14 KEY ACTIONS FOR AN EU ANIMAL VACCINATION STRATEGY

The elements outlined below are suggestions from AnimalhealthEurope as to how a harmonised EU Animal Vaccination Strategy could take shape.

Context

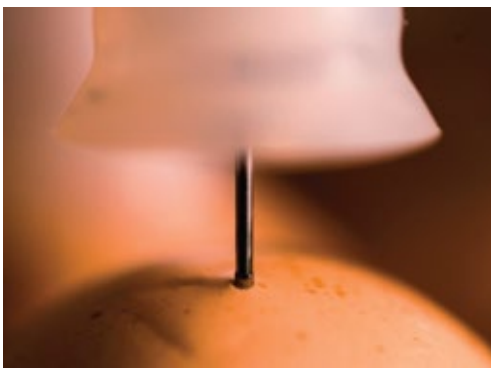
Transboundary and emerging animal diseases have been increasing in occurrence over the past few decades. Diseases which were once only reported outside of Europe's borders are now more frequently occurring on European soil, and not solely in the continent's southern climes. Relying on the reactive approach may not be the best strategy to protect Europe's animals – and maybe even our human population – from the next, inevitable disease outbreak. We need a fundamental shift from a "firefighting" approach to a "fire prevention" approach. Otherwise, the consequences of a future outbreak could spiral beyond our control, dealing a serious blow to European agriculture, public health, and the wider economy.

Although vaccination alone cannot protect all livestock species against every disease that may potentially affect animals in Europe, it remains an essential component of animal disease preparedness, alongside strong biosecurity measures. Animal vaccination also helps address citizens' concerns, particularly regarding large-scale culling and animal welfare. At the same time, harmonising animal vaccination across Europe is a complex and multifaceted issue, requiring the development of a specific, EU-harmonised strategy. Currently there are different approaches towards vaccination, between Member States, and others, sometimes even between regions in one country. This weakens the internal market as farmers and their animals are treated differently, based on the national or regional authority they depend on.

The EU has taken important steps through the Animal Health Law (EU Regulation 2016/429) in providing a robust legal framework for managing transmissible animal diseases, but it has become clear that legislation alone cannot shield Europe from the economic and social impacts of disease outbreaks. When a new disease outbreak is serious enough to impact food production and the agricultural economy, very often veterinary medicines manufacturers are contacted with the request to rapidly deliver vaccines. However, when authorities send urgent requests for a vaccine to be developed and supplied only after the emergence of an outbreak, and when use of the vaccine is not guaranteed, the need for at least minimal supply planning, as well as the time needed for vaccine development make it very difficult or even physically impossible for companies to act within the required timeframe to immediately respond to the request. An earlier and regular, data-supported exchange would significantly help to remediate this often slow and reactive approach.

Ministers of Agriculture have repeatedly called for more support for animal vaccination, and for a harmonised vaccination strategy to address these continuous outbreaks (Agrifish of October 2024, Agrifish of May 2025). More recently, Members of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Parliament also called for a harmonised approach to animal vaccination (AGRI Committee meeting of 12 January 2026). AnimalhealthEurope believes that it is now time for the European Commission to deliver an EU Strategy for Animal Vaccination. At the 79th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2024, all 27 EU countries committed to '*Ensure, by 2030, that animal vaccination strategies are defined with an implementation plan*'. Member States also agreed to similar objectives at the 92nd General Session of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) (Res. No. 29 of 2025).

SUGGESTED STRUCTURE AND TOPICS FOR AN EU ANIMAL VACCINATION STRATEGY



Removing existing obstacles to vaccination

1. Removing 'trade barriers

Trade in live animals and animal based products is directly influenced by the animal disease status of the exporting country. Vaccination, when available and fit for purpose, is widely recognised as an efficient tool to prevent diseases. Still, the use of vaccination as a disease prevention or control measure might be used by some trading partners as an excuse for restricting imports of animals or animal products. This explains, in part, why Member States often decide against preventive vaccination.

The World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) officially recognises disease–free status for seven priority animal diseases under its Official Disease Status framework. These include Foot–and–Mouth Disease (FMD), Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), Classical Swine Fever (CSF), Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia (CBPP), African Horse Sickness (AHS), Rinderpest and Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE). Rinderpest has been globally eradicated since 2011, and WOAH therefore no longer grants official recognition of rinderpest free status. Out of these seven diseases, only FMD can be recognised as having the status "disease–free with vaccination".

We believe an EU Vaccination Strategy could include the following elements:

- The Commission and Member States will work together to promote a review of the disease status frameworks agreed by WOAH, with a view to swiftly adapting it to align with the latest advances in vaccines technology, and enabling the recognition of a "free with vaccination" status where reliable and traceable (marker) vaccines are available;
- Major animal protein importing and exporting countries in and outside the EU should work together to agree on the conditions (based on WOAH standards) under which vaccination can occur, and thereafter trade of both vaccinated and unvaccinated protein can take place;
- The Commission and Member States will work together and use the so–called "animal health diplomacy" to swiftly remove trade barriers to the movement of vaccinated animals and their products;
- The Commission supports innovation in diagnostics to ensure the swift availability of diagnostics and surveillance tools to distinguish between sick and vaccinated animals.

2. Financing vaccination

There is a widening gap between the growing number of animal diseases affecting the European Union and the financial resources available to prevent and manage them, particularly in the context of declining budgets at both Member State and EU levels. As a result, it has become increasingly necessary to explore alternative mechanisms for financing animal disease prevention and management. This is particularly relevant to ensuring that funding mechanisms are sufficiently robust to support effective animal disease prevention, as it is widely recognised that prevention is more efficient and cost effective than managing animal disease outbreaks.

Additionally, the question of who should pay for the vaccines and the vaccination when it is mandated can discourage both farmers and Member States from adopting systematic preventive vaccination strategies. Additionally, different approaches between Member States (and even sometimes between regions) can negatively impact the single market and should therefore be harmonised.

Photo by Xavier Remongin

We believe an EU Vaccination Strategy could include the following elements:

- As animal disease outbreaks will continue to occur in the future, the agricultural crisis reserve mechanism needs to receive sufficient funding, as it is well documented that preventing animal diseases outbreaks is more cost–efficient than post–outbreak disease management,
- Sufficient funding should be made available, through the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) to farmers who decide to invest in animal disease prevention, as voluntary initiatives by farmers led by CAP funding might not be sufficient,
- The Commission and Members States could also explore the creation of alternative / supplementary financing systems for animal disease prevention and management (e.g. through the European Investment Bank (EIB));
- The Commission and Members States could also explore the use of tax rebates/advantages and other fiscal tools to reward farmers who actively choose to vaccinate, ensuring more sustainable food production;
- Finally, the Commission and National Veterinary Authorities could set up additional Union antigen, vaccine and diagnostic reagent banks, as provided for by the Animal Health Law.

Removing existing obstacles to vaccination

3. Animal disease monitoring

There is currently no robust disease occurrence data made available by a dedicated body at EU level, and nobody tasked with systematically providing an estimation and anticipation of when certain animal diseases may pose a risk to the European Union. The establishment of such a mechanism would allow the Commission, National Veterinary Authorities as well as representatives of the farmers organisations, veterinarians, and producers of veterinary medicines to receive early information about future diseases that are likely to impact the EU. This would allow for an informed exchange about future vaccination needs.

We believe an EU Vaccination Strategy could include the following elements:

- The Commission will ask the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to compile timely knowledge of disease outbreaks within the EU and neighbouring countries to better evaluate the likelihood that certain animal diseases will enter or move through the EU.

4. Strategic Veterinary Dialogue

There is currently no structured forum that enables regular exchange between vaccine manufacturers and national authorities. As a result, both sides may rely on assumptions or incomplete information, which could be addressed and clarified through a more systematic and constructive dialogue.

Such a "Strategic Veterinary Dialogue" should be taking place between national authorities (CVOs), the Commission, farmers, veterinarians and manufacturers of vaccines at least every year. Linked to an increased monitoring of future possible animal outbreaks (see point 3), it could allow authorities to take early decisions concerning vaccination and therefore mitigate risks of spreading diseases.

We believe an EU Vaccination Strategy could include the following elements:

- The Presidencies of the Council of the EU, together with the Commission could ensure that representatives of farmers, veterinarians and of the producers of animal vaccines are invited to a regular structural exchange during or in the margins of the Working Parties on Animals and Veterinary Questions to prepare for animal diseases outbreaks, and
- The Commission could create a network of "contact points" between authorities and manufacturers allowing a rapid alert and response mechanism in times of outbreaks.

Harmonise vaccination policies in the EU

5. Communicate on the benefits of animal vaccination

Although animal vaccination is generally not subject to negative narratives, further communication highlighting the wider benefits of vaccination beyond the immediate health of the animals (e.g. for sustainable production, food security, etc.) would be valuable. The #NoBirdFlu communication toolkit from the Commission and the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) is a welcome initiative. On occasion, most recently in France with the Lumpy Skin Disease outbreaks some resistance against vaccination occurred.

We believe an EU Vaccination Strategy could include the following elements:

- The Commission will raise awareness through dedicated communications activities on the wider benefits of animal vaccination.

6. Support innovation and simplify the regulatory environment for vaccines development

Although the EU regulatory framework is already effective in supporting animal vaccine research and approval, certain persistent challenges remain that could be addressed through legislative or non-legislative measures. Consequently, the EU regulatory environment could allow for a quicker and safe approval and production of vaccines, in particular in the case of emerging diseases impacting the EU. This could generate greater research into vaccines development.

We believe an EU Vaccination Strategy could include the following elements:

- The Commission will work with the European Parliament and the Council to ensure that the EU Biotech Act delivers on its initial goal of supporting innovation in veterinary vaccines.

Summary of Recommended Actions:

01 The Commission and Member States will work together to promote a review of the disease status frameworks agreed by WOAH, with a view to swiftly adapting it to align with the latest advances in vaccines technology, and enabling the recognition of a "free with vaccination" status where reliable and traceable (marker) vaccines are available.

02 Major animal protein importing and exporting countries in and outside the EU should work together to agree on the conditions (based on WOAH standards) under which vaccination can occur, and thereafter trade of both vaccinated and unvaccinated protein can take place.

03 The Commission and Member States will work together and use the so-called "animal health diplomacy" to swiftly remove trade barriers to the movement of vaccinated animals and their products.

04 The Commission supports innovation in diagnostics to ensure the swift availability of diagnostics and surveillance tools to distinguish between sick and vaccinated animals.

05 As animal diseases outbreaks will continue to occur in the future, the agricultural crisis reserve mechanism needs to receive sufficient funding, as it is well documented that preventing animal diseases outbreaks is more cost-efficient than post-outbreak disease management.

06 Sufficient funding should be made available, through the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) to farmers who decide to invest in animal disease prevention, as voluntary initiatives by farmers led by CAP funding might not be sufficient.

07 The Commission and Members States could also explore the creation of alternative / supplementary financing systems for animal disease prevention and management (e.g. through the European Investment Bank (EIB)).

08 The Commission and Members States could also explore the use of tax rebates/advantages and other fiscal tools to reward farmers who actively choose to vaccinate, ensuring more sustainable food production.

09 Finally, the Commission and National Veterinary Authorities could set-up additional Union antigen, vaccine and diagnostic reagent banks, as provided for by the Animal Health Law.

10 The Commission will ask the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to compile timely knowledge of disease outbreaks within the EU and neighbouring countries to better evaluate the likeliness that certain animal diseases will enter or move through the EU.

11 The Presidencies of the Council of the EU, together with the Commission could ensure that representatives of farmers, veterinarians and of the producers of animal vaccines are invited to a regular exchange during or in the margins of the Working Parties on Animals and Veterinary Questions to prepare for animal diseases outbreaks.

12 The Commission could create a network of "contact points" between authorities and manufacturers allowing a rapid alert and response mechanism in times of outbreaks.

13 The Commission will raise awareness through dedicated communications activities on the wider benefits of animal vaccination.

14 The Commission will work with the European Parliament and the Council to ensure that the EU Biotech Act delivers on its initial goal of supporting innovation in veterinary vaccines.