

The federal system of Veterinary Services in Switzerland

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Summary

The Veterinary Service is described in the context of the federal state system in Switzerland. The Federal Veterinary Office (FVO) plays a leading role in this Service. Apart from its responsibility for legislation, the most important task of the FVO is the dissemination of information throughout Switzerland. The responsibility for ensuring that the laws are implemented lies with the 26 cantons. Veterinary public health is a key function of the Veterinary Service, where the core focus is on the implementation of the 'stable to table' concept. Animal protection is also an important function.

A certified Veterinary Service requires a high-quality system based on professionalism, objectivity and evaluation. In this paper, the various strengths and weaknesses of the system in Switzerland are discussed and the disadvantages are analysed in depth.

Keywords

Evaluation – Organisation – Quality assurance – Switzerland – Veterinary Service.

Introduction

Switzerland is what is popularly known as a *Willensnation*, a nation forged out of will. It forms neither an ethnic, nor a linguistic, nor a religious unit. Since 1848 it has been a federal state (14).

The state structure of Switzerland is federalist, i.e., the state aims to preserve a confederation with broad independence for its individual states – in the case of Switzerland, these states are called 'cantons'. Federalism is one of the principal characteristics of Switzerland, a country which is organised politically at three separate levels: federal, cantonal and communal.

Switzerland is a direct democracy. Ultimate power lies with the sovereignty of the people. Swiss citizens have the right both at the federal and the cantonal level to participate in the government of the country through initiatives and the use of referenda.

This paper documents the basic features of the confederation of cantons, the organisation of the Veterinary Service in Switzerland and the relevant legislation. The authors demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of the federal system with regard to the Veterinary Service. Furthermore, the authors assess this Service according to the requirements of a modern Veterinary Service, as defined by the OIE (World organisation for animal health) *International Animal Health Code* (the *Code*), and, finally, comment on the problems of the Veterinary Service and the ways in which this Service could be improved.

The Confederation

The federal government is the responsible authority in all the areas in which it is empowered by the federal constitution, e.g. in foreign and defence policy, in Customs and the monetary system and in national legislation. Tasks which are not explicitly federal issues come under the responsibility of the cantons (3, 14).

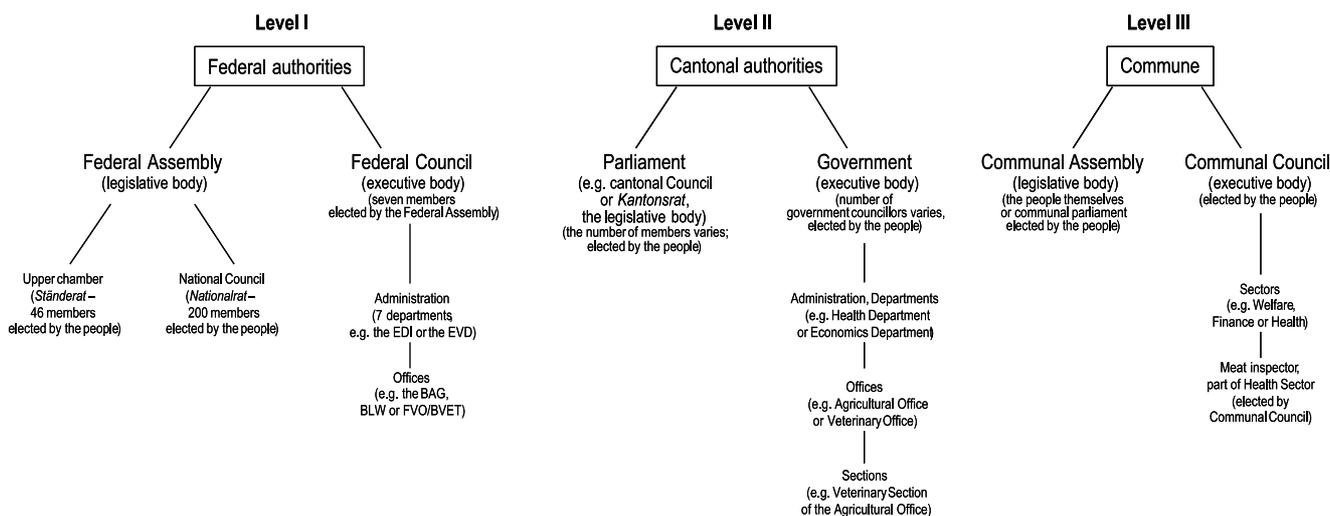
Switzerland consists of 20 cantons and six half-cantons. The cantons are the original states which formed the confederation in 1848 and assigned part of their sovereignty to this confederation. The cantons exercise all the rights which are not conferred on the federal government. Every canton and half-canton has its own constitution, its own parliament, its own government and its own courts.

The federal constitution defines the division of tasks and co-operation between the federal government and the cantons (13). They co-operate by trying to establish a consensus where differences of opinion exist and by working together to formulate the objectives of the federal government, preserve cantonal independence and allocate the enforcement of federal law to the cantons, as described by the constitution and legislation. The federal government allows cantons the maximum possible freedom in this law enforcement and takes account of cantonal peculiarities.

All cantons are organised politically into communes. In addition to the tasks assigned to them by the federal government and the canton, the communes also exercise authority in their own right. They are largely independent in the regulation of these responsibilities. The range of commune autonomy is determined by the individual cantons and therefore differs widely.

The requirements of federalism and the sovereignty of the people are also applicable to the veterinary system. The federal constitution covers most of the objectives of the veterinary system, delegating the large part of their enforcement to the 26 individual cantons. The cantons, in turn, assign their enforcement powers in part to the communes (3).

The legislative authority at the federal level is the General Federal Assembly (14). This comprises two chambers, the *Ständerat* (Upper Chamber) and the *Nationalrat* (National Council). Every canton is represented by two elected members of the *Ständerat*, and each half-canton by one member. The number of members of the *Nationalrat* per canton is determined by the population density of that particular canton. All members are elected by the people. Depending on the nature of the issue, decisions of the General Federal Assembly are subject to an optional or compulsory referendum, i.e., they must be approved by the people. The Federal Assembly also elects seven federal councillors of the Executive Committee. These seven federal councillors are responsible for the administrative authority (consisting of seven departments, e.g. the Departments of Finance, Economics and Home Affairs), which prepares and processes the business of the Federal Council (*Bundesrat*). A similar organisation is found in each of the cantons and also in each of the communes, that is, each canton and each commune has its own legislative body and executive body similar to those at the federal level (Fig. 1).



EDI : Eidgenössisches Departement des Innern (Federal Department of Home Affairs)
 EVD : Eidgenössisches Volkswirtschaftsdepartement (Federal Department of Economic Affairs)
 BAG : Bundesamt für Gesundheit (Federal Office of Public Health)
 BLW : Bundesamt für Landwirtschaft (Federal Office of Agriculture)
 FVO : Federal Veterinary Office
 BVET : Bundesamt für Veterinärwesen (Federal Veterinary Office)

Fig. 1
The organisation of the federal state system of individual cantons in Switzerland, with particular reference to the Veterinary Service

Key figures

The population of Switzerland has grown by 6% in the last 10 years. The increase has taken place largely in the agglomerations and urban centres of the lower Alpine regions, such as Lucerne, Zug and Zürich. The population currently stands at 7.26 million inhabitants, who make up approximately 3 million households (8). Probably about one in two households keeps animals of one sort or another – companion animals and/or farm animals.

The agricultural industry employs 2.7% of the population (1). The production value of the agricultural sector amounts to 7.2 billion Swiss francs (CHF), of which 70.5% comes from animal products. While the production value of animal products amounts to only CHF 650 million, animal products to the value of CHF 1.7 billion are imported every year. Approximately 70,000 livestock businesses produce animal products (10). These businesses manage 1 million hectares of farmland and are responsible for a total of 50,000 horses, 1.6 million cattle (714,000 of these being cows), 1.5 million pigs, 420,000 sheep, 63,000 goats and 6.8 million poultry. The numbers of livestock businesses and of animals have been declining in recent years. Since 1990, the number of cattle and pigs has decreased by 13% and the number of agricultural businesses by 26%. Although the proportion of agricultural subsidies remains high (69% of production value), economic prospects in the agricultural sector are not particularly favourable. Harmonisation with the European Union (EU), especially in regard to lower product prices and subsidy cuts, is resulting in major losses of income with constantly rising costs of living (8). Small farming businesses will not survive, or will only do so as part-time farms with niche products, and larger businesses will only survive if they manage to tailor their production to market demand, i.e., to meet both the economic requirements and also the high quality standards and ecological demands of both society and state.

Organisation of the Veterinary Service

The Veterinary Service consists of the Federal Veterinary Office (FVO), the cantonal veterinary medicine offices and the official veterinarians and civil servants employed by the offices and communes (3).

The main aims of the Veterinary Service are as follows (2):

- the health of animals
- the protection of people against zoonoses
- the production of completely hygienic, low-residue foods of animal origin, which neither deceive nor endanger consumers
- a caring approach to the handling of animals and appropriate animal husbandry

- the responsible use of animals
- the sustainable use of wild animals held in captivity
- the safeguarding of basic veterinary conditions to ensure access to domestic and international markets for animals and animal products
- the promotion of transparency, safety and trust
- the provision of a centre of veterinary excellence
- the dissemination of veterinary information in the areas for which the Veterinary Service is responsible.

Close relations exist between the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, the Federal Office for Agriculture and the Army Veterinary Service (3).

The Federal Veterinary Office

The FVO is part of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs and reports directly to this department. The Federal Office for Agriculture also reports to the Department of Economic Affairs, but the Federal Office of Public Health is part of the Department of Home Affairs.

The main tasks of the FVO include the following (2):

- preparing legislation
- enforcing veterinary laws and regulations at the federal level
- co-ordinating and supporting law and regulation enforcement at the cantonal level
- training for all bodies which implement veterinary legislation
- providing information and advice for interested people and organisations
- public relations (PR) work
- supporting research and development work and its implementation
- developing and promoting programmes to protect human health
- developing and promoting programmes to prevent and treat animal diseases
- liaising and co-operating with national and international organisations.

The FVO is also directly responsible for the enforcement of import, export and transit laws, and employs veterinarians for border, export and inspection controls of export plants. These veterinarians report directly to the FVO and usually operate on a part-time basis.

The cantonal Veterinary Services

The cantonal Veterinary Services do not report to the federal authorities, but to the cantonal administrations. However, the reporting lines and organisational structures differ in each case. Depending on the canton, the Veterinary Service may report to cantonal departments of Health, Economic Affairs or Agriculture. The Veterinary Service may take the form of an independent office, a service within an office with full-time

employees, or a person reporting, in a part-time capacity, directly to a government department. In the canton of Bern, for example, the Veterinary Service is located within the Office of Agriculture. In the cantons of Zürich and Lucerne, the Veterinary Service is an independent office located within the Health Department, and in the canton of Nidwalden, the Veterinary Service consists of a single staff member, working in a part-time capacity, who reports directly to the Health and Social Security Department.

To ensure effective law enforcement, the cantons employ official veterinarians and veterinary supervisors. Whereas official veterinarians are selected by the government, serve a sub-region of a canton, e.g. a district, and also perform duties of a direct nature (inspections and disease control measures), the veterinary supervisors are employed by the cantonal veterinarian at an operational level and, in most cases, act indirectly (providing information, advice and surveillance). Official veterinarians and veterinary supervisors mostly perform their duties, like the border and export veterinarians, in a part-time capacity. Usually these official veterinarians and veterinary supervisors are practising veterinarians with their own practice.

The functions of the cantonal Veterinary Service are extremely diverse. The main duties are as follows (3):

- the enforcement of federal laws on animal diseases
- animal protection
- the control of animal-derived foodstuffs and veterinary medicines
- the training of livestock dealers, bee inspectors, animal attendants and, in conjunction with the FVO, official veterinarians.

As part of these duties, cantonal Veterinary Services may perform any or all of the following tasks:

- monitoring animal health
- requesting services from official veterinarians, veterinary supervisors and inspectors
- monitoring the activities of export veterinary supervisors
- providing support to the federal authorities in enforcing import and export controls
- supervising the livestock trade and meat inspectors in the abattoirs
- ensuring that animal waste products are disposed of safely
- conducting official veterinary inspections on stock farms
- issuing animal-keeping licences for zoo animals and wild animals
- assessing and approving projects which include experiments on animals
- dealing with cases of animal neglect or abuse, for both farm animals and companion animals.

In addition, cantonal Veterinary Services keep the animal disease register, issue licences for veterinary practices, and monitor the use of veterinary medicines.

Some functions are assigned in differing degrees to the communes, for example, meat inspections, enforcement of dog-keeping laws and the disposal of animal waste products.

Legislation

Swiss veterinary law encompasses legislation relating to animal diseases, food, animal protection and medications. These four areas are expressly anchored in the Federal Constitution (13). Article 80 of the Constitution lays down the definitions for animal protection, and Articles 97 and 118 address food safety, medications, and measures to control and prevent animal diseases.

The principles are laid down in the Animal Diseases Act, the Foodstuffs Act, the Medicines Act and the Animal Protection Act. These laws regulate the material guidelines and determine which functions are the responsibility of the federal government and which are the responsibility of the cantons. State agreements, such as the Agreement on the Protection of Endangered Species, occupy a position judicially comparable with that of the laws. In addition, immediate action may be directly ordered by the FVO in the context of the Animal Diseases Act.

The essential executive orders are found in the ordinances of the Federal Council, as follows, namely in:

- the Animal Diseases Ordinance
- the Ordinance on the Disposal of Animal Waste Products
- the Meat Hygiene Ordinance
- the Foodstuffs Ordinance
- the Animal Protection Ordinance
- the Ordinance on the Protection of Endangered Species
- (in the future) the Ordinance on the Flow and Use of Veterinary Medicines.

International trade is covered by the Ordinance on Import, Transit and Export of Animals and Animal Products. In contrast to the other ordinances, this ordinance does not delegate the direct task of enforcement to the cantons (3).

These ordinances are regularly updated to take into account new or 'state-of-the-art' developments, customary trade practices and the concerns of society.

Technical implementation procedures and guidelines for enforcement, which are defined in the ordinances and issued by the responsible federal departments or offices, serve to supplement these laws, albeit without any legally binding status.

The cantons also issue laws and ordinances concerning animal diseases, foodstuffs and animal protection. These laws regulate

cantonal responsibilities and administrative procedures, and, in exceptional cases, material law.

Requirements of a modern Veterinary Service

Veterinary public health is a core function of the Veterinary Service (4, 5, 6). Veterinary public health comprises all areas of veterinary medicine concerned with protecting humans from the risks to health caused by animals and animal products. Animal protection is a component of veterinary public health because, with foods of animal origin, consumers have high expectations with regard to animal-keeping standards and appropriate animal husbandry systems, which provide for and promote animal health.

Food supervision 'from stable to table' is becoming an international requirement (5, 6). More and more consumers demand complete disclosure of the production process and full traceability back to the place of origin. President of the EU Commission, Romano Prodi, underlined this demand when he stated that, 'Citizens want, and have the right, to be told the whole truth and nothing but the truth about their food' (5).

There is a demand, especially for export purposes, for certified and accredited Veterinary Services which are subject to international scrutiny. 'Certification' relates to the administrative processes and 'accreditation' to laboratory control and inspection activities. The White Paper on Food Safety, published in January 2000 by the EU Commission, contains, among other things, the proposal for a new independent advisory body to be created in the form of an institute for food safety (5). This institute would provide information and promote communication and quality-assured Veterinary Services in the enforcement and modification of veterinary legislation. Anyone wanting to export animals, foodstuffs of animal origin and other animal products to the EU must satisfy the requirements laid down in this White Paper in the medium term. These requirements correspond to a modern system of food controls which is appropriate to the times, is of socio-political relevance and receives widespread recognition.

According to the *Code*, the prerequisites for a certified and accredited Veterinary Service are built on three founding principles, namely:

- a) professionalism
- b) objectivity
- c) evaluation.

Professionalism refers to technical and scientific competence and to experience, independence, incorruptibility, consistency and integrity (12). Technical and scientific competence and experience require academic training, a structured course of

further training as a veterinary specialist and continuing education. The decisions of the Veterinary Service must be made without being subject to any economic, financial, political or religious affiliations or threats of any kind, they must be applied consistently, and they must show a high degree of integrity.

Objectivity refers to defined structures, authorities and decision-making processes, especially with regard to animal identification, animal trading, disease monitoring and enforcement and communication (12). For example there should be binding job descriptions that regulate the rights and obligations of authorities. Similarly, to facilitate quality assurance, standards for the following processes should be documented in a manual or manuals:

- monitoring and diagnosing diseases
- data gathering
- licensing procedures
- inspection and control activities
- rapid dissemination of information and communication
- the rights of complaint and appeal.

Communication promotes objectivity and includes both PR work and proof of performance. *Objectivity* also includes a regular self-examination procedure which reviews the declared objectives internally and not only reveals any errors, but also helps to optimise the performance of the Veterinary Service.

The third prerequisite for a modern certified Veterinary Service is *evaluation* (12). Only evaluation allows firm conclusions to be drawn about the fitness of Veterinary Services and permits comparisons to be made between individual services. The evaluation must be conducted as an impartial and bilateral procedure, addressing the processes and also the self-examination procedure of the Service, and drawing up a report in each case. Evaluation ultimately leads to a rationalisation of the discussion, is a learning process for everyone involved, helps to provide justification for political decisions and prompts further questions. A core feature of the evaluation is the 'follow-up' i.e., the continuing evaluation and/or resolution of any problems revealed.

Strengths and weaknesses of the Veterinary Service

Among the strengths of the Veterinary Service in Switzerland are the following:

- the constitutional character and the federalist structure
- the high standard and rigorous enforcement of its laws
- the broad support for this legislation by the people
- the part-time system, which makes it possible to have a dense network of Veterinary Services throughout Switzerland, so that

most Swiss citizens have access to Veterinary Services in their local area

- the high degree of commitment of the personnel and their strong identification with the aims of the Veterinary Service
- the substantial expertise of the Service
- the willingness to operate as a team
- the competition among the cantons, which strengthens the resolve to improve the quality of the Service.

Among the weaknesses of the Veterinary Service in Switzerland are the following:

- the federalist system, which does not allow for central leadership
- the part-time system
- a lack of sufficient professionalism
- a low degree of objectivity
- a lack of evaluation
- a lack of quality assurance
- the differences in reporting lines among cantons
- the duplication of processes
- differences in enforcement
- the minimal influence of the FVO on the resources and activities of the cantons
- a lack of structured training
- the fact that veterinary public health is not a major focus in basic training
- the poor perception and low status of the Veterinary Service within Switzerland, due to inadequate communication and, to a large extent, lack of lobbying.

These two lists show that these strengths and weaknesses often, paradoxically, overlap. This is especially true in the case of the federalist structure of the Service and the part-time system. These two aspects give rise to problems which make it difficult to enforce veterinary law effectively and, in particular, raise the question, at least in some respects, as to whether the Swiss Veterinary Service is relevant to or 'in step with' the times, as defined by the OIE Code.

Problems

Federalism

The organisation of the Veterinary Service in Switzerland, as it stands today, is in keeping with the federal constitution and thus the will of the people. The federalism and sovereignty of the cantons are highly prized (11). Federalism, together with the widespread system of part-time service, ensures that most Swiss people have Veterinary Services nearby, and they are therefore more likely to have personal contact with the service and more faith in the system. Strategies that run counter to federalism or the sovereignty of the cantons, e.g. the formation of 'super-cantons' or the transfer of cantonal tasks to the federal

authorities, have so far mostly met with resistance in Switzerland (7). A lack of trust in the federal authorities and the desire to preserve independence and existing rights or possessions means that individual cantons are reluctant to work together (15). This prevents the integration and supportiveness which would otherwise enhance professionalism and objectivity. However, the problem with a more strongly federalist system would be the need for close co-operation between the three levels of authority (federal, cantonal and communal). This conflicts with the sovereignty and diversity of the cantons and communes (11, 15).

Co-operation

Since the cantonal veterinary offices do not report directly to the FVO, co-operation between federal authorities and cantons is difficult. A requirement issued by the federal authorities does not always have equal effect in all cantons because the cantonal authorities do not always interpret federal instructions in the same way. Thus, the same federal instruction can often have very different consequences in each canton, none of which may be close to what was originally intended. The direct influence of the FVO on the cantonal veterinary offices is limited, because the FVO has neither the authority to issue instructions nor any influence on the resources available to the cantons. Any attempt on the part of the FVO to supervise the cantonal veterinary offices or to issue direct instructions generally leads to a defensive reaction from the cantons (7).

Sovereignty and diversity of cantons

The differences that exist between cantons result in a wide diversity of Veterinary Services. Such differences include the following elements:

- size
- financial resources
- population density of humans and animals
- differing approaches and attitudes
- different agricultural and economic structures
- differences in the distribution of urban areas
- a lack of consistency in Veterinary Service reporting lines.

These elements all affect the sizes and facilities of the various cantonal Veterinary Services. While there is no full-time permanent staff member for the Veterinary Service in the canton of Nidwalden (which has 0.35 of a full-time staff position), or in the cantons of Schaffhausen and Uri (0.5 each), the canton of Lucerne has 8.5 permanent staff members to enforce veterinary regulations and the canton of Zürich has 13. Even if the permanent posts are calculated per capita, per number of abattoirs and stock farms, per tonnage of waste or per livestock equivalent, substantial differences emerge. These differences also have an impact on the financial resources at the disposal of the various cantonal Veterinary Services, however, those Veterinary Services with fewer resources and only part-time veterinarians must still accomplish the same tasks as those Services that are more fully staffed.

Part-time system

Just as the federal system shows both strengths and weaknesses, the part-time system also has advantages and disadvantages. These advantages have already been mentioned, that is, trust, local knowledge, and the ease with which people have access to Veterinary Services because there is always a local service nearby. The disadvantages of the part-time system stem from the very fact that duties are performed in a part-time capacity. Above all, this imposes limits on professionalism, i.e. on the specialist competence and independence associated with the Service. It is inevitable that there will be conflicts of interest and that the Veterinary Service will be a minor focus, rather than the major focus, of the part-time worker. The differences in salary between independent veterinarians and veterinarians in the employ of the canton are an additional problem of the part-time system. These problems hinder meaningful collaborations, the development of common strategies of law enforcement and the establishment of a consistent public image of the veterinary profession.

Substantial differences also emerge, however, not only in terms of the size and facilities of the Veterinary Service in each canton, but also in terms of the nature, scope and focus of the enforcement of veterinary laws. What is seen in one canton as a violation of the law, and met with the appropriate warnings and penalties, may incur no penalty in the neighbouring canton. Animal diseases are perceived and treated differently, as are violations of the animal protection laws.

In some cantons, for example, enforcement of the law on animal protection falls under the jurisdiction of the agriculture department, not the Veterinary Service. In other cantons, animal protection, at least with regard to farm animals, is the responsibility of the Veterinary Service, which reports to the Department of Health rather than the departments of economics or agriculture. Inevitably, there are differences in enforcement practices among these cantons, particularly as there are no standard approval and inspection procedures for all cantons. In some cases, a lack of competence, objectivity and transparency contributes to the inconsistency in the enforcement procedures of the Veterinary Service. Another factor contributing to this inconsistency is that the various levels of the enforcement procedure (information, advice, surveillance, control, warning and, finally, the issuing of penalties) are not always given equal attention. Legislation to date deals primarily with direct enforcement (control, warning and penalising) and only marginally addresses indirect enforcement (information, advice and surveillance). Stakeholders such as veterinary supervisors or health service staff, who could increase indirect enforcement through regular farm visits, are not systematically integrated into the implementation of the laws. It remains to be seen to what extent this gap can be closed by the recently revised animal protection law. One of the principal changes in this new

legislation is to include indirect enforcement as a cornerstone of law enforcement.

Training

A further problem concerns education. Even though the criteria for the election of senior veterinary officers are laid down by law, structured training for qualification as a veterinary officer is only in place to a limited extent. The fact that veterinary public health is neither taught nor offered as a main subject, or even as a subsidiary subject, in the basic curriculum at the Universities of Bern and Zürich limits the potential for new staff to have even a basic understanding of this topic.

Communication

Just as with education, there is no adequate, commonly agreed, communication strategy. Positive proactive communication tends to be the exception. As a rule, media communications are issued as a reaction to events and emergencies. This does little to foster the image of the Veterinary Service and ultimately diminishes its credibility.

All of the above problems affect the FVO itself, and some act to weaken its power. For example, the FVO has an annual budget of only CHF35 million (about €23 million) whereas the Federal Office for Agriculture has a budget of CHF3.5 billion (about €2.3 billion). A further problem is caused by the fact that different offices, which report to different departments, are responsible for various components of the process 'from stable to table'. For example, the Federal Office for Agriculture is responsible for monitoring feedstuffs, while the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, not the FVO, is responsible for veterinary medicines and food controls from the abattoir onwards. Responsibilities and areas of common activity are not clearly defined, sometimes leading to duplication of effort or gaps in the process.

Outlook

The Veterinary Service in Switzerland is fulfilling its purpose, even if the requirements of a modern organisation, in international terms, are only partly being met. Examples of its achievements, which are acknowledged both nationally and internationally, are as follows:

- the current impressive disease status of Switzerland, i.e. freedom from all OIE List A diseases and many List B diseases, has been demonstrated
- the high level of animal protection which has already been achieved
- the high standard of food safety.

There are various reasons for these successes. First, the federal authorities are always prepared to implement and enforce

legislation fully and consistently, through information, persuasive arguments, facts and the provision of technical resources which enable the cantons to accept federal standards. At the same time, the veterinary authorities, in particular the cantonal veterinarians, show a high level of competence, even if this level may differ from one canton to another. These authorities demonstrate that they are willing to meet constantly changing needs, to engage in continuous improvements in quality and to accord the Veterinary Service the importance it deserves. The promotion of animal health and food safety for the protection of humans is a generally accepted objective to which a high level of importance is attached in society, which therefore justifies an appropriate deployment of resources.

The problems of the Veterinary Service are recognised, and there is the desire to solve them and to adapt existing structures to a more up-to-date organisation in line with the requirements of the *Code*. To create a more professional Veterinary Service it will be necessary to move forward, step-by-step, without fully dispensing with the federalist structure and the part-time system. Steps in this process include the following:

- to promote inter-cantonal co-operation
- to form regional veterinary units which allow a professional and efficient approach to the work (7)
- to involve stakeholders, especially those who are employed on the indirect side of enforcement (information, advice and surveillance), and to ensure that they are appropriately compensated
- to introduce and establish quality management for the certification and accreditation of the Veterinary Service
- to provide harmonised basic training in veterinary public health
- to insist that all people employed as public servants by the Veterinary Service undertake a programme of structured training
- to strengthen positive communication in the form of appropriate information and advice
- to foster a positive image of the Veterinary Service and the entire veterinary profession.

There are currently numerous projects ongoing to optimise the Veterinary Service, among them are the following:

- institutionalising inter-cantonal co-operation in selected regions of Switzerland with the aim of furthering professionalism and using available resources cost-effectively without adversely affecting the quality of service that already exists
- introducing veterinary public health as a unit of study at university faculties to increase technical competence
- establishing a strong association of cantonal veterinarians who co-operate to promote, implement and sustain the programmes of the Veterinary Services
- establishing, at the federal level, an ‘Office’ for food safety to cover all processes ‘from stable to table’.

Even if many of the cantons desire increased leadership and support from the federal authorities, the introduction of optimisation processes has to be increasingly a ‘bottom-up’ rather than a ‘top-down’ procedure, especially if they affect the cantons. This is in accordance with the principle of federalism which is held in such high esteem in Switzerland, in contrast with countries where control is much more centralised. As the 19th-century Swiss writer and statesman Gottfried Keller (1819-1890) said, ‘*Zuhause muss beginnen, was leuchten soll im Vaterland*’ (charity begins at home) (9). This is as true today as it ever was. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that the resources available for the Veterinary Service are limited, at a time when the economic outlook is anything but favourable, and cannot simply be increased as one pleases. Resources must, therefore, be used in a selective and cost-effective manner.

Le système fédéral et les Services vétérinaires en Suisse

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Résumé

Les auteurs décrivent le Service vétérinaire à la lumière du système fédéral suisse. L'Office vétérinaire fédéral (FVO) joue un rôle primordial au sein de ce Service. Outre ses responsabilités législatives, la tâche la plus importante du FVO concerne la diffusion de l'information à l'échelon national. Le respect de l'application de la loi relève de la compétence des 26 cantons.

La protection de la santé publique vétérinaire est une activité essentielle du Service vétérinaire, notamment lorsque l'accent est placé sur la mise en œuvre du concept « de la fourche à la fourchette ». La protection des animaux représente une autre tâche importante.

Tout Service vétérinaire certifié doit se doter d'un système de qualité fondé sur le professionnalisme, l'objectivité et l'évaluation. Les auteurs de l'article examinent les forces et les faiblesses du système helvétique et procèdent à une étude approfondie de ses lacunes.

Mots-clés

Assurance qualité – Évaluation – Organisation – Service vétérinaire – Suisse.



El sistema federal de Servicios Veterinarios en Suiza

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Resumen

Los autores describen el funcionamiento del Servicio Veterinario en el contexto del sistema de Estado federal de Suiza. La Oficina Veterinaria Federal desempeña el papel conductor en este Servicio. Aparte de su responsabilidad en materia de legislación, su tarea más importante consiste en la difusión de información en todo el país. La responsabilidad de asegurar la implementación de las leyes les corresponde a los 26 cantones.

La salud pública veterinaria es una función clave del Servicio Veterinario, siendo su foco esencial la implementación del concepto «del establo a la mesa». La protección de los animales es también otra función importante.

Un Servicio Veterinario certificado requiere un sistema de alta calidad basado en la pericia, la objetividad y la evaluación. En este artículo, se comentan los diversos puntos fuertes y puntos flacos del sistema en Suiza y se analizan a fondo las desventajas.

Palabras clave

Aseguramiento de calidad – Evaluación – Organización – Servicio Veterinario – Suiza.



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