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DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION OF AN ANIMAL HEALTH DATA RECORDING SYSTEM IN SWISS DAIRY FARMS

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Cette étude a pour objectif le développement et l'évaluation d'un système d'enregistrement des données sanitaires en élevage bovin laitier. Des fiches pour l'enregistrement des événements liés aux maladies, aux traitements préventifs et aux pratiques d'élevage ont été développées et testées au cours de deux phases successives de huit et cinq mois dans 49 élevages. Les données ont été centralisées tous les mois pour permettre un retour d'information immédiat. Les critères d'évaluation comportaient la qualité des données (validité et exhaustivité), et l'acceptation à long terme du système par les éleveurs. Le développement d'un tel système, en collaboration avec les vétérinaires praticiens et les organisations professionnelles, est critique pour la mise en place d'un réseau d'épidemiosurveillance global des maladies animales dans les élevages laitiers.

INTRODUCTION

The provision of reliable animal health data for epidemiological as well as for economical purposes in a wide national range is becoming more important in the context of epidemiosurveillance networks. The purpose of an animal health data recording system is to provide complete accurate and timely relevant data about diseases and health related treatments. This study aimed principally at the development and evaluation of a data recording system on commercial dairy farms, which can be applied in the context of surveillance networks.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methods for data collection were developed based on procedures used in an earlier project in Switzerland (Frei-Stäheli et al., 1997). A recording/report sheet was created both for health data collection and for feed back of information to farmers. In close collaboration with herd veterinarians, farmers recorded all the events of their livestock using a coding list which contained disease events, preventive treatments and management practices. Data were monthly updated in a central computer database. Two groups of farmers were selected to test the recording system. The first group consisted of thirty-two farmers, who were enrolled in the earlier project (Frei-Stäheli et al., 1997) and were thus trained to record data. The second group was composed of seventeen untrained farmers. The system was applied in the first group for eight months. After this first phase, an interim evaluation of the acceptance was made by interviewing the farmers. They were questioned about expenditure of time, motivation and personal opinion. The system was adapted accordingly and tested for another five months in both groups. Data quality was evaluated by internal data checking and by the comparison of collected data with data from external sources.

RESULTS

The interim evaluation has shown that it took farmers between five and thirty minutes per week to fill out the sheets. Seventy-five per cent of them kept the forms in the house as opposed to the stables. Seventy-two per cent recorded the events immediately, the others within one week. The collaboration of the herd veterinarians was in most of the cases very good.

DISCUSSION

In this study, the acceptance of the method was an important issue. Preliminary results showed, that recording health data with this method was not very time-consuming or difficult for the farmers. Results from a second interview at the end of the data collection allowed a final evaluation. We found that regular feedback of information to farmers on the health status of their herd was critical for their cooperation and motivation to participate in this project.

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