

FMD Ready sub-project: farmer-led partnership for improved animal health surveillance and disease management

This project is piloting farmer-led partnerships for improved animal health surveillance. Surveillance involves monitoring of animal health and reporting of suspected significant disease. The project is looking at ways to strengthen animal health surveillance partnerships at local, state and national levels. The aim is to promote trusting and respectful relationships that will enhance animal health management and early detection of disease introduction and spread. This will result in fewer, less damaging, and more readily controlled disease outbreaks and contribute to earlier return to trade and market access.

In order to be ready for an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) or other significant diseases, livestock industries, government and researchers are looking at a variety of ways to be better prepared. The *FMD Ready* project includes a number of sub-projects:

1. Ensuring rapid diagnosis and vaccine stores are ready
2. Farmer-led surveillance partnerships
3. Improving outbreak decision support tools
4. Tracking of disease for rapid response to outbreaks

Why is this sub-project studying farmer-led partnerships?

The issue of animal health management in Australia is complex, due to the number of partners involved with different roles, resources and priorities. This means that strong and trusting relationships can be hard to make and maintain.

This sub-project is adopting an Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS) approach to address these issues and identify how animal disease monitoring and reporting in Australia might be strengthened.

What are Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS)?

In the past, agricultural research has often been initiated by researchers and governments in collaboration with industry partners. The AIS approach offers producers an opportunity for greater input to lead and seeks to connect with a broader range of relevant players. It is based on sharing of knowledge and experience between partners and within existing networks, encouraging open discussions and the trial of new ideas to address complex agricultural problems.

AIS brings together partners that are affected by, involved and interested in an issue to form something like a working group. AIS calls these groups 'innovation platforms'. In the context of this project the focus will be on animal health surveillance and may include farmers, private veterinarians, rural industries, and government representatives. For issues that need to be addressed across local, state and national levels, local groups can link with networks at other levels, making necessary legislative and governance change possible.

This sub-project is seeking to trial innovation platforms in different 'pilot' groups around Australia, in each of the five industries susceptible to FMD: beef, dairy, pork sheep and goat.

What will a pilot group look like?

Because the groups rely on producer-led partnerships to consider what change might be possible, the pilot groups themselves will create and trial innovative solutions to the complex problem of improving animal health surveillance. Each pilot will be established using the following phases:



What will be required of participants?

The pilot group will initially be organised and facilitated by the research team, with support from State government, industry and producer groups. The pilot group will meet four times each year, with the pilots starting mid 2018 and running for 18-24 months. The sub-project finishes in 2020.

What are the expected benefits for those who participate in the pilot group?

1. Early recognition of local trends in animal diseases and access to new ways of promoting good animal health surveillance and management practices.
2. Greater production efficiencies by recognising and addressing animal health threats and disease management issues.
3. Enhanced partnerships to assist with animal health surveillance and disease management specific to local producer groups or regions.
4. Opportunities for better communication of animal health and disease management issues and coordination of solutions across regional, state and national levels.

Where is the money coming from?

The FMD Ready project is dependent on in-kind contributions from livestock industries and state departments of agriculture /primary industries for which we are grateful.

This project is supported by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), through funding from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources as part of its Rural R&D for Profit program, and by producer levies from Australian FMD-susceptible livestock (cattle, sheep, goats and pigs) industries and Charles Sturt University (CSU), leveraging significant in-kind support from the research partners.

The research partners for this project are the Commonwealth Science and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), CSU through the Graham Centre for Agricultural Innovation, the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) and the Australian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, supported by Animal Health Australia (AHA).