

## **Foot and Mouth Disease is back in Europe and threatens the UK.**

### **Outbreaks in Europe**

On 18 April 2025, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) reported the FMD situation in Europe as follows:

- “After more than 35 years of being FMD-free, Germany reported an FMD type O outbreak [in water buffalo] in January 2025 but regained its FMD-free status by April.”
- "Hungary [has] reported 5 outbreaks (1064 cases, 1372 susceptible); Slovakia 6 outbreaks (45 cases, 7440 susceptible)" since March 2025 [in cattle in both countries].
- “The three countries have implemented biosecurity measures including stamping out, movement control, disinfection and surveillance. Slovakia applied emergency suppressive vaccination; Hungary has not.”
- EU-level responses include: “EUVET deployment, regionalisation measures, immediate culling, emergency vaccination, and movement restrictions based on EU regulations”.

The sources of the outbreaks are as yet unknown. According to the British Agricultural Bureau, the closest sequence to all Hungarian and Slovakian infections was last recorded in Pakistan in 2018, suggesting they were all from the same source, while the closest sequence to the infection in Germany was recorded in Turkey in 2024 and previously seen in Iran, India and Nepal. Both Hungary and Slovakia have suggested a possible biological attack.

### **Risk of spread to the UK**

As a result of the above outbreaks in Hungary and Slovakia, on 3 April, DEFRA assessed the risk of FMD entering the UK over the next three months as ‘medium’.

“This means that the virus is expected to enter Great Britain ‘regularly’ over the next 3 months. The risk of entry of FMDV was considered highest through commercial, personal or illegal trade in products of animal origin (POAO). Each of these routes had a medium risk (meaning that the virus is expected to enter Great

Britain ‘regularly’ over the next 3 months through each of the commercial, personal and illegal trade routes).”

DEFRA’s risk assessment went on to warn of the risk of spread in to and across other EU countries through people and wild animals.

“Given the possibility of human-mediated spread and wild animals being infected in the region and the frequency of new cases being reported to date, we cannot rule out the possibility of sudden wider geographical movements of the disease into new areas over the coming days and weeks.”

Of particular concern is spread to GB’s trading partners in the EU and then to GB via imports of animal products.

“Great Britain’s top 5 EU trading partners for imports of products of animal origin (POAO) from susceptible species into GB are the Republic of Ireland, Netherlands, Germany, Poland and Denmark. Given the proximity to known outbreaks, a major concern is that the disease will spread undetected into Poland and subsequently spread to Great Britain through commercial, personal or illegal movement of POAO before the presence of disease is detected in Poland.”

The assessment also noted that, despite multiple safeguard measures, “there is continued importation of high volumes of illegal products of animal origin, with high volumes routinely seized at ports of entry such as Dover. This poses a major risk concern for spread of FMD (and other pathogens) into Great Britain”.

In view of the above, the DEFRA risk assessment proposed a “straightforward ban on all meat and dairy products from the EU”.

On 9 April, DEFRA announced a ban on bringing meat or dairy products from certain animals (including cows, sheep, pigs and goats) into Great Britain for personal use from the EU and several other countries, and on commercial imports of hay and straw, live animals and specified animal products, from EU countries with FMD (ie Germany, Hungary, Slovakia) or adjacent countries (Austria). Farming and food industry leaders have called for tighter biosecurity measures.

## The 2001 epidemic

The UK has been FMD free since 2007, when there was a small, contained outbreak in Surrey (caused by discharge of infectious effluent from a laboratory). The 2001 epidemic, however, affected vast swathes of the British countryside. More than 6.5 million animals were slaughtered. The countryside was shut down for several months, severely affecting recreation, tourism and the tourist industry. According to the National Audit Office, “the outbreak cost the public sector over £3 billion and the private sector more than £5 billion”. The human and social cost was much greater. The mass slaughter of farm livestock (and even some domestic pets), and the ways in which the slaughter and disposal of animals was ‘managed’ (especially in the early days) left many people deeply traumatised. For some the epidemic marked the end of their businesses and way of life.

## How to pray?

No one would wish for a repetition of FMD 2001, nor for any outbreak of the disease here, and our first resort must surely be to pray and seek the Lord’s mercy. Here, therefore, are some suggested directions for our prayers.

1. Pray for understanding, wisdom and discernment to know how to pray, speak and act, for God’s people to ‘understand the times and know what to do’ (1 Chronicles 12:32) - in this and in all matters.
2. Especially, pray for a revealing of “God’s hidden governance behind visible states of affairs”. Every calamity can be understood as a wake-up call to seek the Lord in prayer, humility and repentance (2 Chronicles 7:13-14). But farming’s troubles are also ‘signs of the times’, and part of a wider global “roaring of the waves and tumult of the people” (Psalm 65:7).<sup>1</sup>
3. Pray for farmers and for all affected by the outbreaks in Hungary and Slovakia, and for all fearful of the disease reaching their own livestock in those and neighbouring countries, and here in the UK.
4. Entreat the Lord to watch over and secure the borders of the UK - to ‘strengthen the bars of our gates and make peace within our borders’

(Psalm 147:13-14). Pray for the containment and retreat of the disease in Europe.

5. Pray for the UK and EU governments and their agencies and advisors to be vigilant, and act wisely, with fairness and compassion, and not to use the issue to advance political agenda or seize excessive power.

The risk of an FMD epidemic in the UK is just one of many farming woes (including other animal diseases) that we have drawn attention to. Citing Hosea (4:1-3), John Plumb saw the current 'disruption' in farming as the 'land mourning' - the result of God's displeasure at the moral state of our nation, and a call to repentance and prayer. In two articles ('the meanings of calamities', reaping what we sow'), I explored in depth the biblical link between moral conduct and calamities in farming and the imperative of repentance.

SOURCE: [Hope Countryside](#)