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Directorate F - Food and Veterinary Office

DG(SANCO)/ 2009-8266 - MR - FINAL

FINAL REPORT OF A MISSION
CARRIED OUT IN
THAILAND
FROM 16 FEBRUARY TO 27 FEBRUARY 2009
IN ORDER TO
EVALUATE THE ANIMAL HEALTH ASPECTS OF THE PRODUCTION OF
POULTRY MEAT PRODUCTS INTENDED FOR EXPORT TO THE EU

In response to information provided by the Competent Authority, any factual error noted in the draft report has been corrected; any clarification appears in the form of an endnote.

Executive Summary

This report describes the outcome of an inspection mission carried out by the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) in Thailand, from 16 to 27 February 2009.

The objective of the mission were :

- to assess the performance of the competent authority (CA) with regard to the supervision of animal health conditions of the production of fresh poultry meat and poultry products destined for export to the EU.*
- to evaluate the actions taken by the CA to address the recommendations in the report DG(SANCO)/7554/2005-MR.*

The report concludes that the CA has since 2005 generally improved the system to supervise the health conditions in the poultry sector. This system gives sufficient guarantees that cooked products to be exported to the EU fulfil the relevant Community requirements in the certificate annexed to Decision 2007/777/EC. Shortcomings exist in certain aspects of the active surveillance, in the movement control of native chickens and in the diagnostic system. While these shortcomings need attention from the CA they do not militate against the CA signing the certificate to export poultry cooked products to the EU.

The report includes a number of recommendations addressed to the CA aimed at rectifying the identified shortcomings and enhancing the control system in place.

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ABBREVIATIONS & SPECIAL TERMS USED IN THE REPORT

Abbreviation	Explanation
AI	Avian Influenza
AIV	Avian Influenza Virus
CA	Competent Authority
CRL	Community Reference Laboratory
DG	Directorate General
DLD	Department of Livestock Development
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FVO	Food and Veterinary Office
HI	Hemagglutination Inhibition
MS	Member States
MT	Mission Team
NAI	Notifiable Avian Influenza
NDV	Newcastle Disease Virus
NIAH	National Institute of Animal Health
SANCO	Directorate General for Health and Consumers
VI	Virus Isolation

1 INTRODUCTION

The mission took place in Thailand from 16 to 27 February 2009 and was undertaken as part of the Food and Veterinary Office's (FVO) planned mission programme.

The mission team (MT) comprised 3 inspectors from the FVO.

2 OBJECTIVES OF THE MISSION

The objectives of the current mission were to:

- assess the performance of the competent authority (CA) with regard to the supervision of animal health conditions of the production of fresh poultry meat and poultry products destined for export to the EU.
- to evaluate the actions taken by the CA to address the recommendations in the report DG(SANCO)/7554/2005-MR.

In pursuit of these objectives, the MT proceeded as follows:

- an opening meeting was held on 16 February with the CA. At this meeting the MT confirmed the objectives of, and itinerary for the mission, and requested additional information required for the satisfactory completion of the mission;
- the following sites were visited:

Competent authority visits		
Central	1	
Regional	1	
Provincial	2	
District	2	
Laboratory visits		
Reference laboratories	1	
Regional laboratories	2	
Primary production		
Farms	2	
Native chickens farms	2	
Fighting cocks farms	1	
Other sites		
Quarantine Station	1	
Movement check points	2	

- representatives from the CA accompanied the MT during the whole mission.

3 LEGAL BASIS FOR THE MISSION

The mission was carried out in agreement with the Thai Authorities and under the general provisions of Community legislation and, in particular,

- Article 46 of Regulation (EC) No 882/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on official controls performed to ensure the verification of compliance with feed and food law, animal health and animal welfare rules;

Full legal references are provided in Annex 1. Legal acts quoted in this report refer, where applicable, to the last amended version.

4 BACKGROUND

4.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A previous mission took place in 2005 (Ref DG(SANCO)/7554/2005) which highlighted shortcomings in relation to avian influenza (AI) definition, intervention in AI outbreaks and diagnostic activities, and the report – published on the Health and Consumers Directorate-General Internet site at http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/ir_search_en.cfm – made a number of recommendations to the CA. Written guarantees have been received from the CA in relation to the implementation of actions to address those recommendations.

4.2 PRODUCTION AND TRADE INFORMATION

Following the AI epidemic of 2004 the European Commission (EC) adopted a safeguard measure allowing only cooked poultry meat products to be imported into the EU Member States (MS). The industry adapted rapidly to this requirement, with the result that where Thailand exported on average 150 000 tonnes of fresh poultry meat products to the EU prior to 2004 their exports are now around of 170 000 tonnes of cooked products per year.

5 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 LEGISLATION AND IMPLEMENTING MEASURES

5.1.1 Findings

To address one of the shortcomings in the 2005 mission Thailand introduced in its legislation a new AI definition. An AI case is now notifiable when caused by any virus belonging to the H5 or H7 strains.

5.1.2 Conclusion

The definition of AI is now in line with those of the EC (Regulation (EC) No 798/2008) and the OIE.

5.2 COMPETENT AUTHORITY

5.2.1 Findings

No changes were noted in the CA structure since the 2005 mission. Animal health and veterinary matters in general are managed and implemented by the personnel of Department Livestock Development (DLD). The hierarchical structure consists of a central office, 9 regional offices, 76 provincial offices and 887 districts. 70 quarantine stations and 146 check points to control animal movements are also managed by veterinary staff. Two other administrative entities exist: the subdistrict and the village, but no veterinary staff are present at these levels.

At village level, the DLD relies on the activities of voluntary staff for the supervision of animal health conditions in poultry. Voluntary staff are members (often the chief) of a village who are in constant contact with the DLD local offices. Volunteers have an important role in both the passive and active surveillance of AI and poultry disease in general in the villages. They are regularly trained by the DLD on veterinary matters. AI has been the subject of continuous training in recent years and volunteers are instructed on the necessity of an early warning of veterinary staff in case of any fatal avian disease in a village. Records of training sessions and materials used during the training were always made available to the MT when requested. The effectiveness of the use of volunteers in the system was assessed by the MT in the evaluation of two outbreaks files (ref. chapters 5.3.6 and 5.3.4)

5.2.2 Conclusion

Although the CA relies greatly on the presence at village level of voluntary staff with no formal veterinary training the continuous contact with CA officials and the training provided to the volunteers has enabled the CA to intervene rapidly and effectively in the case of poultry diseases, especially AI outbreaks.

5.3 ANIMAL HEALTH SITUATION AND OFFICIAL CONTROLS

5.3.1 Veterinary supervision of farms

Broilers farms are categorised as either commercial, if they have 3 000 or more birds or non commercial if they have fewer. The commercial farms are then categorised as

standard or not standard, and some standard farms are further defined as compartment farms. A farm must have a DLD certified Good Agricultural Practices system to be classified as standard. Only such farms are allowed to produce poultry for export. A standard farm must comply with a series of criteria on bio-security and must be serviced by a private veterinarian, who has been trained and licensed by the DLD. There are more than 7 000 standard farms certified.

As far as the MT could verify, a compartment is a poultry producing unit ranging from one farm in a single location to many farms in several locations. A compartment farm must fulfil all the requirements of a standard farm. Furthermore a compartment must have a surrounding buffer zone and must undergo a special surveillance scheme for one year before being certified as a compartment. There are 31 NAI free compartments already certified, made up of a total of 172 farms. An application to be approved as a compartment must be made to the DLD office in Bangkok.

Both compartment and standard farms are under official veterinary control. DLD officials from the district must visit the farms to collect samples in the framework of the relevant AI surveillance monitoring programme. Moreover, officials from the Regional offices carry out a supervisory control twice a year in all standard farms. The MT had access to all farm records during the on-the-spot visits. The records comprised data on mortality, animal health conditions and production. Records were also available of the official supervisory activity. Records were generally found to be in good order although some information on official visits was not present at the farm. The MT could verify that the biosecurity (sites, construction etc) conditions on the farms visited conformed to the Thai requirements and were generally equivalent to standards applied in the EU.

5.3.2 Current disease situation including vaccination

Since the 2005 mission the poultry animal health situation in Thailand has been characterized by the reporting of sporadic cases of AI and no reported ND cases. The CA stated on several occasions that Newcastle Disease (ND) had not been detected for several years while 10 cases of AI were reported in the last 3 years. AI was reported twice in January and twice in November 2008. In some cases high mortality in backyard flocks was reported to the CA and laboratories but a definite cause of this mortality was not always determined, after AI and ND had been ruled out.

Thailand maintains a non vaccination policy against AI while ND vaccination is permitted and widely practiced in commercial and non commercial farming. The MT was informed that only attenuated lentogenic, mostly imported, vaccines are permitted to be used for ND vaccination; a certain amount of La Sota vaccine is also produced in Thailand. The MT was informed that illegally imported AI vaccines were seized on a number of occasions in 2006, 2007 and 2008.

5.3.3 Animal disease notification & control systems for AI and ND

To address shortcomings found in the 2005 mission, the DLD has taken several decisions and implemented several actions. First, the AI case definition has been established (ref. chapter 5.1). Secondly, areas of activity and restrictions have been established, to be set

up in case of a suspect or confirmed case of AI/ND. Thirdly, a reporting system has been designed and is in use to connect every village daily to the DLD epidemiological Unit in Bangkok.

Concerning the areas around an outbreak, movement restrictions are implemented in a 10 km zone around the case. Clinical surveillance is implemented in the 10km radius zone while in a 5 km radius zone sampling is carried out. For reporting of suspects, every afternoon all provinces of Thailand must communicate to the central level any reported mortality in poultry. This information chain can be triggered by any person via the DLD province offices and, as far as backyard flocks are concerned, by the voluntary personnel in the village via the district and province level.

Confirmation of suspect cases of poultry disease is done by any of the seven regional laboratories or by the National Institute of Animal Health (NIAH). The DLD communicates the confirmed cases to international organisations and trade partners including the EC. The MT could verify that the communication of confirmed AI cases in 2008 was carried out without delay, although this was not followed by the sending of isolated virus to the CRL as expected. At the time of the mission, the isolates of the November 2008 outbreaks had not yet been forwarded to the Community Reference Laboratory (CRL).

5.3.4 Surveillance and monitoring schemes for AI

The DLD implements regularly several active surveillance protocols/programmes, depending on the type of poultry farming. As a general rule no live poultry of any kind or category can be moved for any reason without prior sampling to exclude the presence of AI virus. Surveillance is mainly done by cloacal swabbing. Layers and breeders are sampled twice per year and a country wide surveillance activity, called "XRAY" is carried out in backyard flocks also twice a year, in all villages of targeted sub-districts.

A more intense surveillance is carried out in broilers farms. Before a broiler farm is defined as an NAI free compartment it has to undergo a one year surveillance scheme including virological and serological sampling, with AI negative results. Surveillance in NAI free compartments is then carried out only by swabbing on every other crop of broilers. Each batch of broilers in standard farms must be sampled before being moved to the slaughterhouse.

About 1 000 000 samples were taken for surveillance in 2008. In spite of the significant numbers no positive results were ever obtained from any surveillance, for AI or ND. In fact, all 4 AI outbreaks were detected in backyard flocks through passive surveillance. However, it has to be noted that backyard flocks contribute only for a small percentage of the samples taken each year. Furthermore the "XRAY" activity is carried out only in February and July, giving only a snapshot of the situation at the time of sampling ([see Endnote](#)).

5.3.5 Surveillance in wild birds

AI surveillance in wild/migratory birds has been conducted in cooperation with the

Department of National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment. In 2008, 92 species of wild or migratory birds were sampled, comprising 4787 cloacal swabs from 13 332 birds. The surveillance plan in 2009 will involve different species of migratory birds in 3 different areas. A special project is being implemented to complement the surveillance in wild birds. This is a study of the migratory bird flyway by a converging technology of satellite and radio-frequency tracking of birds of different species migrating to Thailand. Up to the present, no positive results have been found in wild birds.

5.3.6 Contingency plans for AI and ND and control of outbreaks

The DLD has produced at central level a guideline on contingency plans (CP). The provinces have adapted the guideline to their needs and produced provincial contingency plans for infectious diseases. In every province there are also permanent committees for AI. The duty of the committees is to lead all the operations when an outbreak of the disease is reported. The MT verified the availability of updated contingency plans, and the existence of the committees in the provinces visited.

The MT could also verify that the measures foreseen in the CP were implemented during the AI outbreaks in 2008. The files of two of the outbreaks in 2008 were reviewed by the MT with DLD officials. From the review it appeared that effective measures to control the disease had been taken on both occasions. The action chain foreseen to control and eradicate the disease had been followed quickly and effectively.

The suspect cases were reported by the volunteers in the villages and investigated by the nearest veterinary officials. Stamping out measures were immediately taken as soon as the veterinary officials were able to verify that the suspect cases met the criteria to declare an AI suspect. In the case of suspect AI in a backyard flock the local office can order the slaughter of the birds. The MT was told that a decision on stamping out needed to be endorsed at a higher level if an outbreak occurred in a commercial farm or compartment. The level at which such decision is taken will depend on number of birds to be slaughtered due to the differences in budget, manpower and equipment this can involve.

From the records it was also possible to follow the epidemiological investigation and surveillance activities carried out around the outbreaks. The epidemiological enquires did not come to a conclusion in the two cases reviewed. The MT was also informed that epidemiological enquires had in fact never been conclusive on the source of infection in any of the reported outbreaks. Moreover, the surveillance carried out in the 5 and 10 km radius around outbreaks concluded that virus had never spread from the index cases. However, while samples from birds in the index cases are sent for confirmation, samples from birds in contact farms are not regularly taken so that no conclusion can be made on the spread of the disease.

5.3.7 Conclusions

Although active surveillance did not detect any positive cases of either AI or ND the scale of the activities is such that it can guarantee an effective monitoring of disease at

least in the commercial flock. This may not always be the case for the entire backyard flock where the "X-RAY" surveillance has certain limitations in space and time ([see End note](#)). Contingency plans, based on a national guideline, and the establishment of dedicated computer systems, gives the CA sufficient means to operate quickly and effectively in case of outbreaks.

5.4 LABORATORIES

5.4.1 Findings

The Veterinary Laboratory Network of the DLD consists of the NIAH and seven Regional Veterinary Research and Development Centres. Improvements were noted by the MT compared to the 2005 mission. These improvements concern in particular a prioritisation system of sample analyses according to the disease status of the country. A pilot project has also been implemented for the computerisation of sample handling, although this is still limited to one laboratory. Accreditation is also underway and all labs in the network have an accredited quality system. The NIAH has been participating since 2006 in some inter-laboratory comparative tests organised by the Australian Animal Health Laboratory.

However some observations were made and some shortcomings were noted in different aspects of the laboratory activity:

- Concerning the role of laboratories:

The NIAH is considered as a National Reference Laboratory for AI and ND but no information was made available to the mission team regarding the establishment of its functions and duties ([see Endnote](#)). The NIAH provides the other laboratories with reagents, but these secondary reference reagents are not validated against international standard reagents. The staff of NIAH provides training and organizes national proficiency tests for the identification of AI viruses and for the titration of the AI specific antibodies by haemagglutination inhibition (HI) testing (2007 and 2008). However, the visits are not documented and the protocols used in the different laboratories have not yet been harmonised by the NIAH.

- Methods used in the laboratory diagnosis of AI and ND

Two methods only are routinely used in AI and ND diagnosis: virus isolation (VI) and HI. Other methods for antigen or antibody detection are not used regularly. As reported in chapter 5.3.5, backyard flocks are culled if AI is suspected, before the results of the laboratory investigations are available. In these suspected cases laboratory investigations are solely based on the few carcasses submitted for VI on embryonated eggs or on primary cell cultures. However, this test is not accredited (see next bullet point) and more importantly is not under a strict quality control system for the following reasons:

- Eggs used for inoculations are obtained from flocks which are not strictly controlled.
- Although the MT was told that eggs are often contaminated with non specific agents, embryonic death is not investigated to discriminate between deaths caused by bacterial or viral infection, including AI or ND nor is the cause of embryo weakness

investigated.

- *Accreditation*

Only one of the AI and ND diagnostic methods used (HI) is accredited, and this only at the NIAH. Virus isolation (VI) is not accredited in any laboratory although it is the method of choice for the detection of AIV and NDV and consequently the laboratory diagnosis of AI and ND ([see Endnote](#)).

- *Results*

Positive results for AI virus considered non H5 / non H7 by the regional laboratories were considered as definitive and were not sent for confirmation to the NIAH; so no further investigation was carried out to establish the exact strain of the virus.

Allantoic fluids showing haemagglutinating activity are tested with antibodies to AI H5 (and in some laboratories also to AI H7) subtype and to ND. Low pathogenic H5 or H7 AI has never been found and only a few isolates belonging to other subtypes were identified at the NIAH. In spite of the countrywide use of live attenuated ND vaccines, isolation of lentogenic vaccine type ND viruses has only been recorded in the NIAH when samples from slaughtered broilers and ducks have been analysed. However the low frequency of virus isolation could be due in this case to the isolation method used. In fact regional laboratories use cell cultures for VI when samples are not obtained from suspect cases. However the egg-adapted vaccine viruses do not grow very well on cells and may remain undetected.

- *Reporting*

Negative results (no haemagglutinating activity after one passage) were reported as AI negatives; ND is not mentioned. In some cases the embryonic mortality due to bacterial contamination or weakness of embryos was high. These were also reported as AI negatives without proper investigation or retesting of the submitted material.

5.4.2 *Conclusion*

As in the others sectors, laboratories have been constantly improving their systems since 2005. However the implementation of the quality system at the diagnostic level, although capable of ruling out AI, is not always able to guarantee a complete diagnosis. Further progress is needed in the accreditation of diagnostic methods.

5.5 TRADE & OFFICIAL CERTIFICATION

5.5.1 *Findings*

Thailand imports live poultry, essentially grand parents, and parents from EU countries. No poultry meat products are imported to be processed and re-exported to EU MS. Broilers slaughtered for export to the EU come mostly from farms located in the central part of the country. There is a movement control system based on a movement permit and health certificate that accompany the birds to the slaughterhouse. Before moving the birds, operators have to communicate to the officials of the district the route to be taken to reach the slaughterhouse. The movement of the birds, (and the movement of any other

animal), is then monitored through a network of checkpoints and quarantine stations, distributed along the main roads. A computer system has been installed to provide the check points with information on animal movements.

Certificates for export of poultry meat products are only issued by the Bureau of Livestock Standards and Certification in Bangkok using the model certificate in Commission Decision 2007/777/EC. All products to be exported to the EU are then shipped from the quarantine station annexed to the port in Bangkok.

The MT could verify the implementation of the certification and movement control system from farms to check points and quarantine stations. It was noted that in general the system was followed according to the established procedures. However it was found that movements of chickens to live markets are not always under control. The CA stated during a visit to a backyard flock that no live poultry would be allowed to go to wet markets from such flocks, and that in general no live poultry was taken to wet markets. This was not consistent with observations made by the MT, in one such market. In one quarantine station it was reported that some illegal movements exist in traditional farming. The officials showed the team some figures concerning such movements for 2008.

5.5.2 Conclusion

The certification system in place can guarantee that poultry slaughtered for export to the EU fulfil the requirements in the relevant certificate. However movements of poultry in the traditional market are not always under control.

6 OVERALL CONCLUSION

The CA has since 2005 generally improved the system of supervision of health conditions in poultry. This system gives sufficient guarantees that cooked products to be exported to the EU fulfil the relevant Community requirements. Shortcomings exist in certain aspects of the active surveillance, in the movement control of native chickens and in the diagnostic system, which while needing attention from CA do not militate against the CA signing the certificate to export poultry cooked products to the EU.

7 CLOSING MEETING

During the closing meeting held in Bangkok on 27/02/2009, the MT presented the findings and preliminary conclusions of the mission to the CA.

During this meeting, the CA acknowledged the all the findings and preliminary conclusions presented by the MT and provided commitments to further improve the system.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

The CA should provide Commission services with an action plan, including a timetable for its completion, within one month of receipt of the report, in order to address the following recommendation.

No.	Recommendation
1	The CA should ensure that laboratories performing official analyses are assessed and accredited in accordance with standards providing guarantees at least equivalent to the requirements of Article 12 of Regulation (EC) No 882/2004, taking into consideration the derogation of Article 18 of Regulation (EC) No 2076/2005. The CA should also ensure that these laboratories use the testing methods laid down in Community legislation, in particular those laid down in Commission Regulation (EC) No 798/2008, Annex III (I).

The competent authority's response to the recommendations can be found at:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/ap/ap_thailand_8266_2009.pdf

9 ENDNOTES

Concerning	Detail
Section 5.3.4	In their comments to the draft report, the CA clarified that the some 70% of all samples is taken in the framework of pre-movement surveillance, but that the large majority of the remainder is taken in back-yard flocks, following the OIE (International Animal Health Bureau) principles in the matter of frequency of sampling.
Section 5.3.7	In their comments to the draft report, the CA clarified that the time of sampling is decided according to OIE guidelines. The limitation of the surveillance to selected districts is explained on epidemiological grounds.
Section 5.4.1	In their comments to the draft report, the CA provided information illustrating this point. Two documents were provided in which the duties of the NIAH as a reference laboratory are established.
Section 5.4.1	In their comments to the draft report, the CA indicated that they are addressing this point.

ANNEX 1 - LIST OF LEGISLATION REFERENCED IN THE REPORT

Reference	OJ Ref.	Detail
Animal Health		
Regulation (EC) No 2076/2005	OJ L 338, 22.12.2005, p. 83–88	Commission Regulation (EC) No 2076/2005 of 5 December 2005 laying down transitional arrangements for the implementation of Regulations (EC) No 853/2004, (EC) No 854/2004 and (EC) No 882/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council and amending Regulations (EC) No 853/2004 and (EC) No 854/2004
Decision 2007/777/EC	OJ L 312, 30.11.2007, p. 49–67	2007/777/EC: Commission Decision of 29 November 2007 laying down the animal and public health conditions and model certificates for imports of certain meat products and treated stomachs, bladders and intestines for human consumption from third countries and repealing Decision 2005/432/EC
Regulation (EC) No 882/2004	OJ L 165, 30.4.2004, p. 1, Corrected and re-published in OJ L 191, 28.5.2004, p. 1	Regulation (EC) No 882/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on official controls performed to ensure the verification of compliance with feed and food law, animal health and animal welfare rules
Decision 2006/437/EC	OJ L 237, 31.8.2006, p. 1–27	2006/437/EC: Commission Decision of 4 August 2006 approving a Diagnostic Manual for avian influenza as provided for in Council Directive 2005/94/EC
Regulation (EC) No 798/2008	OJ L 226, 23.8.2008, p. 1–94	Commission Regulation (EC) No 798/2008 of 8 August 2008 laying down a list of third countries, territories, zones or compartments from which poultry and poultry products may be imported into and transit through the Community and the veterinary certification requirements
Directive 2005/94/EC	OJ L 10, 14.1.2006, p. 16–65	Council Directive 2005/94/EC of 20 December 2005 on Community measures for the control of avian influenza and repealing Directive 92/40/EEC