

Background and Context

A total of 2,026 cases of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) were confirmed in Great Britain between 20 February and 30 September 2001. Although the first case to be confirmed was in pigs at an abattoir in Essex (outbreak FMD/01), this was not the index or primary case in the epidemic.

Epidemiological evidence suggests that the index case occurred in pigs on Burnside Farm, Heddon on the Wall, Northumberland (outbreak FMD/04) which was licensed to feed waste food under the Animal Byproducts Order 1991. Disease is thought to have been introduced to this holding at the beginning of February or the end of January 2001.

It was subsequently spread in two ways. First, by the movement of pigs to an Essex abattoir and from there, by various means, to other farms in Essex and Kent. Second, airborne spread to sheep at Prestwick Hall Farm, Ponteland, Northumberland (outbreak FMD/06). Subsequent sale of infected sheep from Prestwick Hall Farm, through markets at Hexham (Northumberland), and Longtown (Cumbria), resulted in widespread dissemination of disease throughout the rest of England and Wales and to bordering counties in southern Scotland. The latter took place before the suspicion of FMD in pigs at the Essex abattoir had been reported and the index case traced and identified.

The greatest numbers of outbreaks occurred in Cumbria (893), Devon (173), Dumfries & Galloway, Scotland (176) and North Yorkshire (133), Co Durham (85), Powys, Wales (70) and Northumberland (88). Collectively, outbreaks in these 7 counties were responsible for 75.5% of all FMD outbreaks in Great Britain.

Changes to the structure of rural communities plus declining financial returns to farm businesses over many years meant that there were already some challenges to rural economies before the onset of the disease. So the impact of foot and mouth disease on the already suffering hill farmers and rural service industries was painful.

It has also had a severe effect on the more commercial farms, as well as the significant rural tourist industry, and various related service activities.

The restrictions on the movement of visitors to the countryside brought much of the tourist industry to a standstill. Furthermore, the distressing pictures of burning carcasses beamed around the world put many people off visiting Britain, not just the countryside. Though the reduction in visitors from North America was partly caused by other factors, including the economic down-turn over there, unpleasant perceptions of the British countryside did not help.

How the Topic was Handled

The Government intervened to support the countryside in a number of ways:

- Firstly, it met its legal obligation to pay farmers full compensation for the loss of livestock resulting from the enforced slaughter. As of October 2001, that figure was more than £1 billion.
- Next, it made available £39 million to the Business Recovery Fund to help small non-farming businesses. The Regional Development Agencies contributed a further £11 million, including matched European Union structural funds. As of October 2001, these funds were virtually all committed.
- The Inland Revenue and Customs & Excise treated sympathetically those businesses - both farming and non-farming - which had been affected by the outbreak. They allowed Tax, National Insurance and V.A.T. payments to be deferred, without attracting interest, where hardship could be shown. By late September 2001, the total of deferred payments was £160 million.
- A Loan Guarantee arrangement was made available, but was not taken up by many businesses.
- The Business Link Network and the Farm Business Advice Service provided professional advice to farmers and small businesses to enable them to cope with the difficulties they found themselves in.

The Banks took a sympathetic and helpful line with those customers experiencing short-term difficulties.

Finally, the farmers and businesses affected by the outbreak showed great resource in coping with the situation by finding work elsewhere. Farmers' wives were particularly enterprising in this respect.

Lessons Identified

Lessons identified are contained in the **Rural Recovery after Foot-and-Mouth Disease** report by Christopher Haskins

Contacts for Further Information

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Additional Documents

- [Rural Recovery after Foot-and-Mouth Disease](#), Christopher Haskins, October 2001.
- The [Defra website](#) contains further information about the 2001 FMD outbreak, including surveys identifying the economic impact of the outbreak, and details of the independent inquiries into the lessons to be learned from the outbreak and the policy commission on the future of farming and the countryside.