

# A Plan to End Foot and Mouth Disease from All Americas

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American countries should approve soon a plan to terminate foot and mouth disease on the continent up to 2009. The final discussion of the matter took place earlier this month at the Hemisphere Committee for Eradication of Foot and Mouth (Cohefa), in Mexico.

The group, created in 1987 by the countries on the American continent, meets every two years and includes government and private sector representatives in the sub-regions of the continent, including the South Cone, the Caribbean and North America.

According to the president of Brazil's National Council of Beef Cattle, Sebastião Guedes, who is a member of the committee that formulated the plan, the creation of an international fund to attack foot and mouth in zones of greater risk and with fewer funds, as is the case of the Chaco region in Paraguay, Argentina and Bolivia, and the frontiers of Brazil with Paraguay and Bolivia, as well as Ecuador, will be suggested.

These four zones, as well as the North and Northeast of Brazil and Venezuela will be defined as priority areas for the Cohefa plan.

The fund should receive money from the private sector and from governments of all the American countries. According to Eduardo Correia, the president of Pan-Aftosa, a technical secretariat of the Cohefa, apart from the funds that are already forecasted by the governments of each country, which total around US\$ 500 million a year, it is necessary to collect another US\$ 48 million to make the region free of foot and mouth disease for five years. This fund will be administered by the Pan-American Health Organization (Paho).

"The North Americans are prepared to collaborate so as to increase the safety to their herds," stated Guedes. Currently, on the continent, only South America is not free of foot and mouth.

Apart from the five cases of the disease that were identified in Brazil last year, there were also two in Colombia, 42 in Ecuador, 26 in Peru and 36 in Venezuela. Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Guyana and Paraguay had no cases of foot and mouth in 2004.

## Lula in the Campaign

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva is playing an important part in the fight against the disease in South America and has already offered to lead the campaign in the region.

The Brazilian president called all countries in the region to work against foot and mouth at the Mercosur summit, which took place in the city of Ouro Preto, in southeastern Brazil, last year.

"Lula can collaborate in the case of Venezuela as he has close ties with president Hugo Chávez", stated Guedes. Venezuela and Ecuador are the countries that have the greatest problems with the disease.

From 2001 to last year, a total of 127 cases of the disease were found in Venezuela and 179 in the Ecuadorian herd.

The end of foot and mouth should bring advantages to all countries in the region, especially to those that export, like Brazil.

"Once the continent evolves and becomes a foot-and-mouth-free zone, exports will become easier and we will be able to

enter new markets, like the Japanese, Korean, currently only supplied by the United States and Australia," stated Guedes.

While Brazilian cattle beef is exported at an average cost of US\$ 2,000 per ton, Japan buys cattle beef for around US\$ 4,000 a ton.

#### Free Zone

In the Cohefa plan, the continent should be free of foot and mouth due to vaccination by 2009.

The next step will be getting recognition as a foot-and-mouth-free zone without vaccination, a status that has already been reached by some countries on the continent, like the United States.

"Once the disease has been clinically eradicated, tests will tell us when we will be able to stop vaccination," stated Guedes.

The president of the National Beef Cattle Council, who is also a consultant at the National Union of the Animal Health Product Industry, recalled, however, that eliminating vaccination too soon may increase the risks of return of the disease.

According to Correia, from Pan-Aftosa, the South American herd currently totals around 300 million heads, of which 260 million are already in foot-and-mouth-free zones.

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