animal disease is something that cannot be ‘carried’ into the future. In fact improved animal health must be a significant factor in Ireland’s response to reduction targets.

Farmed animal health therefore merits being considered as an issue of strategic national interest which warrants a purposeful strategic response involving the whole of industry and society working collaboratively. Such a strategic approach would provide a framework that will serve to:

- outline national priorities in relation to animal health in the context of the socio-economic development of Irish society, (whilst recognising at the same time our membership of the European Union, with associated commitments and supports/benefits);
- identify the appropriate policies leading to actions/activities necessary to give effect to these policies;
- put in place implementation mechanisms, taking into account specific ‘public good’ and ‘private good’ interests, and appropriate cost and responsibility sharing mechanisms, which reflect actual benefits and costs;
- assign responsibilities and hold stakeholders to account for delivering on the necessary actions to deliver on the agreed goals and priorities.
Chapter II
Chapter II

This Chapter covers the proposal and the issues of Scope, Vision and Strategic Outcomes.

4. Proposal

Whilst much good work has been done in the past, animal health initiatives have not always been taken in the most strategic, cohesive or coordinated way and initiatives/responses in many instances have been reactive.

The creation of a national strategy will guide and provide a framework for the development and implementation of policies and programmes towards making a lasting and continuous improvement in the health of farmed animals in Ireland. This will provide direct benefit to farmers, industry and the economy, and protect society, the economy, and the environment from the negative impacts of animal diseases.

The process of developing such a strategy is not a simple task. The value-chain associated with animal-based production systems contains many actors - some major, some minor – each seeking margin, adding/taking value and increasing/reducing risks. It is subject to significant externalities and along the value-chain one can identify a mixture of private and public ‘good’ and indeed significant possibilities for public ‘bad’.

The mission of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is

“Serving the government and people of Ireland by leading, developing and regulating the agri-food sector, protecting public health and optimising social, economic and environmental benefits”

and one of the key objectives of the Department is to

“Maintain existing standards, and target improvements in animal and plant health, to facilitate increases in farm level productivity”

The Department, recognising the need for leadership to initiate this process and the ‘public good’ associated with bringing various stakeholders together to coordinate collective action for the benefit of all, therefore commits to provide the leadership necessary to draft, develop and progress this initiative.

1 DAFM Statement of Strategy 2016-9
2 As above
5. Scope

The scope of this strategy extends to all animals kept by man in a farmed environment as part of an economic activity. This includes animals farmed - terrestrial or aquatic - as part of the food production value chain (from breeding to production to finishing), for the breeding and production for fur, for the breeding and production of animals for competition or leisure purposes, the breeding of companion and ‘pet’ animals as an economic activity, animals kept for competition or exhibition and animals farmed for game. The scope of the strategy also extends to horses kept for leisure purposes. The strategy recognises that in a small number of cases, people keep traditionally farmed species as pets or as a hobby which may not be an economic activity - such animals however are generally subject to the same animal health risks and the same legislative framework as farmed animals generally and are covered in the scope of the strategy.

The scope does not generally extend to animals in the wild, or ‘pet’ animals kept within peoples’ dwellings/homes. The strategy recognises however that, in respect of such animals, interventions occasionally may be necessary where animals are reservoirs or vectors of disease agents that either (i) pose a serious risk to public health (an example being rabies), or (ii) are shared with farmed animals and where it is necessary to intervene to mitigate a serious animal health risk to farmed animals (such as foot and mouth disease).

The primary focus of the strategy is the impact on animal health and public health arising from biological threats, especially those that are of a contagious nature where the potential impact is beyond an individual farm location. Consideration is also given to physical and chemical threats that may arise in the ordinary course of farming activity that may have a significant local or wider impact – in this context the safety of the farm environment from a food safety perspective is important. Animal feed also carries risks for animal or human health (e.g. swill to guard against exotic diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease, meat and bone meal to guard against BSE, heat treatment of poultry feed to guard against Salmonella, etc). The scope of the strategy thus extends to seeking to ensure the integrity of the feed supply chain to protect animal and human health.

6. Vision

A prerequisite for the development of a strategy is the projection of a vision for the future. This vision will guide the formulation of a number of high level strategic outcomes which are designed to bring about a desired high level objective.

In formulating a national vision for farmed animal health, it is important that this reflects the overall national interest – to include the narrower specific industry sectors and broader societal interests, needs and concerns.

The vision for the National Farmed Animal Health Strategy Framework for Ireland is:

**Improved standards of farmed animal health contributing to a vibrant progressive and sustainable farming and agri-industry and to Irish society in respect of public health, animal welfare, the environment and the economy**
This vision encapsulates a situation where:

1. Ireland’s national farmed animal health status and associated surveillance and control systems are such that we can trade our animals and animal products into markets in all corners of the world.
2. sub-optimal animal health - a significant impediment to farm and processor productivity – is no longer an accepted ‘norm’.
3. farmed animal health standards reflect contemporary scientific knowledge and meet societal expectations.
4. consumers and corporate customers value the confidence they have in the safety and wholesomeness of food and ingredients produced in Ireland – built on transparency, traceability, surveillance, contingency responses, animal health programmes and controls.
5. consumers and corporate customers view Irish farmed animal production systems as among the best in the world.
6. exotic disease risks are foreseen and mitigated and all disease emergencies are dealt with swiftly and effectively.
7. the costs of livestock health programmes and disease response efforts are appropriately balanced between industry stakeholders and the taxpayer.
8. delivery of agreed animal health programmes are supported through the proactive leadership of all stakeholders.
9. animal health standards are ensured through consistent cost effective control and enforcement strategies.

7. Strategic outcomes

To achieve this vision, five high-level Strategic Outcomes have been identified as being the most significant outcomes. The clear focus on achieving these outcomes sets the context and framework within which the national farmed animal health strategy will be formulated. These are:

I. Increased farm-level productivity, delivered in a sustainable way

Farming is a private business which impacts positively on the broader rural economy and society. If these benefits are to be maintained, it is important that farming is seen and accepted to be a profitable and sustainable way of life.

II. Improved processor outcomes

Processors transform and add value to the primary agricultural outputs, providing a market return to the farmer suppliers, providing employment in the rural economy, generating significant export earnings, and providing an acceptable return to investors. All these desirable outcomes depend on a consistent supply of high quality, safe products produced through sustainable processes.

III. Improved market access

As Ireland’s farm animal production capacity far exceeds its domestic demand, it is critical that access to increasingly competitive international markets is maintained and expanded to support the development of the agri-industry and the economy.
IV. Improved capacity to protect public health

Society expects that public health is not compromised by animal health events. In particular, the market place expects and demands safe food. Animal health and animal-based food production and associated control systems which mitigate risk and ensure the timely and effective responsiveness to animal health and food safety incidents must continue to evolve - to ensure that Ireland continues to protect its citizens and customers abroad from exotic zoonotic disease or food contaminant incidents and to enjoy the reputation as a consistently dependable source of high quality safe foods. It is therefore critically important that livestock farmers embrace their role as food businesses.

V. Improved capability to anticipate threats, take proportionate actions to mitigate risk and improved response capacity

Agriculture and in particular animal-based production is a risky business, subject to many threats and uncertainties. On the other hand, consumers expect a consistent supply of ‘risk-free’ products. With the ever-increasing globalisation of trade and international travel, increased attention and investment is needed across all levels of the industry with regard to risk identification, mitigation and communication strategies.

Animal Health Strategy - Strategic Outcomes

- Increased farm-level productivity delivered in a sustainable way
- Improved processor outcomes
- Improved market access
- Improved capacity to protect public health
- Improved capability to anticipate threats, take proportionate actions to mitigate risks and improved response capability
Chapter III
Chapter III

8. Key enabling principles

Four key principles are identified as being critical in order to provide a robust and strong platform which will underpin all efforts to deliver these high level strategic outcomes. These key enabling principles, which are dealt with in more detail below, are:

- Working in partnership
- Acknowledging Roles and Responsibilities
- Reflecting Costs and Benefits
- Prevention is Better than Cure

A. Working in partnership

Whilst farmers have primary responsibility for the health of farmed animals, it is acknowledged that there are factors, outside the direct control of individual animal owners, that can impact on and influence animal health on farms. To optimise outcomes for farmers generally, for the individual sectors, for the agri-business industry and for society, there is an absolute need for all players to work in partnership towards delivering an overall outcome that best serves Ireland, from a social, environmental and economic perspective.

For ‘working in partnership’ to be effective, there are two critical elements. Firstly, it requires a mechanism or process where the views and contributions of all relevant stakeholders along the production/supply chain are taken into consideration – to support collaboration and coordination. Secondly, it requires clarity in respect of the roles of each stakeholder and fulsome acceptance by all of the responsibilities associated with such roles. This responsibility requires all those involved to demonstrate clear commitment to the process and to take a visible leadership role in promoting and advancing the policies or initiatives that arise from such engagement.

Relevant considerations

- Good communication, including communication of risk, and strong relationships between Government, all stakeholders and customers, means that information and ideas are shared, objectives, activities and priorities are agreed and reviewed in partnership.
- Once animal health controls or programmes reach beyond the farm gate, requiring collective actions on the part of many individuals, with varying funding mechanisms, scheduling and timing complexities, diverse stakeholder expectations and requiring quality control systems, those assigned responsibility for managing such complex environments benefit from being equipped with specialised programme/project management skills in order to deliver the expected outputs and outcomes in a way that is transparent to all partners and in line with specific objectives.
There are already a number of central partnership type ‘standing’ arrangements in place, where the Department has initiated processes that provide for on-going interaction and dialogue involving a range of salient stakeholders representing different perspectives in particular areas/sectors in the area of animal health and welfare.

- Animal Health Ireland (AHI) is a public-private partnership involving a multitude of stakeholders involved in livestock and associated food production supply chains, whose objective is to address the inefficiencies associated with endemic diseases on Irish farms. It has its own organisational structure and processes, which involve stakeholders directly in decision-making with regard to policy direction, prioritisation, strategy choices and operational oversight.

- The Equine Liaison Group, chaired by the Department, provides a forum for discussion and an exchange of views with regard to equine health and related matters. This operates on an all-island basis.

- In an international context, the Department and three approved equine bodies work closely together to shape and deliver the Tripartite Agreement between France, Ireland and the United Kingdom, which facilitates simpler movement rules between the three countries for specific horse groupings, whilst providing the necessary health guarantees.

- An Inter-Departmental Consultative Committee on Antimicrobial Resistance, with industry stakeholder representatives, set up in partnership with the Department of Health, provides a forum to discuss and influence policies and strategies to address this global societal risk.

- The inclusion of certain animal health measures in the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020, which provides for the coming together of farmers with professional advisors, is a ‘vehicle’ for providing advice on certain animal health matters.

- There are other recent examples of ‘working in partnership’ arrangements within individual sectors to deal with specific issues –

  - an independently chaired, sector-led Campylobacter Working Group comprising producers, processors, retail sector, FSAI and DAFM to address the issue of Campylobacteriosis in poultry, and
  - an independently facilitated group, with representatives from producers, processors, Teagasc and DAFM to review and make recommendations on animal health matters in the pig sector.

To develop actions and/or programmes in support of this strategy, it is necessary to ensure that from the outset there is clarity with the regard to the objectives and outcomes being pursued.

Whilst currently there are many initiatives across the animal health area, there is no central reference document, web location or communications mechanism where the totality of current and on-going initiatives can be referenced by stakeholders.

High Level ‘Working in Partnership’ Objective

“Working in Partnership is seen and acknowledged to be the normal process by which animal health initiatives are developed and advanced.”

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)

- The Department will act as a facilitator, ensuring that activities and services are joined up, so that animal health objectives are delivered through strengthening the relationship between all those responsible along the supply chain.

- Establish a ‘Farmed Animal Health Strategy Review Body’, (see Section 11), whose members have deep experience from across the spectrum of farmed animal health and public health – from production through to processing and food supply to consumers – appointed on a personal basis, to monitor, challenge and support implementation of this strategy, whilst acting as a link to the industry organisations and representative groups and relevant sectors in wider society.

- Review existing ‘partnership’ type groups/committees to ensure clarity of objectives and the extent to which objectives are being met.
Evaluate the potential value of developing similar central ‘partnership’ standing arrangements, or alternatives such as Focus Groups, in other sectors/areas.

- Renew commitment by all stakeholders to Animal Health Ireland, ensuring a sustainable business model for the medium term – for the lifetime of Food Wise 2025.

- Incorporate the ‘working in partnership’ principle into mechanisms by which the Farm Animal Health Strategy Framework and resultant initiatives and programmes will be developed, monitored and ensured.

- Ensure that all managers assigned responsibility for delivery of programmes and initiatives are provided with training in project management with its focus on time, quality/performance, cost and client acceptance as determinants of success so that the expected outputs and outcomes are delivered in a way that is transparent to all partners.

- Establish a process for improved communication with all stakeholders.

- All animal health initiatives will be supported by a strategy document setting out scientific and other rationales for intervention.

Outcome Indicators (2022)

- A ‘Farmed Animal Health Strategy Review Body’ is in place and effectively delivering on its mandate.

- Farmed animal health policies are developed through collaborative processes, which in addition to any existing standing arrangements, might also include the use of Focus Groups to inform choices.

- Any new animal health initiative will, with the rare exception of where there is the need to respond urgently to a new/novel event which may have significant human or animal health impact, incorporate a consultative process.

- Communication with stakeholders takes place on a planned regular basis, and is acknowledged as providing a clear understanding of key issues to stakeholders.

B. Acknowledging roles and responsibilities

Responsibility for animal health, at a basic level, is very simple. The owner/keeper of every animal – be it kept for food, competition, companionship or indeed animals kept for any other reason - has a responsibility to ensure that the animal’s health and welfare is protected. That is what Irish society expects and demands. It is also equally clear that the benefit accruing from a healthy animal – be it the financial return from producing a food animal, companionship from a companion animal or indeed reward from a competition animal - is a ‘private’ benefit.

At a national level and within society generally however, the health of an animal is a more complex issue. For instance, contagious diseases may be transmitted from animal to animal, (irrespective of whether the animals are farmed for food, competition, companionship, or indeed wild animals), from farm to farm, across industries, between kept animals and wild animals and indeed between humans and animals. In some instances, particularly in respect of contagious disease, the actions of individual keepers of animals may not be sufficient to eliminate the risk of disease affecting their animals.
Relevant Considerations

- The right to own a farmed animal carries with it a responsibility to provide for its health and welfare and to do so in a way that respects and protects the similar rights of all other farmers and society.
- Animal owners have the primary responsibility for the health and well-being of the animals in their care.
- Within the animal production industry supply chain or in the context of the functioning of market along the supply chain, various players intervene at different stages, often extracting value whilst at the same time introducing additional animal disease risks.
- Animal owners, all other players in the farmed animal production supply chain, and indeed members of the general public must accept personal responsibility for their role in the health of farmed animals and act accordingly when on farmland or other locations where farmed animals are assembled, respecting disease prevention and bio-security practices.
- Individuals within an industry may also have uneven exposure to risk resulting from asymmetric access to information – where some individuals who have access to information that others do not, may serve their own self-interest at the expense of other stakeholders, the industry and indeed society.
- In the context of animal health and disease prevention and control, it is internationally accepted that in the first instance there is a need for collective actions on behalf of all ‘private’ participants within an industry (and across industries where the disease agent may be transmitted between industries) to take concerted actions to mitigate risks and to support each other – where affected individuals are supported by others for the good of all.
- This collective action on the part of private individuals is not always easily achieved, with the potential for ‘free riders’ seeking to acquire the benefit without contributing to the collective action.
- Economic studies demonstrate that in a free market, if all decisions are left to individuals, they will optimise their individual private position to the extent that they reach ‘breakeven’ point – where the short-term best outcome for the individual is optimised, at times possibly to the detriment of the long-term optimum outcome for the industry and for society as a whole.
- For the above reason, where there are externalities, and also in the context that quite a number of contagious animal diseases have known zoonotic impacts, with the potential to negatively impact on the public health of society, governments often intervene - from a ‘public good’ interest perspective – to mitigate the negative impact of such externalities and to seek to ensure public health.
- Aside from the obvious need to intervene to protect public health, a ‘public good’ may also arise in mobilising a cohort of unorganised private sector actors to work in concert for the greater good. Even if private sector individuals or groups are willing, they often cannot achieve the necessary level of enrolment, as it may be prohibitively expensive to put a necessary infrastructure in place and additionally they do not have the power of compellability.
- Therefore whilst it is internationally accepted that government can and should intervene strategically in support of a well defined ‘public good’ interest, the process, the method and the extent of such interventions are subject to much discussion and debate – the major concern being that private actors gain private benefit, ‘free-riding’ on the back of ‘public good’ interventions.
- Government rationale for involvement in animal health should be guided by the underlying principles that its interventions are directed towards societally-orientated strategic outcomes, which are of a ‘public good’ nature and which include:
  - the protection of public health,
  - the protection of the environment,
  - the protection of the wider economy, which may include taking action relating to bio-security protection at external borders,
  - the mobilisation of concerted action on the part of individual private stakeholders towards addressing animal health and welfare challenges, where the private sector does not have the infrastructure, systems or ability to compel participation to do so, and where such actions are of broader societal benefit,
  - improving market access,
  - safeguarding animal welfare.
- It is therefore necessary and helpful to seek to describe the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders along the supply-chain.
High Level ‘Roles and Responsibilities’ Objective
“Roles and responsibilities of all salient stakeholders will be elucidated and documented to ensure clarity for all.”

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)
- Initiate a consultation process with the wider stakeholder community to identify and agree on specific roles and responsibilities.
- Develop and publish a document setting out clearly the roles and responsibility of all stakeholders with regard to the health of farmed animals.
- Develop Codes of Practice for various industry stakeholders, where and as appropriate.

Outcome Indicators (2022)
- A document setting out the specific roles and responsibilities of stakeholders will be published and will be widely available, such that animal owners, all other players in the farmed animal production supply chain, and the general public will have a clear understanding of the importance of animal health, where and how it can be impacted on, risks arising to public health associated with animal disease, and where responsibilities lie.
- The role and responsibilities of Government are clearly set down so that stakeholders cannot have unrealistic expectations.
- Relevant Codes of Practice are published.

C. Reflecting costs and benefits
There is no doubt that animal disease gives rise to a cost to the owner/keeper of the animal – direct cost due to immediate production losses and treatment - and indirect costs resulting from sub-optimal production into the future, as well as the opportunity cost associated with treatment. It follows therefore that the primary beneficiary from animal health programmes which seek to avoid or prevent disease is the owner/keeper of the animals.

The question then arises as to why anyone other than farmers as individuals or as a collective, should have any financial interest in treatment or prevention of animal disease on farm or in contributing to optimising the health of privately owned animals on privately owned farms. In this context, it may be recalled that where disease exists on a widespread scale, losses can be felt across the industry and into the overall economy. Additionally, unhealthy animals have negative environmental impacts. Furthermore certain animal diseases are zoonotic in nature with a potential impact on human health, and the overuse of antibiotics in animal production may contribute to the development of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) which is a recognised global health concern.

Relevant Considerations
- Farming is a private commercial activity.
- Whilst animal disease is a constant threat to animal-based production, good animal health provides benefits to the farmer concerned.
- Within the prevailing overall macroeconomic environment in which all individual farms operate, the output from individual farms – the benefits accruing from the farming activity - is largely influenced by the management and husbandry skill of the farmer, through the business choices made and resources deployed, within that farm.
- Many risk mitigating measures may be taken at individual farm level that will reduce the threat of disease impacting on farm output - it is appropriate that individual farmers be responsible for the cost of these measures. Losses resulting from failure to implement such measures should lie fully with the farmer.
- Reflecting on the previous discussion on roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, it is clear that in some situations, response at individual farm level is insufficient to deal with the risk arising – particularly when dealing with contagious disease.
In such situations collective action on the part of farmers - either locally or sometimes generally – is necessary to mitigate the risk for all farmers. It is appropriate that individual farmers contribute financially towards the delivery of this collective action.

Cattle farmers in Ireland have made financial contributions within such a context for many years by way of bovine disease levies, in the specific context of tuberculosis and brucellosis eradication programmes. The relationship between farmer contributions and the costs of the programme or indeed relating to compensation have been on an ad-hoc basis and are not aligned to any particular strategy or agreement. Other livestock farmers do not make any similar type of contribution.

The 2013 Animal Health and Welfare Act foresees that the current disease levies may be replaced by animal health levies, without the current legislative restriction to species or disease.

Where other individuals engage by way of an economic activity at some stage in the supply chain and where, by their involvement, additional risks are introduced, it is appropriate that they contribute in a proportionate way to the costs of mitigating any such additional risks.

Processors gain from improved animal health, which ensures a continuity of supply and a better quality ‘raw material’ which supports the marketability of their products.

Government also may have a role to play, where interventions are required towards societally-orientated strategic objectives, in a ‘public good’ context.

Financial losses associated with a disease event may not be restricted to the farmed animal sector and indeed in extreme cases, may extend well beyond the agri-industry.

The key to limiting significant financial losses to the farmer, the broader industry and to society is prevention. Investment in preventative measures and bio-security practices are crucial.

High Level ‘Costs and Benefits’ Objective

“Animal health programmes will be appropriately and sustainably funded on the basis of a formal objective evaluation of benefits and costs.”

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)

- Engagement with stakeholders with a view to clarifying the role of government regarding financial supports for animal health and welfare programmes, specifically,
  - To initiate a process, using the working in partnership principle, where DAFM’s expected contribution in respect of all notifiable diseases is clarified and documented so that there is a clear understanding among all stakeholders in advance of any disease event.
  - That all stakeholders (including DAFM) will provide clarity in respect of a multi-year commitment to the co-funding for Animal Health Ireland to pursue its strategic plan.
- Review funding mechanisms for AHI to ensure a sustainable model for the medium term – for the lifetime of Food Wise 2025.
- Commence the animal health levies section of the Animal Health and Welfare Act and repeal the Bovine Disease Levies legislation.
- Any proposals with regard to animal health initiatives will have clear objectives and have clarity with regard to costs, expected benefits and funding mechanisms, where appropriate.
- Develop a process whereby all proposed animal health initiatives are subject to appropriate cost and benefit analysis.
Outcome Indicators (2022)

- The rationale for Government intervention (financial and other) is clearly set down, justified, based on sound scientific evidence, and informed by legitimate societal concerns.
- DAFM will have clearly documented the extent to which it will provide State support (including financial) in respect of surveillance for or in the event of an episode/event of each of the listed notifiable diseases.
- Animal health programmes will have clear objectives, be appropriately funded taking into account benefit/cost assessment, be communicated, reviewed and reported on and managed using best practice programme/project management techniques.
- AHI maintains delivery on its mandate, underpinned by a sustainable business and funding model.
- Agreements reached with industry on appropriate and targeted animal health levies to supersede the current bovine disease levies.

D. Applying the principle that ‘prevention is better than cure’

In the ‘animal health world’, much focus in the past has been on treating animals that have poor health or are diseased, where the economic output from the animal is already reduced due to ill health. The principle of ‘prevention is better than cure’ seeks to change the focus from one of post-event response to and management/treatment of disease to one that promotes animal health as a driver of optimised production, improved margins for producers and providing the best quality food for consumers.

Relevant Considerations

- It is well accepted and clear to all that financial losses – direct and indirect - arise from clinical disease.
- The losses arising from sub-clinical disease are often not well understood or perceived to be as significant as they actually are.
- Husbandry and management practices on farms can significantly impact on the health of animals – thus change in farm practices and/or infrastructure is often the necessary first step in the prevention of animal disease.
- Progress has been made over recent years in the area of disease prevention, with increased use of vaccines to protect against certain animal disease threats and the elimination of certain diseases from the country – e.g. Bovine Brucellosis, Aujeszky’s disease.
- Treating sick animals generally involves the use of antibiotics – a precious and scarce resource that is under threat - and where the long term availability of effective antibiotics is not guaranteed.
- Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is now recognised as a significant global public health threat – this is prompting a review of the way antibiotics are used in animal health/veterinary medicine.
- Mistakenly in the past, one perspective on prevention being better than cure resulted in the increased prophylactic use of antibiotics in an imprudent manner in some cases.
- Whilst vaccines serve to mitigate the potential losses from being exposed to an infectious agent, elimination of the agent removes the threat altogether.
- Certain infections in animals which cause relatively minor farm output losses have the potential for significant impact on human health, with associated economic losses.
- Bio-security is the core element of ‘prevention’ – serving to minimise risks and thus protecting the health of farmed animals.
- Farm boundary bio-security practices in Ireland are not particularly robust.
It is well acknowledged that the movement and congregation of animals pose the greatest risk of transmission of animal disease from farm to farm and around the country. It is therefore appropriate that particular attention be given to mitigating the risks associated with such activities and those involved in such movement and congregation – livestock marts, fairs, slaughter plants, transporters and dealers.

Animal feed is a critical element that may have a direct impact on animal health and through the food chain, impact on public health. It is therefore appropriate that particular attention be given to ensuring the integrity and safety of the feed supply chain.

Any newly developed or introduced new/novel feed source or feed production system/treatment has the potential – unless subject to critical risk assessment – to impact on animal health, animal welfare or public health.

Inappropriate management of animal by-products has been shown to pose risks to animal health, public health and to the environment.

Animal Health Ireland (AHI) has been a catalyst in highlighting the benefits of preventive measures particularly through its delivery of the BVD Free and CellCheck programme being run for its constituent stakeholder groups.

AHI has also published very informative and helpful advisory brochures dealing with biosecurity issues.

The farmed animal private veterinary practice network is a significant repository of knowledge and expertise that can guide herd health planning and preventative veterinary medicine.

Understanding the evolution of exotic or emerging diseases and the potential risks allows for preventive measures to be planned and implemented.

Newer technologies, infrastructure or systems being introduced into agriculture production, whilst having the potential to provide animal health benefits, may also have unintended impacts on animal health.

Developments in animal breeding technologies have the potential to impact positively and negatively on an animal’s health – for instance ease of calving, and indeed at a different level, an animal’s immunological response to infectious agents.

Under the Knowledge Transfer module of the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020, an animal health component will focus on certain issues where preventive measures will readily reap benefit for the farmer.

A Targeted On-Farm Advisory service under the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020 will provide targeted on-farm animal health advice to certain farmers and will provide advice on best-approach preventive practices.

High Level ‘Prevention is better than Cure’ Objective

“Herd health planning and preventive measures including biosecurity protocols, will have gained significant traction across all animal production systems – the concept of prevention being better than cure is the accepted norm.”

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)

- A cost benefit analysis of herd health planning and farm bio-security practices will be undertaken.
- All educational and training programmes for farmers and animal owners will provide modules on animal health and herd health planning.
- A system of animal health surveillance, horizon scanning and risk analysis will be coordinated at a national level and data shared with stakeholders.
- The series of inspections/controls along the supply chain will be reviewed to ensure that their focus is clearly on prevention and that they incorporate all known risks.
A system will be in place to identify, evaluate and effectively manage all potential threats to animal health arising from infrastructural change, new biotechnology, novel husbandry systems and newly farmed species and genotypes.

A national coordinated AMR action plan will be developed in conjunction with the human health sector and stakeholders and will be implemented.

Responsible use guidance in respect of animal medicines usage in animals will be developed.

An evaluation of the availability of farmed animal veterinary services will be undertaken.

Outcome Indicators (2022)

- Animal owners acknowledge the direct benefit of actively developing and using animal health plans.
- The economic value and practicalities of farm level bio-security are fully understood and applied.
- The proportion of herds actively involved in strategic and responsive herd health planning has increased.
- Animal owners and keepers have the necessary skills to exercise good bio-security practice.
- Veterinary services are available and used appropriately.
- Veterinary medicines are sufficiently available and used responsibly.
- There is a system of horizon scanning for new animal (as well as potential zoonotic) health threats and an active programme of veterinary surveillance in place to enable risk management practices be introduced.
- A national AMR action plan will be in place and its effectiveness will have been confirmed.
- Newly introduced production or husbandry technologies or systems will not impact negatively on animal health or animal welfare.
Chapter IV
Chapter IV

9. Supporting infrastructures and systems

The delivery of an effective and dynamic national farmed animal health strategy is dependent on the availability of a variety of nationally available infrastructural resources, operational systems and skill sets.

Whilst presented in the following as standalone components to ensure clarity as to their contribution and their necessity, the reality is that these structures and systems are inter-dependant and inter-connected and need to be considered and addressed as a collective – not just as individual elements. If the provision of these infrastructural components is purposefully managed and coordinated, they will ensure the maximum outputs towards delivering the strategic outcomes – for the benefit of the various sectors of the agri-industries and for Irish society.

The process of developing this strategy framework will also allow for a critical review as to how these various resources are managed, resourced and aligned and it may prompt suggestions as how best to position and manage such national resources for the benefit of the industry and society generally.

Animal Health Strategy - Supporting Infrastructure & Systems

- Surveillance Systems
- Contingency Preparedness
- Laboratory Services
- Epidemiology & Risk Analysis
- Animal Health Economics
- Statistical Modelling
- Farm Animal Veterinary Services
- Traceability Systems
- Market Access Initiatives
- Safe Animal Feed
- ICT & Data Management
- Veterinary Medicinal Products
- Independent Scientific Advice
- Education, Training & Communication
- Research & Innovation
A. Animal health surveillance

Animal health surveillance is the on-going systematic collection, collation, analysis, and interpretation of animal health data, with the dissemination of the resultant information for decision making. Surveillance provides baseline information to allow differentiation of abnormal from normal states, or variation from the status quo.

Relevant Considerations

- Surveillance allows the early detection of exotic or emerging disease and the identification of developing events related to endemic diseases, or changes in the status quo.
- Actions based on information from surveillance can reduce the frequency and severity of the negative impacts associated with animal diseases or the threat of disease because the frequency, distribution, and determinants of disease, and the populations at risk are better understood.
- The adoption of sound scientific principles within surveillance contributes to the validity and credibility of the analysis and resolution of complex issues.
- Surveillance information supports international trade and the competitiveness of animal based agriculture. It provides documented evidence that supports trading partners and international animal health agencies recognising Ireland’s capacity to detect important diseases in animal populations and the transboundary incursions of trade-limiting diseases.
- The information from surveillance enhances public confidence in the management of animal health issues.
- Surveillance provides data for the prioritisation of investment in research and risk management.
- A national surveillance system should integrate all potential sources of surveillance data for analysis and use by all decision makers within the farmed animal health system.
- Notwithstanding the above, a surveillance system must consider and protect personal and proprietary information.
- Surveillance is not cost free – there may be significant costs associated with programme design, sample collection, testing, data collection, storage, analysis and reporting.
- The allocation of surveillance resources should be prioritised for the greatest return on investment according to the risk (probability, consequences, and uncertainty) that diseases and hazards present to society.
- The surveillance system must retain the capacity to rapidly scale-up, scale-down, or re-focus as new challenges or changes in risk importance demand.
- The plan for future surveillance should be reviewed annually by the stakeholders in the farmed animal health system.
- New disease risk pathways, including aerial vector borne, are becoming increasingly important in Ireland.

High Level Animal Health Surveillance Objective

“Surveillance systems will be further developed within the context of a broader fully integrated national surveillance system covering all farmed species, which provides, interprets and disseminates data that facilitate risk analysis, disease modelling and decision making, meeting the needs of the farmed animal sector.”
Recommended Strategic Action (2017 – 2022)
- Establish an agreed, collaborative and integrated National Animal Health Surveillance Programme with all parties currently involved in surveillance activities.
- Build the institutional capacity to deliver and coordinate such a framework within DAFM - economists, epidemiologists, veterinary scientists and policymakers will work together with stakeholders to deliver an appropriate and effective surveillance system.
- Develop a collaborative process to annually review the future surveillance plan and determine the priorities for resource allocation.

Outcome Indicators (2022)
- A national, integrated Farmed Animal Health Surveillance Programme will have been developed and coordinated by the Surveillance Division in DAFM.
- Stakeholders will make data available to enable effectiveness of the surveillance programme.
- Data from the surveillance system will be incorporated into risk analysis and decision analysis.
- Farmed animal health stakeholders annually review the surveillance work plan and establish priorities for resource allocation based on the greatest return for the farmed animal industry.
- Surveillance output data will be publicly available to all stakeholders to support policy development and prioritisation and to support international trade of Irish animals and products.

B. Contingency preparedness and emergency response

Large scale outbreaks of exotic disease can have a major economic impact, with associated financial and social impacts, as shown below.

Table 1. Costs and duration of outbreaks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Duration (days)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Classical Swine Fever</td>
<td>€ 1.5 billion</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Foot &amp; Mouth Disease</td>
<td>£ 4.9 billion</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Avian Influenza</td>
<td>€ 0.8 billion</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The capability to respond quickly and effectively to incursions of exotic disease has been long recognised as a prerequisite for any country in developing a credible animal health system. This capability has been led in Ireland over the years by the animal health contingency planning unit in DAFM - effectively coordinating responses to many suspect events and directing effective responses to events, where necessary, over the years.
Relevant Considerations

- Preparation is the critical element in the management of an exotic or emerging disease.
- Animal identification and effective traceability systems are essential tools in the disease response and control plans.
- Movement controls and standstills are central tools for disease control.
- Risk identification associated with countries of origin in the context of animals/products being imported is a critical element in anticipating risks.
- There should be clear and widely understood responsibility with regard to notification of identified disease risks – as response time relative to time of incursion is a critical factor in the effectiveness of response to disease outbreak.
- Effective surveillance systems, which can be adapted based on evolving knowledge of risk, are critical in contingency planning.
- Industry stakeholders themselves have a key responsibility to contribute to contingency planning in support of government resources.
- Bio-security protocols to support disease control must be developed by various sectors of the farmed animal industry for all farmed animal species.
- Pre-event clarity in relation to eligibility for and scale of compensation in various scenarios, agreed between government and stakeholders is desirable.
- Adequate resources must be available for contingency planning and preparation.
- Adequate resources must be identified and available for immediate and effective deployment in response to detection of an outbreak.
- Information and data management and communication systems are critically important in disease response capability.
- Simulation exercises assist considerably in developing, testing and evaluating response capability.
- In the face of disease challenge, clear effective communications strategies are critical.
- Vaccination programmes, where available and determined to be necessary, may be considered in response to certain outbreak situations.

High Level Contingency Preparedness and Emergency Response Objective

“Contingency planning and emergency response systems will be further developed, taking into account new and emerging, as well as existing, disease threats and the need for innovative solutions regarding the resourcing of response actions, to best position Ireland to anticipate and respond to major disease risks.”

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)

- Responsibility for all aspects of contingency preparedness and emergency response for all exotic animal health threats will be assigned to the National Disease Control Centre (NDCC) of DAFM.
- The NDCC will liaise and consult across all relevant stakeholders with a view to prioritisation of actions and to ensure the engagement of all stakeholders in the development of the national response effort.
- The NDCC will update and develop further specific contingency plans in accordance with identified priorities.
- The NDCC will liaise, as necessary, with other DAFM divisions (involved in for example Surveillance, Diagnostics, Epidemiology, Risk Analysis and Disease Modelling, Procurement, Communications, Traceability) to ensure that exotic disease anticipation and response are taken into account.
NDCC will provide necessary training modules and contracts, as necessary, to ensure adequate response infrastructure is in place to enable an immediate response to any initial event/threat.

NDCC will ensure that arrangements are in place to ensure the health and safety of high-risk responders to zoonotic exotic diseases.

Recognising the commonality of interest on an all-island basis associated with exotic disease threats, the NDCC will continue close engagement with DAERA to ensure the optimal coordinated response to any disease, on an all-island basis.

Outcome Indicators (2022)

- NDCC will have in place contingency plans in respect of, at least, the 15 major epizootic (former OIE List A) exotic diseases.
- Appropriate contracts and procurement arrangements will have been developed, consistent with the requirement to deliver a timely and effective initial response to all ‘suspect’ exotic or emerging disease events.
- A programme setting out a suite of scheduled simulation exercises will be in place and delivered in accordance with the plan.
- An annual review of contingency planning and preparedness will take place with all the farmed animal health stakeholders, to review progress, monitor developments and ensure the participation of all in such planning.

C. Laboratory services

Laboratories provide critical scientific capability and capacity in support of animal health systems. Animal health laboratories have a significant role to play in diagnostic investigation, disease surveillance, disease control programmes, emergency preparedness for exotic diseases (and other major animal health related incidents which impact on the food-chain) and in research to better understand animal health and disease. In addition, laboratories are repositories of scientific knowledge and expertise providing valuable advisory input into international standard setting, design and implementation of regional and national programmes and herd health management decisions.

Relevant Considerations

- Animal health laboratory services are provided by both the public and private sector in Ireland. DAFM and a number of state-funded entities provide for much of the regulatory and research science needs of the industry with a particular emphasis on delivering “public goods”.
- DAFM Laboratories include the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory at Backweston, a network of Regional Veterinary Laboratories (in Athlone, Cork, Kilkenny, Limerick and Sligo) and a research farm facility at Longtown. These laboratories support control programmes for endemic diseases, are engaged in surveillance for new and emerging diseases and are an integral part of contingency plans for exotic disease. DAFM hosts National Reference Laboratories for a number of OIE-listed diseases (e.g. BSE, Bovine tuberculosis, FMD, etc.) and these NRLs are involved in oversight of private commercial laboratories. In addition to these regulatory requirements, DAFM provides a laboratory diagnostic service to the farming community via private veterinary practitioners and accepts voluntary submissions of carcasses for post mortem examination and of clinical specimens collected on farm. The information on the pattern and frequency of different diseases in food-producing animals and emerging trends that is derived from providing this service is made available to industry through reports in the farming and veterinary press and an annual surveillance report produced in conjunction with other laboratory service providers on the island. In support of these various functions, DAFM Laboratories are also actively engaged in applied R&D on animal health related topics in collaboration with other agencies and academic partners. A Working Group tasked by the Department with undertaking a comprehensive review of the Laboratories issued its report at the end of 2016. The Department is currently considering its recommendations and consulting with relevant stakeholders.
The Marine Institute provides similar regulatory and diagnostic services in respect of piscine health and aquaculture.

Other state-funded laboratory service providers, including the State Laboratory at Backweston and HSE Laboratories, provide capability in analytical chemistry and microbiology that is sometimes required in the investigation of animal/zoonotic disease.

The Irish Equine Centre is a not-for-profit organisation that specialises in providing a laboratory diagnostic service for the equine industry. It hosts OIE Reference Laboratories for Equine Influenza and Equine Rhinopneumonitis.

Teagasc and the UCD School of Veterinary Medicine have laboratory capacity and embedded scientific expertise in animal health related disciplines for teaching and research purposes.

The Agri-Food and Bio-Sciences Institute in Northern Ireland provides laboratory diagnostic services on a commercial basis and these are availed of on occasion by farmers and veterinary practitioners in border counties and by the intensive pig and poultry sectors.

Private commercial laboratories (including laboratories operated by some of the larger food business operators) have increased the range and volume of animal health related testing services they provide in tandem with the recent development of industry-led disease control programmes and a greater awareness at farm level of the costs of sub-clinical disease and the benefits of adopting preventive herd health measures.

For regulatory programmes where testing is provided by private commercial laboratories, DAFM is involved in oversight and publishes lists of “approved” laboratories. Similarly for industry-led disease control programmes, AHI publishes lists of those laboratories that are “designated” to provide testing services.

In Ireland accreditation of testing laboratories to the ISO 17025 standard is awarded by the Irish National Accreditation Board which publishes a list of all the test methods (and laboratories) accredited to this standard.

Bio-containment and the health and safety of staff are key considerations for those laboratories working with dangerous pathogens; DAFM operates a number of BSL-3 laboratories in its central laboratory complex at Backweston and will have a BSL-4 laboratory (for work with exotic viruses) in operation from the end of 2017.

High Level Laboratory Services Objective

“To further develop and maintain national capability and international credibility across different service providers – requiring a broad range of expertise across various laboratory-based disciplines and sectors, a critical mass of experienced persons and sufficient testing (and “surge”) capacity to meet the needs of an expanding livestock-based and export-dependent industry underpinned by a national animal health research programme.”

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)

- DAFM to implement agreed recommendations of the Strategic Review of its laboratories.
- National and international reference laboratory functions to be appropriately resourced.
- Build closer collaboration and better communication between public and private service providers nationally and also internationally.
- All laboratory service providers should engage in initiatives to make better use of existing data in the context of the National Animal Health Surveillance strategy.
- Ensure that laboratories are effectively contributing to animal health related research - through identifying and communicating research needs and greater collaboration between regulatory and research scientists.
D. Epidemiological and risk analysis

Epidemiology is the science concerned with the study of the factors determining and influencing the frequency and distribution of disease and other health-related events and their causes in an animal population - for the purpose of establishing programs to prevent and control their development and spread. It combines the disciplines of statistics and economics with the biological sciences and thereby facilitates the optimisation of resource deployment with regard to animal health strategies.

Risk analysis can be broadly defined as a formal objective process of evaluation and decision making in respect of risks that may arise regarding an industry, a company or a project. Risk analysis includes a number of individual distinct components - such as risk assessment, risk characterisation, risk communication, risk management - and the development of policy relating to risk, within any particular setting. Risk analysis is now accepted to have a very central role in the area of animal health and food safety, where the process is broken down into two distinct elements – risk identification and risk management – where the former is based on scientific evaluation of all available data, whilst the latter recognises that the management of risk must also take into consideration broader societal issues.

Relevant Considerations

- Epidemiological skills and perspectives, with their focus on population medicine, are critical when seeking to understand animal disease dynamics and in planning animal health programmes.
- The Centre for Veterinary Epidemiology and Risk Analysis (CVERA) is the national resource centre for veterinary epidemiology and risk analysis as it relates to animal health and related food safety risks in Ireland, located within the UCD School of Veterinary Medicine.
- CVERA is funded by DAFM. The Centre is staffed by employees of University College Dublin and of DAFM.
- A broad range of expertise is represented within the Centre, including database development and management, geographic information systems, statistics, veterinary medicine and epidemiology.
- CVERA has provided and continues to provide DAFM, other state agencies and researchers with epidemiological and risk analysis support, as well as supporting other national initiatives through engagement with Animal Health Ireland, and also internationally through engagement with other universities and national veterinary services.
- The Department itself has a significant epidemiological capacity within its own staff complement working in different areas of animal health.
- There is greater capacity to improve the extent of utilisation of epidemiological and risk analysis expertise in a range of animal health and food safety areas.
High Level Epidemiological and Risk Analysis Capability Objective

“Epidemiology and risk analysis capability will be further developed to provide a national resource that will be used systematically across the whole animal health and food safety landscape.”

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)

- Review the Statement of Strategy of CVERA to ensure that its scope is aligned with the Farmed Animal Health strategy.
- Evaluate the current skills set within CVERA to ensure it is consistent with meeting the requirements of the Farmed Animal Health Strategy.
- Ensure that CVERA maintains its international status as a recognised academic Centre, reflecting the excellence and independence of its science and research.
- Given the inter-connectedness of many infrastructural components, CVERA will develop a clear working relationship with DAFM policy, operational and laboratory services and other agencies and organisations which lead on other related infrastructural components.

Outcome Indicators (2022)

- CVERA is clearly seen and accepted to be the national resource providing expertise in the area of epidemiology and risk analysis.
- CVERA maintains its international connections and reputation as a centre of high quality independent science and research.
- CVERA will routinely support initiatives across the agriculture and food industries in the areas of animal health, animal welfare and food safety.

E. Animal health/animal disease statistical modelling

Statistical modelling is gaining greater acceptance as a management support tool in the animal health area. Statistical modelling uses existing observed data and applies a set of assumptions with a view to predicting possible future outcomes – if the assumptions are correct. Modelling enables a series of hypotheses be tested, which serve to inform animal health managers, enable them understand possible scenario outcomes, and plan for such possible eventualities. Additionally models may be used to seek to understand potential outcomes in situations where a range of possible alternative management interventions are applied to a disease outbreak. Models are tools that have value but need to be used with caution. They have particular value in assisting in contingency planning by way of scenario planning, plotting the possible evolution of an epidemic and the likely impact of different interventions.

Relevant Considerations

- Ireland does not have an abundant supply of ‘modelling’ expertise in the area of animal health.
- Consequently animal health/animal disease modelling has not featured strongly in determining policy or operational strategies in the animal health area.
- Other countries utilise animal health/animal disease modelling to a greater extent than we do in Ireland.
- As the potential for statistical modelling is continuously developing and evolving, the requirement is for a dynamic, flexible, constantly developing and refreshing modelling resource.

High Level Animal Health/Disease Statistical Modelling Objective

“Animal health/animal disease modelling will be developed as a tool to assist in decision-making with regard to disease control and eradication programmes.”
Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)
- Determine the optimal mechanism to acquire expertise in statistical modelling in the animal health area in Ireland, which would be available for the ‘public good’.
- Initiate a process to develop, use and grow such expertise, as necessary.
- Determine a mechanism by which such a resource can be funded.

Outcome Indicators (2022)
- Statistical modelling skills and expertise in the animal health area are available and integrated as part of the wider agri-industry supporting infrastructure and systems.
- The extent to which statistical modelling is used in the area of animal health continues to expand.

F. Economics of animal health

Economics is the science that is concerned with the study of how people and societies make decisions and choices to get the best outputs/outcomes from limited resources. Whilst original economic systems were simply focussed on trade and a belief that people acting in their own self-interest produced goods and wealth that benefited all society, modern economic systems acknowledge that economies are about more than just trade, but also reflect the values of society and the social and political structure of that society.

Animal health initiatives invariably involve choices. There is a need to understand and balance costs, potential benefits and other societal issues in determining the best course of action for society as a whole. Possessing the most objective perspective possible as to the relative merits/demerits and cost/benefits of choices available is of central concern to governments and to industry sectors. Animal health economics can make such information available.

Relevant Considerations
- Ireland does not have an abundant supply of economists with specialist expertise in animal health economics.
- Consequently economic evaluation has not featured strongly in determining policy or operational strategies in the animal health areas.
- Other countries utilise economic evaluation to a greater extent than we do in Ireland.
- An objective and transparent assessment of the relative merits/demerits of various choices available can ensure the best deployment of resources.

High Level Economic Evaluation Objective
“Economic evaluation will be incorporated as a routine into the decision-making process with regard to all animal health and welfare initiatives.”

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)
- Determine the optimal model by which to develop, use and grow expertise in animal health economics in Ireland, which would be available for the ‘public good’.
- Determine a mechanism by which such a resource will be acquired and funded.

Outcome Indicators (2022)
- Animal health economic skills and expertise are available and integrated as part of the wider agri-industry supporting infrastructure and systems.
G. Availability and capability of farmed animal veterinary services

Veterinarians are the animal health and welfare professionals – fulfilling a critical role in the delivery of farmed animal health across the world, through service and support to their farmer clients. Additionally there is also international recognition of the role of veterinarians in ensuring the safe production of food and the protection of public health in its broadest sense – for instance through their involvement in meat inspection services, dealing with zoonotic conditions on farm and in responding to the global challenge of antimicrobial resistance through prudent and responsible use of animal remedies.

Relevant Considerations

- The provision of veterinary services is generally a private business activity in Ireland.
- The Veterinary Council of Ireland is the statutory body responsible for regulating the veterinary profession in the country.
- Farmed animal veterinary practices constitute an important resource in supporting farmers in dealing with endemic animal health and in exotic disease identification, notification and response efforts.
- As farming systems evolve, as society develops, as international travel and trade increases, as we see movement in disease patterns, possibly associated with climate change, and with significant social changes in rural areas, the challenges faced by veterinarians, especially farmed animal veterinarians, are constantly changing.
- Furthermore as the expertise of farmers evolve, as new technologies develop, as some services traditionally delivered through veterinary practices are supplied through other channels, the role of the farm animal veterinarian needs to evolve - to lead and respond to these changing circumstances.
- In such a changing environment, it is vital that the education of veterinarians - those trained in Ireland and abroad - is constantly updated to ensure the most up-to-date knowledge, practice and information is available to each veterinarian.
- As well as serving their farmer clients, farmed animal veterinarians are entrusted by society to safeguard the public good – through diagnosing and promptly reporting exotic animal disease, protecting public health from occupational or food-related zoonoses and through prudent use of antimicrobials and in protecting the welfare of animals.
- The recently introduced Veterinary Council of Ireland requirement for compulsory continuous veterinary education is a positive step forward and can be fine-tuned over time to ensure the targeting of educational modules towards priority areas.
- Recent social and economic developments across the developed world have seen a reduced availability of veterinary practice services for farm animals in some areas of these societies.
- There are some concerns expressed that this is now occurring in the more remote parts of Ireland.

High Level Availability and Capability of Veterinary Services Objective

“Veterinary Services’ availability and capability are acknowledged as critical components of Ireland’s animal health and welfare system – from supporting improved productivity, ensuring animal welfare, protecting public health and responding to exotic animal disease.”
Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)
- DAFM will work with the Veterinary Council of Ireland to ensure the appropriate regulatory framework and continuous veterinary education systems are in place.
- Within the context of the legislative framework of the Veterinary Practice Act, to work with the Veterinary Council of Ireland to provide legislative and procedural clarity in respect of a limited number of procedures that could be undertaken by persons other than a registered veterinary practitioner.
- DAFM initiatives in the areas of contingency preparedness and emergency response will outline the anticipated role of veterinary practitioners.
- DAFM will work with the Veterinary Council of Ireland and other stakeholders to evaluate the availability of veterinary services in the more remote parts of Ireland.
- DAFM will evaluate and outline participatory roles for veterinary practitioners in animal health initiatives both endemic and exotic.

Outcome Indicators (2022)
- A review of the availability of veterinary services will be completed.
- Clarity will have been provided in respect of certain procedures that may be undertaken by persons other than veterinary practitioners.
- The role of veterinary practitioners in the preparation for and response to exotic disease events will be clarified and documented.
- The role of veterinary practitioners in endemic and exotic animal health programmes and responses will be documented.

H. Traceability (animal identification and premises registration) systems

A key element in any programme to protect or improve animal health at national level and to support food safety assurances at home and abroad is the need for comprehensive information on the location of all holdings, the identification of animals and details on the movement of animals between locations, thus optimising traceability in support of food safety systems, emergency disease responses and accountability with regard to animal welfare.

Relevant Considerations
- Animal and premises identification and animal movement knowledge are critical to effective surveillance and disease control/eradication programmes.
- Ireland has historically had very robust premises registration and animal identification systems in respect of cattle, originating from the commencement of the bovine TB eradication scheme in the late 1950s and subsequent developments.
- In recent times the bovine systems have been significantly updated and upgraded to include data on movements, in response to EU requirements arising primarily from the BSE crisis in the late 1990s.
- Progression in information technology development has enabled significant advances in cattle traceability systems.
- Premises registration systems are now in place in respect of all farmed animals - including poultry and aquaculture - with the exception of farmed deer.
- A sheep and goat identification system, based on individual tagging of each animal is in place for many years now. This current system is under review as there is an identified need to enhance the system to better support traceability in the area of animal health and food safety concerns.
- Pig identification requires the identification of pigs on moving from their holding – by way of herd marks for pigs moving for production and slaughter, and individually for breeding pigs. Movements are recorded on a central database.
Since 2009, all equidae are required to be individually identified by way of a micro-chip and official passport document. A central database is in place, with a requirement to record change of ownership – which supports animal health, animal welfare and food safety concerns.

High Level Traceability (Animal Identification and Premises Registration) Objective

“Animal identification and traceability systems will be continuously evolved to ensure that Ireland’s reputation as having a world leading traceability system will be maintained.”

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)

- Further develop and improve the sheep identification system to better support animal health and food safety assurances and controls.
- Recognising the continuous development in IT and genomics technology, to continue to improve the cattle traceability systems and controls to maintain Ireland’s traceability as among the best in the world.
- Reassess the adequacy of premises registration systems in underpinning animal health policies and strategies.
- Undertake a cost/benefit evaluation of introducing a fully electronic identification system of cattle.

Outcome Indicators (2022)

- Improved sheep identification and traceability system is in place.
- All premises where farmed animals are kept will be subject to a registration requirement.
- Ireland’s cattle identification and movement control systems will maintain their position as among the best in the world.

I. Supporting access to international markets

Ireland is in the enviable position that it can produce significantly more animal based products than it can utilise internally for its own citizens, thus it is a very large exporter of agri-products. Whilst this is a very significant national resource, its value is dependent on achieving access to significant markets across to the world, to realise its maximum value to Irish producers and processors.

Relevant Considerations

- Ireland is a small open economy with a significant need to trade its agricultural products.
- Animal health is a significant contributor to farm outputs and must be recognised in this regard.
- Access to many international markets is contingent on specific animal health status.
- Ireland’s animal health status is a primary element in trade negotiations with third country markets, as is the credibility of its farmed animal health systems and food safety and control systems.
- Performance measurement and animal health surveillance data from the farmed animal sector are often needed to facilitate trade negotiations.
- Animal health is to be seen as a core ‘value centre’ and contributor to economic development and market access rather than simply a default compliance issue, where adherence to basic legislative requirements is the goal.
- Competitor trading nations are developing and advancing animal health programmes and systems, recognising their potential to add to their ‘value proposition’ in certain niche quality markets.
High Level Access to International Markets Objective

“Recognising the relationship between animal health and food safety, access to markets will be maintained and expanded through the enhancement of the national farmed animal health status and systems.”

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)

- Utilise Ireland’s animal health status and programmes as an asset in developing new market access, especially in non-traditional markets.
- In the context of market access priorities, evaluate the relevance and prioritise funding/initiatives towards specific animal health initiatives that will defend access to current markets and support new market access negotiations.

Outcome Indicators (2022)

- The engagement by all stakeholders in bringing this strategy into operation will have provided a vibrant and cohesive farmed animal health system that defends, promotes, supports and maintains market access efforts.

J. Safe animal feed

Animal feed, including water, is a critical farm input that may have a direct impact on animal health and animal welfare and indeed, through the food chain, may impact on public health. Risks may be biological, chemical or physical. Historical examples of feed-related risks include Meat and Bone Meal and BSE, swill feeding and Foot & Mouth Disease, salmonella contaminated feed and Salmonellosis in poultry, whilst more recently we have seen the Dioxin incident where contaminated pig feed led to contaminated pig meat being placed on the market, requiring a widespread recall. We have also noted incidents where inadvertent contamination of feed has also resulted in localised farm animal deaths due to lead poisoning, botulism and caffeine poisoning. It is therefore appropriate that particular attention be given to ensuring the integrity and safety of the feed supply chain.

Relevant Considerations

- A reliable and constant supply of good quality water is important for the health and welfare of farmed animals – and is particularly critical in intensive production systems.
- The Department has a robust feed inspection control system in place.
- Waste foods and returned foods have the potential to pose a biological risk.
- The feeding of inappropriate feed to animals may pose a localised risk.
- The globalisation of the animal feed supply chain, with increased international trade which allows for animal feed to be sourced and distributed far and wide, will inevitably lead to challenges for all players in the animal feed sector.
- Any newly developed or introduced new/novel feed source or feed production system/treatment has the potential – unless subject to critical risk assessment – to impact on animal health, animal welfare or public health.
- The use of recycled industrial bulk containers (IBCs) has led to contamination of feed, impacting directly on animal health, with the potential for risk to public health.
- Poorly maintained feed stores on farm can facilitate the contamination of feed, impacting directly on animal health and potentially on public health.
- Animal feed is sometimes used as a mechanism by which animal medicines are administered to animals and thus has relevance with regard to the prudent use of antibiotics and efforts to minimise the risk of development of antimicrobial resistance (AMR).
High Level Safe Animal Feed Objective
"To ensure that feed does not present a risk to human or animal health, animal welfare or the environment, to implement an effective feed control regime – which is responsive to changing circumstances and emerging risks - across the entire feed supply chain."

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)
- Develop an integrated IT solution for recording and reporting on official controls along the feed chain (including analysis of non-compliances), and the identification of new and emerging risks arising from the controls.
- Carry out a ‘horizon scanning’ exercise in conjunction with the industry, to ensure awareness of new and emerging risks all along the entire animal feed supply chain and to take account of these risks in the risk analysis of the Feedingstuffs Annual Inspection Plan (FAIP).
- Where appropriate, carry out a risk assessment of all new/novel feeds and/or feed treatments and to incorporate the findings of these assessments in the risk analysis for the FAIP.
- In consultation with industry, create awareness among farmers and Feed Business Operators (FeBOs) of the critical role of animal feed in safeguarding human and animal health, animal welfare and the environment.
- Review the role of in-feed medication in the context of prudent use of antimicrobials and efforts to minimise the risk of AMR.

Outcome Indicators (2022)
- Establishment of an Animal Feed Stakeholder Network that will report on ‘new and emerging risks’ in the animal feed chain.
- Robust IT system delivered for the recording and reporting of all official controls along the feed chain.

K. ICT developments and data management

The availability of a modern ICT system is essential for the successful implementation of national animal health programmes. The use of such systems yields significant efficiency dividends and allows data to be gathered from a variety of sources and to be rapidly disseminated to all relevant parties. The ready availability of comprehensive data to professionals and others involved in the delivery of animal health programmes is critical to the success of those programmes.

Relevant Considerations
- The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has invested heavily in the development of its ICT systems in the last decade.
- Central to animal health programmes, controls and initiatives are ICT systems such as the Animal Health Computer System (AHCS), the Animal Identification and Movement (AIM) System, the Agriculture Farm Inspection and Testing (AFIT) System, the Laboratory Information Management System (LiMS), as well as core DAFM client and payment systems.
- Movement data captured in respect of cattle is in ‘near real time’ on an individual animal basis.
- In addition to supporting the operation of established national animal health programmes, AHCS is being further enhanced to provide the capability for dealing with outbreaks of exotic diseases.
- Linkages have been established between a number of Departmental systems and also with external ICT systems to facilitate the sharing of animal and herd health data. For example data is exchanged between the Department’s systems and the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) database in respect of the National Bovine Viral Diarrhoea eradication programme.
The DAFM Laboratories have a Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) which captures significant amounts of animal health data.

AHCS has been developed to enable two way data flows between the Department and private veterinary practitioners with regard to data relating to their client’s bovine herds.

Animal Health Ireland, through the programmes it coordinates, also generates significant animal health data – this is currently hosted by the Irish Cattle Breeders Federation (ICBF).

The ICBF also captures animal health and welfare data through its own programmes or as a service provider to DAFM.

Private industries - in particular milk and meat processors – capture certain animal health data relating to their suppliers.

It is important that linkages be established and maintained between all sources of animal and herd health data so that professionals working in this area have as full a picture as possible. This linkage is critical in supporting an effective surveillance system.

Experience has shown that the availability of ICT systems is critical to the management of animal health programmes, in particular outbreaks of exotic disease such as Foot and Mouth disease.

ICT systems require on-going investment in development and maintenance to ensure their continued relevance to the business needs.

Comprehensive data analysis informs the formulation of policy relating to the introduction and implementation of animal health programmes.

All Data Controllers and Data Processors must pay due regard to responsibilities under Data Protection legislation.

High Level Data Management Objective

“ICT and data management capability will be further developed to ensure that full advantage is taken of the possibilities offered by ICT systems. The Department will continue to utilise the latest technologies to maintain and develop world class ICT systems to support animal health and welfare in Ireland.”

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)

- Implement additional AHCS Class A functionality to meet business requirements into the medium/long term.
- Develop additional functionality to support the surveillance infrastructure, facilitate feedback of information to farmers, support inspections/controls across the animal health, animal welfare and food safety landscape, facilitate legislative reporting requirements and management of programmes and the implementation of new animal health and welfare programmes for a variety of species.
- Expand the linkages with other ICT systems that contain animal and herd health data.
- Ensure that the Department’s ICT systems are upgraded to keep abreast of developments in information technology.

Outcome Indicators (2022)

- AHCS disease management functionality and IT Architecture upgrade completed as necessary to ensure that it is fit for purpose into the medium/long term future.
- Additional functionality on the Class A disease management side to provide an enhanced level of IT functionality in the event of a Class A disease outbreak (2-3 years to implement).
- Centralised reporting capability established and with enhanced resourcing to ensure that available data is leveraged to the greatest degree possible.
L. Veterinary medicinal products

Veterinary medicines have an important role to play in terms of disease prevention, in limiting the impact of disease outbreaks when they do occur, and in protecting the welfare of animals. Notwithstanding this positive attribute, such products, if not used appropriately and prudently in animals farmed for food production, have the potential to give rise to public health risks.

The primary challenge relating to medicinal products is the threat posed by antimicrobial resistance, (AMR) which is now recognised to be a global public health risk. Whilst the relative contribution of resistance development within animal production systems is not quantified and is subject to debate, it is now unquestioned that actions need to be taken within the agriculture sector to reduce the rate of resistance development overall. Veterinary medicines, in particular antibiotics, are a precious resource whose effectiveness for both humans and animals needs to be safeguarded through responsible use by all under the ‘One Health’ banner.

Relevant considerations

- The global tendency towards consolidation of the pharmaceutical industry, and the focus on the development of human medicines, has the potential to impact on the availability of appropriately authorised veterinary medicines.
- Whilst currently there is no compelling evidence of supply or availability issues in relation to suitable medicines for cattle, sheep or pigs in Ireland, there are some identified problems with availability of suitable medicines in the case of both bees and fish.
- The equine sector presents some challenges in terms of availability, as it is a small sector in terms of scale with limited returns to be had on investment, particularly given the cost of bringing new veterinary medicines to market.
- In line with the principle that ‘prevention is better than cure’, vaccines have a significant role to play in protecting animals from a range of infectious diseases.
- Veterinary medicines lend themselves to be manufactured and traded illegally – the use of unauthorised or illegally traded product poses a risk to both animal and public health.
- Veterinary practitioners have a key role to play as custodians of appropriate veterinary medicine usage.
- AMR is a global societal concern which requires that the use of antimicrobials in farm animals is undertaken in a responsible and appropriate way.
- Where it is necessary to use antibiotics in farmed animals, it is important that they are prescribed and used prudently – the right antibiotic at the right dose to the right animal for the right time.
- Farmers also have a very important role to play in terms of ensuring appropriate usage; acknowledging and recognising veterinary medicines as not just another input to ensure productivity, but as a specialist tool to deal with specific problems.
- Effective communication of the risk posed by AMR is essential and industry bodies have a very important role to play in ensuring this risk, and the need for prudent use of antibiotics, is effectively communicated.
- Veterinary medicines, in particular antimicrobials, cannot be used as a substitute for good management and appropriate bio-security.
- Farmers, veterinary practitioners and advisors need to work together to reduce the need for antibiotic use.
- Veterinary medicine usage, in particular the use of antibiotics, needs to be part of an overall farm animal health plan focussed on the prevention of disease in the first place through good husbandry and management practices in the first instance and when using antibiotics, to use as little as possible but as much as necessary.
- Intensive production systems present particular challenges in terms of disease control and account for over 60% of the total quantity of antibiotics used in Ireland on an annual basis.
- The control of medicine use in equines presents a unique challenge in that equines can be competition animals, pet/leisure animals as well as being food animals.
High Level Veterinary Medicinal Products Objective

“Human and animal health are protected through ensuring availability of effective authorised veterinary medicines and through the appropriate and prudent use of veterinary medicines, especially antimicrobials.”

Recommended Strategic Actions (2017-2022)

- Review, on an on-going basis, the situation with regard to veterinary medicine availability and take action to ensure availability as needed.
- Implement a clear national AMR strategy, which could include
  - Developing and implementing an electronic system for collecting data on antibiotic usage.
  - Continuing to work with all stakeholders under the auspices of the Inter-departmental Consultative Committee, to ensure effective risk communication and identification of actions that need to be taken to ensure prudent use of antibiotics.
  - Ensuring monitoring for antimicrobial resistance provides a clear picture of the situation in Ireland and the risks to public and animal health.
  - Working with the Department of Health to ensure adherence to the World Health Organisation (WHO) Global Action Plan on AMR.
- Review the regulatory framework relating to animal medicines manufacture, distribution, prescription, supply and usage to ensure it clearly promotes prudent use.
- Develop prudent use guidelines for veterinarians and farmers.
- Review the Official Control Programme to ensure it is aligned with ensuring the appropriate use of veterinary medicines (dissuading the inappropriate use).

Outcome Indicators (2022)

- Problems with availability of veterinary medicines are appropriately and effectively addressed as they arise.
- Information on antibiotic usage is being collected, analysed and disseminated.
- The regulatory framework and the related control systems are consistent and robust, such that they clearly promote prudent use and deal effectively with any inappropriate use of animal remedies.
- Prudent use guidelines will have been developed and distributed.
- The Inter-Departmental Consultative Committee continues to guide policies that see a reduction in AMR development.

M. Independent scientific advice

Independent scientific advice is an important resource, both to guide and develop the National Farmed Animal Health Strategy, but also to advise on policies and programmes that will flow from the Strategy. Whilst science is an objective discipline, it is important to protect against any tendency towards loss of objectivity on particular issues or where teams of scientists and policy makers are working together on specific projects or investigations, to guard against the possibility of ‘group think’. For this reason it is important for policy makers who are charged with developing and coordinating the various responses to risks, programmes and initiatives have ready access to and utilise independent scientific advice, and are subject to such independent scrutiny on matters relating to animal health.
Relevant Considerations

- The Centre for Veterinary Epidemiology and Risk Analysis (CVERA) in UCD provides independent epidemiological support and advice to the Department, Animal Health Ireland and other bodies.
- Much of the research work undertaken by CVERA is published in high impact peer reviewed publications.
- CVERA through its network of contacts around the world enables the expertise of global scientific leaders in their fields to contribute to policy formation in Ireland.
- Additionally, DAFM has appointed a Scientific Advisory Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare, comprising national experts in a range of scientific fields, with a remit to provide independent scientific advice to the Department, to consider and advise on ways in which Ireland’s animal health and welfare can be protected and advanced and to advise the Minister in respect of matters he refers to them from time to time.
- Irish animal health scientists have contributed positively at international fora such as the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the World Organisation for Animal Health, (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO – EUFMD), gaining experience, building scientific networks which can be called upon for advice and developing opportunities for collaboration.
- The Irish Equine Centre has been recognised as an OIE World Reference Laboratory for both Equine Influenza and Equine Rhinopneumonitis.

High Level Independent Scientific Advice Objective

“Independent Scientific Advice continues to be a critical and core element of animal health policy and operational programme development – providing a broader critical knowledge base and acting as a guardian against group think.”

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)

- Renew the mandate and membership of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Animal Health and Welfare at the appropriate time.
- Review the role and scope of activity of CVERA to ensure it is closely aligned with the objectives and requirements of national policies and objectives in the areas of farmed animal health and welfare.
- Evaluate the current skills set within CVERA to ensure it is consistent with meeting the requirements of the Farmed Animal Health strategy.
- Irish scientists will continue to develop international collaborations to add to the available pool of scientific expertise which can be called upon when necessary.

Outcome Indicators (2022)

- There is continued engagement by Irish scientists with international organisations relevant to farmed animal health – European Commission, OIE, European Food Safety Authority, Food and Agricultural Organisation, etc.
- CVERA continues to maintain and expand its collaboration with other research institutions around the world.
- The Irish Equine Centre maintains its approval as an OIE Reference Laboratory status.
N. Education, training and communication

The optimisation of farm animal production is the goal of every farmer. Achieving the desired outputs and outcomes is however challenging. Farming is subject to many variables, some within the farm gate and others outside. Some matters are within the direct control of the farmer and others are not. Like all other production factors, to adequately take into account the requirements in respect of animal health, the protection of public health and the production of safe food in any farm environment, knowledge and understanding are key factors.

It is equally important that veterinarians, who are the animal health professionals providing advice to farmers, receive the best education and that their knowledge base is kept up to date with new technologies and developments regarding animal health.

Relevant Considerations

- Ireland has a strong infrastructure for the provision of agricultural education, training and advice.
- General advisory services for farmers are provided by Teagasc, as well as by a significant private sector commercial advisory service.
- The national education and training resource exists at the level of the agricultural colleges, providing courses at various FETAC levels to young farmers.
- At University level there are high quality courses in most areas of animal production and veterinary science – at both under-graduate and post-graduate levels.
- In addition a number of the regional institutes of technology are now providing courses in animal production sciences.
- In the past, the focus of training in animal health had often been on specific/individual animal disease control and prevention interventions, rather than on overall herd health as a means to optimise production.
- This focus needs to be broadened to present investment in animal health as a ‘profit centre’ in animal production, not simply as a generic standalone input cost to be reduced where at all possible.
- The requirement for core agricultural education for farmers is now included in the eligibility criteria for many EU funded support programmes in agriculture.
- Animal health elements have now been fully integrated into the current phase of the Knowledge Transfer programme under the Rural Development Programme.
- A targeted farm animal health advisory service is being provided under the Rural Development Fund to assist and provide support to certain farmers encountering specific animal health related difficulties, through on-farm veterinary evaluation and advisory service.
- Animal Health Ireland (AHI) has undertaken significant efforts in providing specific animal health, disease prevention/control and biosecurity advice to farmers and other stakeholders – through publication of brochures and meetings – in line with their strategic plan.
- AHI is now the accepted reference point for independent high quality up-to-date information relating to animal health issues in the bovine sector in Ireland.
- Such a reference point is currently not available in respect of other species.

High Level Education, Training and Communications Objective

“Education, training and communication regarding animal health and welfare is understood and accepted to be central and core to optimisation of farm animal outcomes.”
National Farmed Animal Health Strategy 2017 - 2022

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)

- Evaluate the feasibility of generating standardised sectoral advisory animal health and bio-
  security brochures and resources to sheep, pig, poultry and equine sectors, as AHI has in place
  for the bovine sector.
- Ensure that the animal health components of Knowledge Transfer initiatives under the RDP are
  delivered in the time scale envisaged and are of a consistent high quality.
- Ensure that the targeted farm animal advisory service under the RDP is delivered in the time
  scale envisaged and is of a consistent high quality.

Outcome Indicators (2022)

- A bio-security brochure and reference point will be in place in respect of other farm species, in
  addition to what is available for bovines.
- The animal health components of the Knowledge Transfer measure and the On-farm animal
  health advisory measure will have been evaluated and determined to be successful.

O. Research and innovation

Research is a vital component of a competitive, innovative and sustainable agri-industry. Industry
development plans such as Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025 have recognised the vital role
research and innovation plays in developing the scientific and technical knowledge and skills
needed to underpin the ambitious targets for the various industry sectors.

Notwithstanding the economic challenges over past years, Ireland maintained a focus on continued
investment into research, as an element within society that will support national recovery. For its
part, DAFM has consistently invested significant public funding in supporting relevant research in
the agri-food area over many years.

Relevant Considerations

- In March 2015, DAFM launched its Sustainable Healthy Agri-Food Research Plan (SHARP) which
  sets out a strategic research and innovation agenda (SRIA) for ‘Sustainable Food Production
  and Processing’ and ‘Food for Health’ priorities areas of the Government’s National Research
  Prioritisation Exercise. This plan further builds on and refines the earlier 2011 DAFM strategic
  research agenda set down in ‘Stimulating Sustainable Agricultural Production through Research
  and Innovation’ (SSAPRI) and ‘Food Research Ireland’ (FRI).
- Of particular relevance to the development of this Farmed Animal Health Strategy is the
  inclusion of a thematic area entitled Animal Production – which has a particular focus on animal
  breeding, animal well-being, animal nutrition and product quality and animal reproduction –
  recognised as worthy of research investment in line with the over-arching principles of
  supporting competitiveness, sustainability and customer focus. This reaffirms the commitment
to further research in the animal health areas, acknowledging these to be key elements, and
areas with the potential for increased contributions to the advancement of the agri-food
sector.
- Breeding for improved animal health or enhanced resistance to infectious disease has long
  been considered as a mechanism that offers potentially major benefits to the farming and
  livestock sectors worldwide.
- Ireland, through public funding, has and continues to invest heavily in the area of genomics in
  recent years.
- Whilst the initial focus was very much on productivity gains rather than improved animal health,
  attention most recently has turned to animal health aspects. Advancement in genomic research
  will provide further opportunity to consider traits relating to animal health and disease
  resistance.
There is general acknowledgement that the issue of disease resistance is complex and that there is unlikely to be any ‘silver bullet’. Nevertheless genomic selection is an important area of research and development that has the potential to contribute significantly to improved health in farmed animals in the future.

Berry et al. (Irish Veterinary Journal 2011, 64:5) concluded that ‘there is overwhelming evidence that genetics make a significant contribution to the health and resistance to disease in cattle, and that the tools for simultaneous selection on these traits and other performance traits are available. Furthermore, because of differences in exposure rates as well as the lack of complete sensitivity and specificity of tests, heritability estimates for health and disease resistance traits discussed in this review are likely to be underestimates of the true heritability. Additionally, new developments in ‘omics’ technologies provide a considerable resource that can be exploited to further increase genetic gain, especially in health and disease traits. Nonetheless, resistance to most diseases will be governed by a large number of genes, and mutations within genes. Therefore, absolute resistance is unlikely, and genetics alone is not the solution to improved animal health. Rather, it should be seen as an integral part of an overall programme for improved cattle health, both at farm level and national level’.

DAFM has invested and continues to invest significantly in research into Tuberculosis, including into intervention and diagnostics, to support eradication programme efforts.

The Scientific Advisory Committee on Animal Health and Welfare (SACAHW) has recommended that research into the ‘polledness’ trait of cattle be explored, with a view to eliminating the need to routinely disbud or dehorn cattle.

High Level Research & Innovation Objective

“Investment in research and innovation in the areas of animal production, well being, nutrition and product quality, are facilitating tangible improvements in the area of animal health.”

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)

- Identify new priority areas for research to build on the specific animal health related actions outlined in SHARP.
- Evaluate the possibility of including research into ‘polledness’ in future competitive calls for research.
- Encourage maximum researcher participation, in future competitive research calls.
- Strive to ensure that available data which can contribute to advancing research in genomic research focused on animal health/disease resistance traits are available to the wider research community – bearing in mind Data Protection parameters.
- Use research outputs to better inform breeding and management strategies that support optimum animal health and fertility performance.

Outcome Indicators (2022)

- The number and impact of new research proposals funded in the animal health area.
- The degree to which updated research outcomes are made available and their impact in enhancing animal health performance.
Chapter V
Chapter V

10. Ensuring compliance with animal health standards

It is generally necessary to provide a legislative framework to ensure the necessary collective actions that will deliver pre-determined animal health standards. Governments may need to do this in any event to ensure that ‘public good’ interests, in particular public health elements, are protected. Even in the absence of a clear public health interest, regulation may also be necessary to support collective actions on the part of an industry, as it has been shown that if all decisions are left to individuals, they will optimise their own individual short-term positions even if they are not aligned with the best interests of the industry or society as a whole. Where programmes or standards are underpinned by legislative requirements, it is necessary to ensure compliance through effective enforcement.

Relevant Considerations

- DAFM, in its regulatory roles for (1) food safety, (2) animal health and welfare, (3) plant health and (4) as the primary farm income support paying agency, is required to have in place effective control and compliance procedures to ensure that national and EU regulations are being adhered to, that the food supply chain is protected and that public monies are being protected and accounted for.
- Regulation is a key element in ensuring compliance with farmed animal health standards.
- ‘Better regulation’ is achieved through a process that involves, at the outset, clear communication of information, direction and advice to (and where appropriate training for) those subject to regulation.
- Following on from the provision of information, the second element of better regulation involves inspection/audit of a subset of operators to assess compliance.
- The DAFM inspection and control systems range from direct product/animal inspections to oversight of Food Business Operator (FBO) food safety management systems. The primary focus of these inspections/controls is to ensure that individual producers/processors are complying with minimum legislative requirements – to provide assurance regarding food safety, animal or plant health or animal welfare or indeed that necessary eligibility criteria relating to monetary transfers are in place.
- The selection and level of inspection is typically based on risk assessment or as set out in the relevant EU Regulations.
- Where compliance is significantly deficient warranting action by the competent authority the levers available to ensure compliance include administrative sanction, cross compliance sanction and/or regulatory prosecution.
- DAFM has significant experience and competence in regulation. It also has an effective investigation and enforcement capability. These are important resources that support compliance with the required animal health and welfare standards.
- DAFM has in place a Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan which sets out the level of service that customers can expect from the Department and additionally a Farmers’ Charter of Rights which makes more specific commitments to farmer customers on the enhancement of the delivery of services and schemes.
- DAFM has a Quality Customer Service Unit (QCSU) to which citizens who believe they have been treated inappropriately or unfairly by DAFM officers may lodge a complaint. The QCSU will investigate any such complaints.
- In addition to the role of the regulatory system in ensuring compliance with minimum regulatory standards, private commercial actors along the supply chain can also influence the delivery of higher standards (or the non acceptance of lower standards) through market signals.
High Level Objective with regard to ensuring compliance with animal health standards

“Regulation based on the provision of information and guidance, supported by inspection/audit and enforcement where absolutely necessary, supports compliance with the optimal standards of animal health to deliver safe sustainable agri-sector productivity and economic development.”

Recommended Strategic Action (2017 - 2022)

- Ensure that, in the context of ‘better regulation’, and in line with the principle of ‘working in partnership’, any proposed changes to, or proposal to introduce new regulations in the animal health area are subject to a consultation process prior to final implementation.
- Ensure that after any significant changes in regulation, every effort is made to ensure that citizens potentially affected are made aware of the changes and likely impact on them.
- Regularly review outcomes of inspections/audits to evaluate
  - The reasons for non-compliances, whether further communication/education is required and to undertake any such new intervention as necessary.
  - The appropriateness of sanctions imposed to ensure they are proportionate, dissuasive and effective.
- Where investigations are necessary, to carry these out in accordance with the relevant Code of Practice.
- DAFM Investigations Division to publish an annual report.
- DAFM to record on its website a summary of the outcome of any court cases relating to the areas of animal health and welfare, veterinary public health or food safety matters that it is involved in.

Outcome Indicators (2022)

- All new/revised regulatory changes will be subject to a consultation process.
- DAFM Investigations Division will have published its annual report on its activities.
- DAFM website seen to be recording details of cases dealt with before the Courts.

11. Ensuring results

Whilst the coordination and executive implementation of the various activities will invariably fall to either DAFM or Animal Health Ireland to plan, coordinate and execute, it is vital that all the relevant stakeholders and their representative organisations take responsibility for delivering on the strategy and provide the necessary active and visible leadership on animal health matters, to ensure success. All initiatives will be supported by an explanatory document setting out the scientific and other rationales for intervention.

To provide an appropriate level of objective oversight and governance, an independent ‘Farmed Animal Health Strategy Review Body’ will be established, whose members will have deep knowledge and experience from across the spectrum of farmed animal health – from production through to processing and food supply to consumers – to monitor the development and support the implementation of the strategy and to act as a link to the industry organisations and representative groups and relevant sectors in wider society.
The key functions of the ‘Farmed Animal Health Strategy Review Body’ are to:

- monitor in a systematic way the engagement by stakeholders and progress towards the delivery of the various aspects of farmed animal health objectives, strategy and initiatives.
- ensure continuous reviews of progress and identify and (where required) facilitate modifications to improve outcomes.
- benchmark any new or emerging policies against the high level objectives of the Farmed Animal Health Strategy.
- establish and maintain links to industry organisations and representative organisations.
- liaise with industry bodies and gather information that will enable better assessment of decisions made and policies being pursued.
- establish and maintain links to relevant bodies across broader society, including human health.

The ‘Farmed Animal Health Strategy Review Body’ will meet twice yearly and will provide a report of its assessment with regard to progress and implementation of the Animal Health Strategy to the Minister. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine will provide the secretariat to the Body.