The organisation of the State Food and Veterinary Service of Lithuania

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Summary
The author describes the State Food and Veterinary Service of Lithuania, the competent authority for public and animal health in Lithuania. The Director of the Service, the Chief Veterinary Officer, reports directly to the Prime Minister.

Lithuania is divided into ten counties and thirty-four districts. The State Food and Veterinary Service has regional units in all the counties and districts and has a staff of 1,380 employees.

The main tasks of the State Food and Veterinary Service are to implement the basic EU principles of market supervision in Lithuania, with an emphasis on ensuring food safety and control; to establish a unified food control system following the principle "from farm to fork"; to create a favourable environment for the free movement of goods between Lithuania and the countries of the EU while ensuring the safety of imported products of animal origin; to promote continuous improvements in the welfare of animals and to protect the animal population from contagious diseases.

Keywords

Introduction

The law on veterinary activities in Lithuania was adopted in 1991 (1). In 1999, with the aim of providing a legal basis for the harmonisation of national legislation with that of the European Union (EU), the law amending the veterinary activities law was adopted (2). This law forms the legal basis for the enforcement of veterinary controls during the processing of products of animal origin, animal disease control and animal registration and identification.

The State Food and Veterinary Service (SFVS) is under the control of the Government, and the Director of the Service, the Chief Veterinary Officer, reports directly to the Prime Minister (Fig. 1).

On 4 May 2000, the Government of Lithuania adopted a resolution on the re-organisation of market control authorities. The State Veterinary Service and the State Hygiene Inspection, under the Ministry of Health, and the State Quality Inspection, under the State Consumer Rights Protection Service, were reorganised into the SFVS and Non-Food Inspectorate (Fig. 2) (4). These new market control authorities have been operating since 1 July 2000. The SFVS has assumed all functions of the former State Veterinary Service and the subordinate veterinary institutions.

The competent authority of the SFVS has a central administration, divided into six departments with 1,380 employees (67 at headquarters, 427 at county level, 518 at district level, 71 at city level and 297 in other institutions).

The main tasks of the SFVS are as follows:
– to safeguard the interests of consumers, to ensure that the food supplied on the internal market and intended for export complies with the requirements for safety, labelling and other mandatory indicators established by law
– to ensure veterinary and hygiene control at all stages of food handling (from crop and food animal production to supply to the consumer)
– to prevent the introduction of contagious animal diseases, to protect the national animal population from contagious diseases, to eradicate disease upon occurrence and to ensure the welfare of animals
– to promote the entry of Lithuania into the EU in the food and veterinary sectors.
HACCP: hazard analysis and critical control point
GMO: genetically modified organisms

**Fig. 1**
The responsibilities of the State Food and Veterinary Service and the ministries of Agriculture, Health and Economy in matters of food production

An organisational chart of the SFVS Administration is given in Figure 3.

The Animal Health Department is responsible for drafting legal documents on animal health, animal welfare and veterinary pharmaceutical activities. The department also establishes measures for the prevention and control of infectious and invasive animal diseases.

The Food Department is responsible for drafting the legal texts that regulate public health issues, including food safety, quality and other mandatory requirements. Veterinary food safety and hygiene control at all stages of the food handling process are also the responsibility of the Food Department which ensures that the food placed on the internal market and intended for export complies with national regulations.

The main tasks of the International Affairs and Law Department are to harmonise national veterinary legislation with EU law, to maintain relationships with international organisations and other countries and to ensure that the activities of the SFVS and all subordinate institutions comply with both the legislation of Lithuania and that of the EU. The department also manages the staff register.

The Informatics and Information Technology Department is responsible for policy issues in the field of information and public relations. The role of the Department is to disseminate information within the framework of the SFVS, abroad and on the internet, and to maintain contacts with the mass media. As part of this work the Department drafts legal documents on information issues and systems, including the registration, identification and veterinary surveillance of animals, and ensures that these systems are managed effectively.

The Strategic Planning and Finance Department develops strategic plans for the activities of the SFVS, drafts the budget and ensures optimal use of the available and planned financial and material resources for the operation of the SFVS and all subordinate institutions.
The pyramid model

Food and animal health surveillance and control are conducted by ten county food and veterinary services which are divided into smaller subdivisions in accordance with the administrative division of the country, namely: four cities and 34 districts.

The structure of the SFVS is based on the pyramid model, topped by the headquarters at national level, a county SFVS at regional level and a district SFVS at local level (Fig. 4).

The central service is responsible for the development and coordination of control policy, the analysis and assessment of data and the establishment of priorities. The county service is responsible for the development of inspection programmes and the organisation, control and audit of district service activities. The district service is responsible for the implementation and management of inspection programmes. A private veterinarian performs clinical examinations, diagnoses diseases, checks compliance with animal welfare requirements and reports to the district service. A veterinary inspector performs spot-checks and reports to the district service on a regular basis (Fig 5).

To perform its tasks and comply with its responsibilities more effectively, the central administration of the State Food and Veterinary Service has several subordinate institutions (Fig. 6).

The Border and Transport State Veterinary Service

The tasks of the Border and Transport State Veterinary Service are to protect the country from the introduction of contagious animal diseases and to prohibit the importation of low quality products and raw materials of animal origin, feedstuffs and medicines which could be hazardous for public health. Among other responsibilities, the service manages the activities of the veterinary border posts, ensures that transported goods are subjected to veterinary inspection and conducts the registration of the importers of foodstuffs.

At present, 18 veterinary border posts and 30 checkpoints operate along the borders of Lithuania. Each border post employs four to five veterinarians, depending on the capacity of the post. The posts operate around the clock.

The national programmes for the entry of Lithuania into the EU provide for the establishment of twelve long-term veterinary border posts, which are being reconstructed in order to meet EU requirements, and will be put into operation in the year 2004.

The National Veterinary Laboratory

The National Veterinary Laboratory is the central laboratory of the SFVS. The Laboratory has nine subsidiaries, one in each county.

The main tasks of the Laboratory are to safeguard the health of consumers, prevent the spread of animal diseases and improve the health and welfare of animals.

In 2000, the Food Control Laboratory of the National Veterinary Laboratory was accredited by the German
The Lithuanian State Inspection of Veterinary Preparations

The Inspection ensures that only high quality and safe veterinary medicines, medicinal substances, biologicals, diagnostics, feed additives, premixes, medicated feedstuffs, pet food, body care and hygiene products for animals or biocides, are used in Lithuania. This Department contributes to the compliance of Lithuania with EU rules in veterinary pharmacological matters.

County, city, and district State Food and Veterinary Services

Lithuania is divided into ten counties (Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda, Panevėžys, Šiauliai, Alytus, Marijampolė, Telšiai, Utena and Tauragė), each of which covers from three to six districts. There are regional SFVS in all ten counties, four cities (Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda, and Palanga) and 34 districts.

Food and Veterinary Audit Service

The task of the Food and Veterinary Audit Service is to increase the effectiveness of the Service and to ensure that public funds are managed efficiently.
Inspection of the county, city and district SFVS, and other institutions that are part of the SFVS, is conducted according to a schedule approved by the Director of the SFVS or in response to consumer complaints.

The reorganisation of market control institutions has strengthened consumer protection in Lithuania.

The SFVS is fully responsible for food safety 'from stable to table' and 'from field to fork' (Figs 7 and 8).

The SFVS has a well-developed information system and an excellent database and can therefore provide information on a wide range of topics (Fig. 9).

The key attributes of an effective Veterinary Service are as follows:

– competent national authorities, with adequate powers to implement veterinary legislation
– a clear chain of command
– adequate budgets
– skilled staff
– the ability to prevent and eradicate contagious animal diseases.
L’organisation du Service vétérinaire et alimentaire d’État de la Lituanie

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Résumé
L’auteur décrit le Service vétérinaire et alimentaire d’État de la Lituanie, dont les compétences s’étendent à la fois à la santé publique et à la santé animale. Le Service est dirigé par le directeur des Services vétérinaires, qui est directement responsable devant le Premier ministre. La Lituanie se compose de dix régions et de 34 districts. Le service vétérinaire et alimentaire d’État possède des antennes dans chaque région et chaque district, et emploie 1 380 personnes. Le Service vétérinaire et alimentaire d’État a pour principales missions de mettre en œuvre les principes fondamentaux de vérification des marchés appliqués par l’Union européenne (UE), en veillant particulièrement à la sécurité sanitaire des aliments et au contrôle des aliments ; d’instituer un système de contrôle alimentaire intégré « de la ferme à l’assiette » ; de créer un environnement favorable à la libre circulation des marchandises entre la Lituanie et les pays de l’UE tout en garantissant la sécurité sanitaire des importations de produits d’origine animale ; de promouvoir l’amélioration continue du bien-être animal et la protection des populations animales vis-à-vis des maladies contagieuses.

Mots-clés
La organización del Servicio Estatal de Alimentación y Veterinaria de Lituania

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Resumen
El autor describe el Servicio Estatal de Alimentación y Veterinaria de Lituania, la autoridad competente para la salud pública y sanidad animal en dicho país. El director del Servicio, Jefe de los Servicios Veterinarios, informa directamente al Primer Ministro. Lituania está dividida en diez condados y treinta y cuatro distritos. El Servicio Estatal de Alimentación y Veterinaria dispone de unidades regionales en todos los condados y distritos y cuenta con una plantilla de 1.380 empleados.

Las principales tareas del Servicio Estatal de Alimentación y Veterinaria de Lituania son las siguientes: implantar los principios básicos de verificación de intercambios comerciales que se aplican en la Unión Europea (UE), haciendo hincapié en la seguridad sanitaria de los alimentos y el control alimentario; establecer un sistema integrado de control de alimentos “de la granja a la mesa”; crear un entorno favorable a la libre circulación de mercancías entre Lituania y los países de la UE, garantizando la seguridad sanitaria de las importaciones de productos de origen animal; promover el mejoramiento continuo del bienestar animal y proteger las poblaciones animales contra las enfermedades contagiosas.

Palabras clave

References