

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## 2024 ACTIVITY AND 2025 POSITION



# FESASS

*Fédération Européenne pour la Santé Animale  
et la Sécurité Sanitaire*



**Brussels, 28th March 2025**

## Message from the President



Most of our member organisations were created in the 20th century, when serious diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease, tuberculosis and brucellosis were still scourges for European livestock farming. Thanks to everyone's efforts, foot-and-mouth disease has been eradicated throughout the EU, and tuberculosis and brucellosis have been eradicated in most Member States. Although we have never reduced our level of mobilisation, other worrying diseases have developed in the EU. I'm referring to African swine fever, highly pathogenic avian influenza, and Culicoides vector-borne diseases (BTV and EHD). All of these diseases are challenges for the veterinary authorities and weigh heavily on the livelihood of our farms. In 2024, this trend continued and even worsened, with the considerable increase in BTV accompanied by the introduction of new serotypes and new emerging diseases such as *Peste des Petits Ruminants* and sheep pox. 2025 promises to be even more formidable with the introduction of foot-and-mouth disease, twice since the start of the year, first in Germany and then in Hungary, and now its recent spread to Slovakia. This multiplication of outbreaks in the heart of Central Europe is extremely worrying.

This serious situation confirms the importance of the Union's strategy based on prevention and the work conducted by the Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies in 2024, in which our federation played an active part.

Alongside the Belgian Presidency, we co-organised a conference on biosecurity in cattle farming. The aim was to highlight the importance of this approach, including in extensive farming. We also wanted to take this opportunity to stress the importance of applied research to provide practical solutions to the various implementation problems in the field. The second aspect of the discussions conducted by the two presidencies concerned vaccination, another key element in prevention. Here too we were particularly active. Faced with the pressure of BTV and EHD, it was essential to promote the benefits of vaccination. But we also needed to think about how to manage these diseases. We therefore launched a long-term reflection process, bringing together experts from our organisations and from the Member States. We held a workshop at the European Parliament on these issues last December, and I would like to thank MEP Benoît Cassart for hosting us. We have just presented you with the initial conclusions of this work, which will continue during the first half of 2025.

We are delighted that the Commission has also committed itself to this approach. The prospect of changing the categorisation of Culicoides vector-borne diseases is a positive sign. It must be based on in-depth expertise and must not be accompanied by a total withdrawal of solidarity towards farmers. The coordination between Member States in the management of these Culicoides vector-borne diseases, which we are calling for, must also apply in terms of solidarity. Here, we invite the Commission, the Member States, and the stakeholders to

reflect on the development of means that will enable us both to support the farmers who have been hardest hit and to secure the production of suitable vaccines in sufficient quantities. The European Union's animal health strategy provides for action in this area, and it is high time we got to work. The aim is to ensure that solidarity is as uniform as possible across the European Union, mobilising both public and private funding. We will be preparing proposals along these lines in 2025.

On the legislative front, the European Commission has begun the process of evaluating the Animal Health Law (AHL, Regulation (EU) no. 2016/429 of the European Parliament and of the Council), as provided for in Article 282 of this basic text. Measuring the effectiveness of the Animal Health Law and its delegated regulations is absolutely necessary as it is a question of guaranteeing the long-term health and safety of European livestock farming. However, as we have pointed out on several occasions, this assessment is too premature. The Animal Health Law has only been in force for 4 years, and its provisions are still only partially implemented in several Member States. It is therefore difficult to accurately gauge the effectiveness of this measure, and it will undoubtedly be necessary to conduct another evaluation in around ten years' time. Nevertheless, we are aware of the importance of the work in progress and the opportunity offered, and our federation is involved in the ongoing discussions and has actively participated in various consultations.

The priority is to ensure that the Animal Health Law requirements are properly understood and applied; for example, on-farm prevention and surveillance covered by Article 25 of the Animal Health Law, with health visits. This article is essential for farmers, their animal health organisations, farm vets and the authorities. However, the conditions for its implementation need to be clarified, as much is already being done in this area, albeit in an often heterogeneous way. There is no need for a new regulation. Aware of what is at stake, FESASS, COPA-COGECA and FVE have decided to draw up recommendations for the effective application of this article throughout the European Union. This action will support the discussions within the Council led by the Polish Presidency, and then by the Danish Presidency, on this subject.

Another key point in the application of the Animal Health Law concerns the definition of cases of D and E diseases, or simply E diseases. Regarding Regulation 2020/689, the responsibility of precisely defining these cases is given to the Member States. This does not guarantee a consistent approach at European level. What may be considered a case of Johne's disease in one Member State will not necessarily be so in another. We therefore call on the Commission to review its position in the light of the current evaluation, and we remain at its disposal to contribute to the development of these definitions.

2024 also saw the renewal of the European Parliament and the European Commission. We would like to take this opportunity to salute the initiative of the MEPs who decided to set up an intergroup on sustainable livestock farming. This is part of the drive to define a long-term vision for livestock farming. Together with the other European organisations concerned, FESASS will be available to this intergroup and will participate as much as possible in its work. At the same time, the arrival of the new college of Commissioners is accompanied by a declared ambition for European agriculture. We made a written contribution to the strategic

debate initiated by the President of the Commission. We welcome Commissioner Hansen's plan to develop an overall vision for the future of European livestock farming with great interest. We will be working to ensure that this vision includes the health dimension. This is crucial to the sustainability of livestock farming, to the economy of farms, and also to the health of consumers and the environment.

For the first time, the appointment of a Commissioner in charge of animal welfare also reflects a strong priority. FESASS is aware that animal welfare is a key factor in animal health, and conversely that animal health is a key factor in animal welfare. These are two inseparable conditions for guaranteeing high-quality breeding and production. We are therefore involved in the ongoing work on welfare in transport and look forward with interest to future proposals to ensure greater consistency in the European regulatory framework for animal welfare.

With regards to our federation, our Board of Directors wanted to invest more in public relations in order to provide good quality information regarding our activities and those of our members, as well as on animal health in general. Our website has been revamped, and the latest version will be completed by the end of this half-year. We have also set up a blog on LinkedIn, which seems to be meeting a certain demand, as the number of followers is increasing. Still on the subject of public relations, in partnership with the Association of Belgian Agricultural Journalists, we organised a workshop on the challenges of evaluating the Animal Health Law. The event, which was an immense success, gave our two Belgian members - ARSIA and the DGZ - the opportunity to present the consequences of the Animal Health Law for their activities, both in terms of promoting biosecurity and combating IBR.

We have also been a member of the European Livestock Voice platform since 1 January 2025. This is a strong partnership of organisations, sharing a common vision and common values to promote a balanced debate on the livestock sector and its contribution to the European economy and society.

We have many other plans for 2025. I would just like to point out that, in view of the ongoing threat of ASF, we plan to devote most of our FESASS Days next autumn to preventing and combating this disease.

Finally, I would like to conclude by stressing the importance of international action, because diseases know no borders. The work of the WHO and FAO is to be commended. Their role is crucial and must be reiterated and supported in a world where conflicts and national egoism are weighing ever more heavily. In this context, the voice of the European Union, resolutely supporting the One Health approach, is a beacon that lights the way and must not be extinguished.

Didier Delmotte

President of FESASS