

THE EUROPEAN SURVEILLANCE NETWORK FOR INFLUENZA IN PIGS

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The «European Surveillance Network for Influenza in Pigs» (ESNIP) was a concerted action (QLK2-CT-2000-01636) in the 5th Framework Research Programme of the European Commission.

Swine influenza viruses (SIVs) are enzootic in swine dense regions of Europe and they are a major cause of respiratory disease in fattening pigs. Until recently, however, there was no organized surveillance for influenza viruses of swine, as is the case for human and equine influenza viruses. In addition, there was no standardisation of diagnostic techniques or of the techniques used for antigenic and genetic characterisation of swine influenza virus (SIV) strains. Because of this lack of organisation and harmonisation of SIV surveillance, it was difficult to make recommendations for the control of SIV in Europe, and for the selection of vaccine strains in particular. These needs have led to the submission of a proposal for an EC concerted action by researchers from several European countries.

The ESNIP concerted action started on January 1 2001. Fourteen partners from 10 different European countries (Belgium, Denmark, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, the UK) were involved, including 2 human influenza reference laboratories and 3 industrial partners. The network was coordinated by researchers from the Institute for Animal Science and Health, the Netherlands, Veterinary Laboratories Agency, UK and Ghent University, Belgium.

The major realisations were:

- 1) The standardisation of protocols for SIV isolation and serology and for antigenic and genetic typing of SIV isolates.
- 2) The selection and production of reference virus strains and sera. These were made available to all ESNIP partners for preliminary subtyping of SIV isolates.
- 3) The establishment of a central SIV bank with a collection of recent SIV isolates from various geographical areas in Europe.
- 4) The establishment of a database with relevant information on the SIV isolates that were obtained in different countries during the network.
- 5) The antigenic and genetic characterisation of a number of recent SIV isolates from different European countries.
- 6) The organisation of a serological survey to obtain a preliminary picture of the prevalence of different SIV subtypes in various European countries.

Most important, however, is that SIV researchers and diagnosticians from throughout Europe have started to exchange information and thoughts on SIV and to speak the same language.

The concerted action has ended on December 31 2003, but it has set the stage for a further cooperation between ESNIP partners and for a more organized surveillance of SIV.

The influenza session during this symposium will in part serve to communicate the ESNIP results to the scientific community. ESNIP partners from Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK will present oral or poster communications during this session.