BACKGROUND

The Caribbean Animal Health Network (CaribVET), established in 2003, brings together national veterinary services of all Caribbean countries and territories. Its aim is to achieve more effective animal health prevention and control within the region.

Given the high heterogeneity of Caribbean countries and territories and the numerous exchanges between them, animal health risk management (RM) is a huge regional challenge. As the scientific basis for RM, risk assessment (RA) is hence becoming a fundamental element of the network’s activities.

OBJECTIVES:

- Assess perception of Veterinary Services use of risk assessment
- Identify principal exotic diseases of concern in the Caribbean Region and their means of introduction

MATERIALS & METHODS

1. Questionnaire edit by the Epigroup members.
   - Indicate perceived domain for the application of RA methodologies (control and or prevention of endemic and or exotic diseases)
   - Prioritize specific objectives to be pursued by the use of RA methodologies
   - Rank major ways of introduction of 5 exotic diseases selected from a list of 25
   - Evaluate 13 ways of introduction of chosen diseases according to perceived importance for the country.

2. Questionnaires submission and collection
   - Questionnaire submitted to the Chief Veterinary Officers (CVO) of 27 Caribbean countries by the chair of Epigroup.
   - Answers were collected by one Epigroup member, coordinating this work.

3. Survey results summarised and discussed during a three-day meeting attended by fourteen animal health officers from six countries.
   - A score i was attributed between 1 (low importance) and 3 (high importance) for each proposed way of introduction. Score 0 when the CVO was not able to evaluate the importance.
   - For each country c, a score $S_c$ was calculated for each specific way of introduction $j$ by summing up all the weighted scores provided:
     $$ S_c = \sum_{i=1}^{25} \omega_i X_{ci} $$
     where $\omega_i$ = frequency of the score $i$, and $X_{ci}$ is the weight of score $i$, with $\omega_1 = 1$, $\omega_2 = 2$, and $\omega_3 = 3$.
   - Scores $S_c$ were combined across countries to obtain an overall ranking $S_j$ of the importance of different routes $j$ for the introduction of exotic animal diseases in the region:
     $$ S_j = \sum_{c=1}^{6} S_{cj} $$

RESULTS

Country-specific concerns to specific diseases:

- Some diseases were considered important to all countries
- The most likely route
- Second most likely route

CONCLUSIONS & PERSPECTIVE

Recommendations

- Joint formal risk assessment of introduction of selected exotic infectious diseases (of shared regional interest) offers clearest opportunity for collaborative work among Veterinary Services in Caribbean region and should be a priority.
- Current understanding of exchanges of animals & products in region is limited and should be improved.

Perspectives

- CaribVET strategy of moving towards more coordinated regional work may be a useful example for other regional networks that face similar challenges in assessment and prevention of animal health-related risks.

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