

Advice 24-2015 of the Scientific Committee of the FASFC on a draft Royal Decree on the modification of the Royal Decree of 6 March 2007 regarding the organization of breeding programs to obtain resistance against transmissible spongiform encephalopathies in sheep breeds

Scrapie is a disease which is transferrable by prions. It is a subacute slowly progressive neurodegenerative disease of sheep and goats with a fatal outcome. Scrapie belongs to the group of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE's) of which also BSE in bovines and Creutzfeldt-Jakob's disease in humans are part. Based on the current scientific knowledge, it is generally accepted that both classical and atypical scrapie in sheep and goats are not transferrable to humans through consumption of sheep and goats products. The susceptibility for the development of classical scrapie is hereditary. By selective breeding for resistance to classical scrapie it is possible (at least in sheep) to reduce the number of affected farms. The knowledge on the genetic susceptibility of goats for the agent that causes scrapie is on the other hand much less extensive.

At the beginning of 2015, the conditions for the trade of breeding and fattening sheep and goats have been sharpened. Sheep which are carrier of the resistant ARR/ARR genotype for classical scrapie, can still be brought in trade without any additional conditions. All other animals must meet a number of conditions: breeding animals must always originate from a farm with the 'controlled risk' or 'negligible risk' status for scrapie. For fattening animals, the latter condition is only applicable for animals which are destined to a country with a national scrapie eradication program or with the 'negligible risk' status for scrapie.

The conditions to obtain a scrapie status are stipulated in annex VIII of (EC) Regulation 999/2001. Member states are free to decide whether they install a regulation for the attribution of scrapie statuses or not. Belgium wishes to make use of this possibility. The draft Royal Decree which is subject of this advice provides the conditions for the attribution of the 'controlled risk' and 'negligible risk' status for classical scrapie. Given the fact that the European conditions are entirely adopted in the Belgian legislation, the draft Royal Decree only contains a reference to the European conditions (Regulation (EC) 999/2001).

Given this context, the Scientific Committee has no specific remarks on this draft Royal Decree. The Committee supports the initiative of the Food Safety Agency to provide the legal basis to attribute a scrapie status to sheep and goat farms. After all, this allows the intra-community trade of goats and sheep which are not carrier of the resistant ARR/ARR genotype and provides at the same time sufficient guaranties to reduce the spread of classical scrapie.

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