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Press release

Foot-and-mouth disease: a new European Union reference mandate for ANSES and CERVA

The French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety (ANSES) and the Belgian Veterinary and Agrochemical Research Centre (CERVA) have jointly been appointed European Union Reference Laboratory for foot-and-mouth disease. This French-Belgian consortium, coordinated by ANSES, was selected following a call for applications issued by the European Commission in May 2017, with a view to replacing the current incumbent, the Pirbright Institute in the United Kingdom. Through this decision, which will take effect on 1 January 2019, the European Union is paying tribute to the commitment of both establishments to animal health, and to the quality of their research work.

Foot-and-mouth disease is an extremely contagious affliction of livestock that requires special attention from the health authorities. It is a major disease that can have a significant impact on production and international trade in foodstuffs of animal origin, as well as on food security and economic development at both local and global levels.

A new European Union Reference Laboratory for foot-and-mouth disease

Through its Maisons-Alfort Laboratory for Animal Health and in association with the Belgian Veterinary and Agrochemical Research Centre (CERVA), ANSES has just been appointed European Union Reference Laboratory (EURL) for foot-and-mouth disease. The French-Belgian consortium was selected following a call for applications issued by the European Commission in May 2017. This new European reference mandate is expected to come into effect on 1 January 2019, succeeding the current holder, the Pirbright Institute in the United Kingdom.

By granting ANSES and CERVA this status as European Union Reference Laboratory, the European Commission is paying tribute to not only the scientific work and reputation of both organisations at European and international level, but also their coordinated mobilisation to address major health issues.

ANSES and CERVA: long-standing partners

Linked by a collaboration agreement since 2009, which incidentally was recently renewed, the two organisations have combined forces on many occasions in recent years, in particular to participate jointly in research projects on animal health and food safety. ANSES and CERVA have been working together for some time now in the fields of diagnosis and reference, concerning both pathogens responsible for animal epidemics and zoonoses, and chemical agents liable to contaminate the food chain.

CERVA, which is a member of Med-Vet-Net, the European network on foodborne zoonoses, is also a partner in the European "One Health" research project coordinated by ANSES. This project will begin in January 2018 and concerns foodborne zoonoses, antimicrobial resistance and emerging risks associated with infectious diseases. Lastly, CERVA is on the editorial committee of *Euroreference*, the European journal on reference activities run by ANSES and now published jointly by 18 European organisations.

The Maisons-Alfort Laboratory for Animal Health was founded in 1901, in large part to combat foot-and-mouth disease, which was then endemic in Europe but has since been eradicated in many developed countries while nonetheless remaining a threat. As the National Reference Laboratory for foot-and-mouth disease and, since June 2015, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) Reference Laboratory, it works actively with international organisations (the OIE, the FAO - Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and its European Commission for the Control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease) in the global fight against FMD. To do this, it takes part in numerous initiatives to harmonise control programmes and standardise diagnoses, training and expert appraisals at international level, in the countries where it is still present, particularly in North Africa and the Middle East.

Through the excellence of its research and its expertise, the Belgian Veterinary and Agrochemical Research Centre (CERVA) contributes to a proactive policy in the areas of animal health, food safety and public health, at Belgian and international level. CERVA is also one of the FAO reference centres for foot-and-mouth disease and an OIE collaborating centre. For ten years, the organisation chaired the research group of the FAO's European Commission for the Control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease. Lastly, CERVA's Vesicular & Exotic Diseases unit has coordinated several European research programmes on foot-and-mouth disease and taken part in research programmes through twinning initiatives with various African countries, including Nigeria and Burundi.

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