

EU rules no exemption on slaughtering for Romania

The European Commission has refused to grant an exemption on cultural grounds to Romania over the home slaughter of pigs at Christmas. Many Romanian families kill one or two pigs in the festive season by slitting the animals' throats, but this contravenes a European directive that stipulates pigs, sheep and goats should be stunned first if they are being killed at home for own consumption. An investigation by Eurogroup for Animals and VIER PFOTEN Romania uncovered that the practice is still widespread in the country and wrote to the Commissioner for Health at the European Commission to alert them to the situation.

The Commission has now written back to the two organisations to admit that Romania is in breach of European legislation, and it has told the country to take action. Romania initially argued it should be given an exemption as they claimed it was a cultural tradition.

Philip Tod, spokesman for the Commissioner for Health, wrote in a letter to the two animal welfare organisations: "The Commission appreciates that the Romanian authorities may face practical difficulties, but denies having granted them any derogation. The Commission has on the contrary requested that they provide a specific action plan to address the situation as quickly as possible."

Sonja Van Tichelen, director of Eurogroup for Animals, welcomed the decision. "It is fantastic that the Commission is demanding immediate action on this medieval practice. Tradition should never be used as an excuse to make animals suffer unnecessarily. By being stunned first, these pigs can avoid a lot of agony."

Dr Marlene Wartenberg, director of VIER PFOTEN European Policy Office, added: "Romanians will still be able to keep pigs at home, but at least now the country has to reinvent the tradition in a more animal friendly way."

Eurogroup for Animals is offering to help Romania adjust to the change by giving advice and training, and will be meeting the country's agricultural minister later this month. VIER PFOTEN is supporting the change by an information campaign, run by VIER PFOTEN's office in Romania.

Free range 'no increased infection risk' for chickens

Scientists at Oxford University have found that the free-range environment is not a major source for the infection of chickens with a bug responsible for 340,000 cases of food poisoning in the UK every year.

Chicken meat contaminated with the bacterium *Campylobacter jejuni* is a major cause of food poisoning in humans. This has led to increased biosecurity measures that attempt to limit infection of chickens in intensive, housed conditions. It had been thought that free-range chickens are more at risk because they cannot be protected from outdoor infection sources such as wild birds.

'It was widely thought that free-range chickens were likely to pick up *Campylobacter* from the free-range [environment](#), particularly wild birds, but none of the evidence we have gathered supports this as a major infection source,' said Professor Martin Maiden of Oxford University's Department of Zoology who led the research.

'If this was the case then you would expect to see free-range chickens sharing

genetically similar bacteria with local wild bird populations but our study suggests that this is not the case. It's good news as it means that not being able to extend comprehensive biosecurity measures to free-range poultry is probably not the threat to human health that had been feared.'

A total of 975 chickens from 64 flocks were sampled over a period of 10 months as part of the research. Wild bird populations in the areas concerned were also studied.

The research was conducted by Professor Martin Maiden, Professor Marian Stamp Dawkins, Dr Frances Colles, Dr Noel McCarthy and Dr Samuel Sheppard of the Department of Zoology and Dr Kate Dingle and Dr Alison Cody of the Nuffield Department of Clinical Laboratory Sciences at the University of Oxford.

Source: Oxford University

Contagious swine fever detected in Slovakia

Bratislava - Thousands more pigs will have to be slaughtered in southern Slovakia following a new outbreak of highly contagious swine fever, an official said on Thursday.

A total of 13 332 pigs will have to be killed at a farm in Jesenske owned by a Danish investor, state veterinary official Milan Matus said. The cull should start at the end of the week, he added.

This farm, situated in a village some 290 kilometres south-east of the capital Bratislava is the second to be infected with swine fever in Slovakia.

The State Veterinary and Food Office (SVPS) earlier this week ordered the killing of 7 000 pigs at a farm managed by the same Danish investor, in the southern town of Dolne Semerovce. The slaughtering was to be completed on Thursday, according to Matus.

The European Commission slapped a ban on all exports of pigs and pig products out of Slovakia as well as their internal movement on Tuesday to stop the highly contagious disease from spreading.

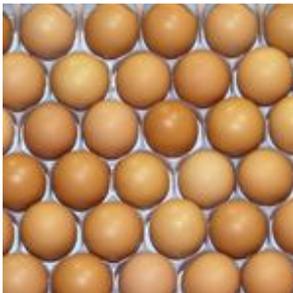
Brussels is to reconsider the ban in a meeting next Monday.

Swine fever, which kills pigs but is harmless to humans, last erupted in southern Slovakia in 2005. However, the number of pigs to be culled is far higher than the previous record of 5 914 killed in 2004 according to the Slovak media.

Unilever and McDonalds change to free-range eggs

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McDonald's and Unilever will stop using battery eggs for their products. Both multinational concerns confirmed to the animal welfare organisation Compassion In World Farming (CIWF) that they will only use free-range eggs from now on.



The Dutch/British food and cosmetics concern Unilever uses 650 million eggs per year in Europe. The eggs are used in mayonnaise, dressing, ice-cream and shampoo. To meet this demand, 2.5 million chickens are needed. Before 2010, all the products should be made from free-range eggs. The transfer from battery eggs to free-range eggs will be done in phases. It will be first implemented in Europe and then in the rest of the world.

This week, McDonald's and Unilever were awarded with the Compassion In World Farming's Good Egg Award. This award is introduced by the CIWF.

FVE Conference on MRSA "Raising awareness is key to control"

Brussels, 8 April – Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a growing problem in both animals and humans and urgent action is required – and such action should be based on a shared responsibility between veterinary practitioners and medical doctors. That was the main conclusion of the recent European conference on MRSA, organised on 8 April by the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) and financially supported by TAIEX (EU Commission, DG Enlargement).

Although epidemiological data indicated a link between antibiotic pressure and the emergence of resistant bacteria, other factors, such as hygiene measures and husbandry systems also play a role.

"This is a topic of global importance, stressed professor Johanna Fink-Gremmels (University of Utrecht), who chaired the meeting, congratulating the FVE on this timely initiative. "MRSA has an impact on both animal health and public health, added Dr Walter Winding, FVE President, "and it is time to act. Raising awareness among veterinarians, doctors and the public at large is key to tackle the problem". He also recalled that such an approach was "a good illustration of the 'one health' concept" as promoted by the FVE.

Speakers presented the topic from various angles (definition, societal concerns, MRSA in animals and working in partnership) and included representatives from DG Sanco, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the Scientific Advisory Group on Antimicrobials (SAGAM-EMEA), the Standing Committee of European Doctors, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the European Parliament.

Speakers also included scientists from various institutions in Europe and representatives from the animal health industry and farmer's organisations.

The conference was attended by 190 participants from 34 countries including the United States, and included representatives from the veterinary, medical and farming sectors as well as scientists and policy makers.