

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

Change in FSA Advice on Botulism in Cattle

The attached paper updates Members on action taken by the FSA to implement the recommendations in the ACMSF's report on Botulism in Cattle (ACM/800) that in the absence of other clinical signs there should be no requirement to restrict milk or meat from healthy cattle from farms where there have been suspected cases of botulism in cattle. The Agency is developing a communication strategy in conjunction with the Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) to inform stakeholders of the change in the Agency's advice.

**Secretariat
December 2006**

Change in FSA Advice on Botulism in Cattle

1. There has been a recent amendment to the FSA's advice on the management of outbreaks of suspected botulism in cattle following recommendations in the ACMSF's report on Botulism in Cattle (ACM/800).

2. Prior to the Committee's report, the Agency's policy when managing cases of suspected botulism in cattle was to request that the farmer agrees to a voluntary restriction order on the movement of livestock and on the entry of meat and milk from the affected herd into the food chain. These restrictions applied for a period of 14 days from the onset of the last clinical case or 17 days from the removal of the suspected source of botulism and applied to both affected and healthy cattle within the herd.

3. An ad-hoc group of the ACMSF was convened in 2004 to consider the potential risk to human health from food chain issues linked to botulism or suspected botulism in cattle, particularly in relation to the spreading of poultry litter on agricultural land. Based on a thorough review of the scientific literature their report concluded that the current voluntary restrictions on meat and milk from clinically affected cattle appear to be appropriate and such foods should continue to be withheld from the food chain due to concern that this may pose a risk to consumers.

4. However, the report also concluded that voluntary restrictions applied to unaffected cattle could be considered to be over-precautionary based on current scientific evidence. This was mainly because the botulinum toxin types identified in animals (C and D) have rarely been associated with disease in humans. In addition, there is little evidence to suggest that any human cases of botulism from meat and milk consumption have occurred and there is a lack of clinical cases of botulism occurring in suckler calves in herds in which there were cows affected by botulism. The report therefore recommended that in the absence of other signs, there should be no requirement to restrict entry into the food chain of milk or meat from healthy cattle from farms where there have been clinically suspected cases of botulism in cattle.

5. The draft ACMSF report and recommendations were the subject of a three month consultation with stakeholders and other interested parties. No objections were received on the recommendations to relax restrictions on meat and milk from healthy cattle from farms where cases of botulism are suspected. The finalised report was endorsed at the main ACMSF meeting on 28th September 2006 and has been published on the Agency's website;

<http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/botulismincattle.pdf>

6. The FSA is implementing the change to its advice and will no longer request voluntary restrictions for healthy cattle from farms where cases of botulism are suspected. However, this will need to be reviewed if new evidence emerges that the botulinum toxin types that affect humans (i.e. A, B and E) are causing outbreaks in cattle. The FSA will still be informed of cases

of suspected botulism in cattle as there may be additional issues for the FSA to consider to ensure that the food chain is protected.

7. The *ad hoc* group of the ACMSF did not assess the risk to human health from food chain issues associated with suspected botulism in sheep or goats. These incidents are less common than those involving cattle and the Agency will ask the ACMSF to consider this in the near future. The FSA will therefore continue to request voluntary restrictions for healthy sheep and goats from farms where cases of botulism are suspected until this has been reviewed by the ACMSF.

8. The Agency is developing a communication strategy in conjunction with Defra and VLA to inform stakeholders of the change in the Agency's advice. This is likely to involve a letter to the consultation list for the ACMSF's botulism in cattle report and articles in the Veterinary Record, VLA newsletter and farming press. It is anticipated that this will be disseminated in early December.

9. There is some evidence to suggest that access to litter from deep litter broiler houses is a factor in the occurrence of disease in recent outbreaks of suspected botulism in cattle. We would expect litter containing carcass material to be especially high risk source material. In some cases the litter had been spread on land on which cattle were grazing or on adjacent fields, in others animals gained access to a stack of stored litter. The Agency's communication strategy will include links to guidelines on Defra's website. These aim to control the risk of botulism in cattle associated with poultry litter.

10. Other recommendations in the Committee's Botulism in Cattle report will be considered by the Agency in 2007.