

Risk register threats



OUR ASK

A cross-government, Treasury-funded plan to deal with issues identified on the government risk register that threaten food production capability, such as African Swine Fever and plant pests.

Why it's needed

Measures to deal with, and prevent the incursion of, newly emerging exotic diseases in plants or animals that pose a threat to food security, trade and biodiversity, must be a priority for any future government.

The risk of an exotic disease or plant pest disrupting the UK's food chain is ever-present. Outbreaks of plant pests and animal diseases result in production losses and significant costs for farming businesses, the environment and the public.

The government's National Risk Register 2023 suggests that a major outbreak of one plant pest could have an economic cost of over £1 billion surrounding environmental losses alone, due to impacts on things like air quality and biodiversity loss.

We are seeing alarming incursions of African Swine Fever across Europe, and this autumn saw a small number of cases of

Bluetongue in Kent. There is a grave risk that parallel outbreaks of these diseases, alongside Avian Influenza and Bovine TB, would place unsustainable demands on regulators and the industry.

Without adequate resourcing in terms of official vets, pharmaceutical products like vaccines, and surveillance measures, domestic businesses and overall domestic food security would be vulnerable to significant impacts.

There is an urgent need to take a more strategic and long-term view of our planning and response to disease incursion mitigation, alongside the immediate control measures and planning exercises the government currently undertakes.

Any disease outbreak will have potential long-term costs and impacts on UK food security. The

delay between the final cases being resolved and the full resumption of disease-free status, which would allow trade routes to open up again, could be financially crippling to food-producing businesses.

Many farm businesses are unable to obtain disease insurance cover and the cost of secondary cleansing and disinfection can be prohibitive. There are also challenges in accessing emergency vaccines, which can resolve outbreaks quicker.



Personnel shortages are also a key strategic risk. Exotic disease outbreaks place immediate and far-reaching pressure on government agencies, such as the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), to fulfil official disease control requirements.

A long-term, funded plan would ensure the UK has the ability to resource its surveillance obligations, without restricting the business-as-usual APHA activities that are required to maintain supplies of safe food to people and protect animal and plant health.

We need stronger border controls with consumer messaging and campaigns to inform the public of the risks. Island nations such as Australia are very strict in how they protect their borders. We must learn from other nations' experiences and examples.

What it would deliver

Domestic producers must have the confidence that government is doing everything to ensure disease preparedness.

The UK's science and research facilities are world-class, but continued investment in innovative science is needed to help us deal with changing climate patterns and evolving pathogens.

Government and industry working in partnership with the science and research community to improve pharmaceutical manufacturing pipelines will

encourage business investment while also protecting our food supply chain.

The UK has recognised high animal health and welfare standards and environmental credentials. These include our globally recognised efforts to mitigate against the threat of antibiotic resistance.

Our reputation as a producer of high-quality, safe food in international markets is reliant on our ability to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to these standards. Ensuring that we

have the surveillance intelligence and mechanisms in place to keep disease incursions out, and to react quickly and appropriately should an incursion happen, will help in securing international trade deals.

The economic benefits of a pre-emptive approach, or speedy and concise response, to potential disease threats are massive. This is because trade can restart in a swift fashion without costly delays and the environmental costs of managing plant pests can also be minimised.

National Farmers' Union, Agriculture House,
Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire CV8 2TZ

 Tel: 024 7685 8500

 www.nfuonline.com

Produced by:
NFU, AGRICULTURE HOUSE
STONELEIGH PARK, STONELEIGH, WARWICKSHIRE CV8 2TZ
December 2023

