

# A Survey of the Veterinary Situation in the Winter Pastures of Georgia and Recommendations for their Improvement

An Initiative of the Georgian Carnivore Conservation Project



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## Summary

This report provides an assessment of the current status within the state veterinary service in Georgia. The rights and obligations of the Agency of Food Safety, Veterinary Service and Plant Protection at the city and district level are discussed. The specific activities of the Veterinary Supervision Department in implementing the State Program of Animal Disease prevention are analyzed.

The report also focuses on the current state of the veterinary service in Dedoplistskaro and the availability of those services to the livestock-owners overwintering on the Dedoplistskaro pastures. The cost of sheep vaccinations and other prophylactic treatments are analyzed and the specifics of aid available to the shepherd under the State Program are also described. Finally, the requirements for improving the quality and accessibility of veterinary service for shepherds are explored and recommendations made.

Conclusions made include:

- the need for a state programme for such sheep-specific diseases as *bradsot* (an inflammatory disease of the intestines) and *sheep-pox*
- the necessity of restoring a diagnostic mobile laboratory team (formerly under the Ministry of Agriculture) in Dedolpistskaro
- The restoration of veterinary stations in the region to improve access to veterinary service for those on winter pastures as well as a means for controlling epizootic diseases
- The equipping of such posts by the local authorities

The implementation of these and other activities described in the report will ensure the availability of modern veterinary services to the shepherds working in the region. It is anticipated that the realization of such improvements will pave the way for increases in the incomes typical within the livestock industry and subsequent improvements of the social-economic conditions of their families. In addition, benefits of these improvements should extend to the work of the Agency of Protected Areas and, more specifically, the Vashlovani Protected Areas Administration in their role as protectors of the semi-arid ecosystem where many of the livestock owners tend their sheep.

## **Brief survey and analysis of the state policy and programs regarding veterinary care to domestic livestock**

The formation and implementation of state veterinary programs in Georgia is the responsibility of the National Agency of Food Safety, Veterinary Service and Plant Protection (NAFVP), an agency of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). The rights and obligations of this agency relating to matters of veterinary care are regulated by the Law on Veterinary Services (1995, #27-30) and the Regulation of the Agency (**Decree of the Minister of Agriculture (14 March, 2006 #2-44)**).

The Department of Veterinary Supervision (DVS) is a structural unit of the NAFVP and includes the following institutions:

- Agency of Supervision of Infectious Diseases of Animals
- Agency of Supervision of Animal Food
- Veterinary Pharmacies and Clinics
- Veterinary-Sanitary Supervision Agency
- Agency of Registration of Veterinary Substances.

The rights and obligations of the Agency of Veterinary Supervision embrace the following:

- protection of animals and humans from epizootic, zoonotic, zoonthropo-nostic and non-contagious diseases
- veterinary-Sanitary Supervision of trade by animals, animal food and raw materials
- supervision of biological, diagnostic, chemical-pharmaceutical and other veterinary remedies and the withdrawal of dangerous substances from food, control of production, storage and sales processes.
- prevention, identification and control of dangerous contagious diseases
- implementation of veterinary-inspection control
- elaboration of the state programs of prophylactic vaccinations
- registration, marking, identification and listing of livestock

Based on the above-mentioned decree, the functions of physical persons (certified veterinary doctors) and legal entities (veterinary clinics, pharmacies) include treatment and prophylactic measures against epizootic and zoonthropo-nostic diseases in farms. When involved in state programs, such as the control of rabies or anthrax, the winners of tenders provide state funded vaccinations to farms.

**Decree of the Minister of Agriculture (May 22, 2006 #2-81)** regards the establishment of the Veterinary Doctors' Certification Council, under the DVS, which implements the certification of vets in three directions:

1. Veterinary-sanitary supervision,
2. Treatment-prophylactic activities and
3. Veterinary pharmacy.

In 2009 the DVS implemented the state program for the prevention of anthrax, rabies, tuberculosis and brucellosis. Within the framework of the program vaccinations for anthrax and rabies were financed by the state while animals were researched for tuberculosis and brucellosis. Any other prophylactic measures required for other diseases of domestic cattle are financed by the farmers. For example, livestock owners overwintering in Dedoplistskaro should pay for vaccination against bradsot and pox and, in May, treatment with sheep-dip as protection from tick-borne diseases. As pastoral livestock-owners often receive a low annual income many are unable to implement such treatments and the threat of diseases spreading throughout the population arises.

**Decree of the Minister of Agriculture (August 17, 2005, #2-190)** establishes the veterinary-sanitary rules pertaining to the annual migration of livestock between summer and winter pastures. According to this decree, the DVS has to identify the terms of migration, establish veterinary posts on the migration routes and provide veterinary supervision of migration. Livestock owners are obliged to finance immunization of animals against anthrax, barbel, bradsot and pox under the guidance of veterinary doctors 21 days prior to the start of migration. After the health of animals is checked, the Dedoplistskaro District Agency vet issues a veterinary certificate for the entire flock. It is prohibited to start the migration of sheep to other pastures without this certificate. However, there are currently not enough state appointed vets to properly supervise these migrations and the rules of migration are not effectively enforced.

**Decree of the Minister of Agriculture (16 September, 2005, #2-215)**, defines rules of functioning for veterinary doctors as well as veterinary pharmacies, clinics and objects. Every district and town in Georgia has a district or town unit of the NAFVP. These units deal with the implementation of NAFVP orders and recommendations within their administrative units. They represent the NAFVP and implement its policy on the ground. As such, they include specialists in food safety, veterinary medicine and agronomy.

In Dedoplistskaro the district unit employs two vets and an agronomist; there is no food safety specialist. The unit owns a one-storey, four-room building which is badly in need of repair. There is no technical equipment and only very basic furniture. The vets are expected to supervise all veterinary activities within the district as well as provide veterinary and sanitary supervision of animal products sold at local markets. They are also charged with monitoring the practices of all veterinary pharmacies in the district. According to the current regulations, the veterinary doctors of local units are not authorized to monitor the zoo-hygienic norms in farms and so they are unable to control the health of livestock.

If a contagious disease does manifest in the Dedoplistskaro district, local vets are required to immediately inform the NAFVP. Private veterinary clinics are then authorized to serve the farmers. The vets and the clinics are obliged to comply with the current diagnostic norms when taking pathological materials for transfer to the central laboratory. Veterinary doctors and private veterinary clinics deal with the statistical registration of veterinary activities and inform the district unit of any veterinary activities implemented on a monthly basis.

In Dedoplistskaro there are four veterinary pharmacies functioning on the basis of the These pharmacies deal with retail sales of medical substances permitted and registered in Georgia, and are supervised by the Agency of Registration of Veterinary Substances.

**Decree of the Minister of Agriculture of 4 May, 2006, #2-74** defines the functions of a private veterinary laboratory in Dedoplistskaro to include the provision of veterinary expertise for monitoring meat and milk sold at the agricultural market in Dedoplistskaro. If a dangerous infectious disease is identified, the laboratory immediately informs the Dedoplistskaro unit of the NAFVP.

One of the structural units of the MoA is the State Laboratory. Its' headquarters are in Tbilisi and there are eight regional departments through which it carries out diagnostic activities throughout the country. The Dedoplistskaro pastures and farms are serviced by the Kakheti branch located in Gurjaani. Until 2008 the state laboratory also had mobile teams in Tbilisi, Akhaltsikhe and Kutaisi and a hotline with which local populations could contact one of the mobile teams to assist with the identification and treatment of animal diseases. The service was fully paid for by the state laboratory. In the absence of such a system livestock owners have to pay for the services of a local vet to take samples from the sick animal and submit these to the lab.

The activities of the Dedoplistskaro pharmacies are supervised by two veterinary doctors from the NAFVP district unit. Testing of products sold by the pharmacy are tested through the following process: the vet makes three purchases of a given substance from the pharmacy and all three units are sealed. One

remains at the pharmacy, one with the vet and the third sent to the lab for analysis. If a negative assessment is made the substance is withdrawn from the market and the pharmacy owner is fined.

### **Analysis of the availability of veterinary service necessary for shepherds**

According to Georgian Law on Veterinary Service, farmers are obliged to implement agricultural and specialized veterinary activities that ensure animal protection from epizootic and zoonotic diseases. Farmers are obliged to obey the recommendations of the state vets and implement planned and obligatory vaccination of animals, diagnostic research, treatment and other prophylactic measures within the established terms.

Livestock owners have to cover the expenses of any veterinary care or treatment other than the administration of vaccines against barbel, rabies and anthrax.

In conditions of market economy, an increase in the income of livestock owners is closely linked with the availability of good quality veterinary care. Currently, the net cost for vaccinating one head of cattle is between 1.5 and 2.0 GEL whilst that of a sheep is around 40-60 Tetri (this includes the cost of the actual vaccine as well as the vet's fee, the syringe and the use of a sterilization device). Diagnostics for various epizootic diseases that need serologic and bacteriological analysis costs 50-150 GEL. The treatment of a flock of 500 sheep with sheep-dip costs between 80-100 GEL (though this may be increased in many cases for those with flocks in Vashlovani as they also have to bring water for the washing process in).

The Department of Veterinary Supervision undertakes tenders for three diseases and signs agreements with the winners on the vaccination of cattle. However, numerous problems arise during vaccination. In private farms there is no full registration of the number of cattle and sheep and so the amount of state-allocated vaccine provided often falls short. There is also a shortage of qualified vets willing to participate in these programmes as any problems that arise with animals being sold post-vaccine will be the responsibility of the vet that administered the vaccine.

### **Evaluation of the status of the Dedoplistskaro veterinary post and the identification of Needs**

A broad network of veterinary institutions was established in Dedoplistskaro district for the implementation of veterinary measures. The network included an animal diseases prevention station, a district veterinary clinic, a veterinary post and a veterinary district laboratory for the control of meat, milk and food products.

As a result of Georgia's transfer to a market economy, the sphere of the veterinary service is controlled by the Department of Veterinary Supervision at the NAFVP. In towns and villages this department implements its activities through its district units. Veterinary activities in the district are also implemented by the following private legal entities: veterinary clinics, veterinary pharmacies, diagnostic laboratories and certified veterinary doctors. On the territory of Dedoplistskaro district, the NAFVP is represented by a district unit which includes two veterinary doctors and an agronomist. Dedoplistskaro also has four veterinary pharmacies that comply with licensing requirements (although their material-technical base falls short of modern requirements) and six certified vets. In order to improve the veterinary service in Dedoplistskaro district it is important to establish modern clinics and express-diagnostic labs. This will help the farms on winter pastures to overcome significant problems.

## **Recommendations for improving the quality of and access to veterinary care on winter Pastures**

1. In order to improve access to veterinary services on winter pastures:
  - a. restore the financing of a mobile team under the diagnostic laboratory of the MoA to enable the local population to obtain qualified consultations from veterinary specialists whenever necessary
  - b. establish a private veterinary clinic in Dedoplistskaro
  - c. include vets in the personnel of the administration of protected territories to manage the treatment and prevention of epizootic disease within the protected territories
  - d. The NAFVP district unit for Dedoplistskaro, together with the local authority, should establish veterinary posts and resting places along migration routes supervised by qualified veterinary doctors
  - e. reference books on veterinary issues should be published and disseminated among livestock owners with details of specific symptoms, contact information for relevant veterinary posts, service fees and procedures for obtaining veterinary care
2. In order to improve the quality of the veterinary support given to the livestock owners:
  - a. DVS should provide additional programmes for the timely and supervised provision of vaccinations against bradsot and sheep pox
  - b. DVS, in collaboration with local authorities, should ensure the identification and registration of all sheep in farms located on winter pastures in order to facilitate the efficient program for fighting epizootic diseases
  - c. Livestock owners should maintain a register of sheep in which an attending vet can record treatments and make recommendations for the issuance of certificates
  - d. Livestock owners should be prohibited from purchasing medicines' or carrying out treatments without the advice of a qualified vet
  - e. Fully staffed veterinary stations should be restored in the district, each to serve one or two villages or towns. These should be financed from local budgets by way of self-financing.
  - f. an insurance system should be introduced, within the veterinary service, with a reputable insurance company to cover the expenses of veterinary consultations and services.
  - g. a branch of the laboratory of the MoA should be opened in Dedoplistskaro in order to decrease transportation time and expenses involved in carrying out diagnostic tests

