

**Advice 08-2019 of the Scientific Committee established at the FASFC on the draft royal decree concerning the control program for bovine tuberculosis****Background & Terms of reference**

Belgium is officially free of bovine tuberculosis since 2003 (Decision 2003/467/EG). However, each year a number of outbreaks are detected. The current legislation dates from 2002 and is reviewed given the current epidemiological situation in Belgium concerning bovine tuberculosis, the progress in the field of diagnostic tests and the opinion 12-2016 of the Scientific Committee in regard to the Belgian bovine tuberculosis control program. In this opinion the Scientific Committee has recommended a thorough adaptation of the bovine tuberculosis control program.

The present draft royal decree has been drafted based on the opinion 12-2016 and in close consultation with the agricultural sector. The Scientific Committee is asked to evaluate the present draft royal decree.

**Method**

This opinion is based on data from scientific literature and on expert opinion.

**Results and conclusions**

Although not all recommendations of the opinion 12-2016 have been taken into account, the Scientific Committee is of the opinion that the proposed control program is well structured. Nevertheless, the Committee has formulated some general and specific remarks on the draft royal decree.

The Scientific Committee finds it relevant that, in case a real-time polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) test on suspected lesions of carcasses at slaughter is negative, a bacterial culture is initiated (until 8 weeks) without already implementing any restrictive measures on the farm. This procedure should improve the cooperation of all actors in the field. In case of appearance of a positive bacterial culture, restrictive measures are implemented immediately.

In the proposed control program, the intradermal (ID) test is almost completely abandoned and the Interferon gamma (INF- $\gamma$ ) test and the Enzyme-Linked Immuno Sorbent Assay (ELISA) test are almost exclusively used. The Scientific Committee agrees with this adaptation given the fact that it can be scientifically demonstrated that the INF- $\gamma$  test and the ELISA test have a better individual sensitivity than the ID test (as currently executed in the field). The combination of the INF- $\gamma$  test and the ELISA test in parallel provides a very good sensitivity and relatively good specificity. The Committee wishes to point out that the 'cut off' value of both tests need to be adapted to the current epidemiological situation in Belgium.

The classification of high and low risk contact farms still needs to be elaborated. For the elaboration of such a classification, the risk factors mentioned in opinion 12-2016 can be used.

The Committee takes note of the disappearance of the mandatory bovine tuberculosis (bTB) test at purchase. In opinion 12-2016 it has been mentioned that purchase is an important risk factor for the introduction of bTB into bovine farms. In that way, it is recommended to maintain a visit of the farm veterinarian after purchase and to add sampling for bTB to the purchase testing procedures which are provided by the regional laboratories on a voluntary basis.

The Scientific Committee pleads again for the availability and open consultation of all epidemiological data for all actors of the surveillance network in order to allow a risk based surveillance.

It is recommended to evaluate the entire new program (and the disappearance of the mandatory bTB purchase test) on a yearly base.

In addition the Committee has formulated some specific remarks on the draft royal decree.

The full text is available on this website in dutch and in french.