Letter to the Editor

Animal farms 2001

Recently media tried to convince the public about the rationality of the preventory actions against foot and mouth disease (FMD) raging in G. Britain and encroaching on Europe. It would be perhaps useful to present somewhat different vision of this problem.

It is surprising that all the images of rare cruelty, which were presented to the public, did not wake up to much questioning. Many of these gruesome pictures were waking many extremely bad associations.

Of course, I am not a vegetarian, neither activist of any humane society but the decisions taken and measures which were adopted and presented in fight against this epidemic were rendering very perplex. They were simply shocking certainly also to many others by their cruelty, by the waste and by lack of consideration for life of beings such as are the farm animals and also very little consideration for the farmers no matter what attached to their cows, pigs, etc.

The decisions of extensive unproductive slaughter of animals even only suspected to be in contact with others were dictated by clearly mercantile considerations. They were based on the WTO agreements signed years ago on initiatives of some partners (mainly US and UK) eliminating from the world trade all animal products from the countries with outbreak of FMD or products simply containing the antibodies against it.

The very last point is the main cause of the termination of the vaccinations in Europe and of course also of reappearance of sensibility of our mainly bovine herds (other cloven-hoof animals were “too cheap” to be vaccinated even then) to this disease. The results of such desire to attain the immunologic purity at all cost, how it happened recently in UK and to way smaller extent on the Continent, is emptying whole regions from the cloven-hoof animals (Artiodactyls).

Here, one needs to remind that developed countries impose very justly very strict standards of well being of farm, laboratory and domestic animals. And so suddenly, almost nobody says anything to protest against the tragic fate of millions of animals slaughtered hastily.

To calm our consciences we were presented the accounting sheets comparing the losses due to this “euthanasia”, as it was euphemically called, with hypothetic losses in foreign trade.

It is know, however, that the international trade has functioned well before the introduction of all these embargos on the products caring the antibodies against FMD. It is also known that the sick animals can recover becoming, however, less productive. There are in the world multiple areas with endemic FMD and it is clear that in this new world of increasing free trade and intensification of all kinds of exchanges between various countries, the movements of persons and goods will bring us more than once this pathogen and also the others. The question arises: Are we going to stick to such strategy in the future and clean/sterilise our woods, fields and farms from all cloven-hoof species?

All this taken apart, it is very surprising that otherwise quite outspoken organisations such as animal protection societies were suddenly so silent about this cruel destiny reserved to so many of living beings, which are none less our farm animals. The same for sometimes very visible and audible activists of nature protection to not to use the word ecologists. Most of them seemed to have really other things to do.
The consumption of meat and the fate reserved to animals was always raising ethical questions. It is perhaps quite old-fashioned at present time when only profit taking counts, to formulate ethical interrogations. Nevertheless, one is tempted to ask: Can we say anything positive about the animal well-being and about ethics of human–animal relations in the present situation?

Additionally, we can be very anxious imagining how our occidental civilisation with no compassion what’s ever for the whole animal populations in health crisis will maintain high standards of humanist and humanitarian values in the future?

The present strategy of defence against FMD is looking relatively efficient when adopted at the very beginning of the epidemic. It risks, however, to turn into absurd drama when more infection spots are present. In such a scenario, substantial parts of Europe risk either to be covered by the animal crematory piles or subject to the strict quarantine rules stopping virtually all human and animal mobility. Pushing this logic further, the question arises: How to stop bird and insects from flying and how to prevent the movement of other animals such as rodents, cats, dogs, etc.?

Perhaps it would be better in such a case to spare, vaccinate and before anything else also cure those animals, which are sick. When their time would come either use their products on the national markets or export them after good sterilisation.

After all it is already almost more then 100 years that Pasteur achievements are known and there are plenty of skills available to render the animal products sterile and harmless.

And, if necessary, the politicians should rethink and renegotiate the agreements.

There would be great time that Europe which was an example of human and technical progress of all kinds, catches up and secures finally the decent treatment of animals, which are assuring our well being already from thousands of years.

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