Developing a disease prevention strategy in the Caribbean: the importance of assessing animal health related risks at the regional level

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In 2009, the Caribbean Animal Health Network (CaribVET) conducted a survey among Caribbean national Veterinary Services to assess perceptions towards the use of risk assessment (RA) by animal health services in the region and to identify the main exotic diseases of concern in the region and their means of introduction. The results showed that the introduction of live animals was considered the most likely route of introduction of exotic animal pathogens into the region, followed by the informal introduction of animal products by boat passengers. The use of RA was considered important (in descending order): (1) to avoid or reduce contamination of the human food chain (food safety); (2) to identify vulnerability factors for potential impact of emerging (exotic) and re-emerging diseases in order to improve emergency plans; (3) to prevent the introduction of exotic diseases through live animals for trade; and (4) to identify high-risk areas for introduction of exotic diseases. The diseases considered by the countries/territories with a highest introduction risk were Highly pathogenic avian influenza (16), Foot and mouth disease (10), Rabies (9), Newcastle disease (7) and Classical swine fever (6). The results were used to define a regional strategy for assessing animal health risks that highlights the importance of intra-regional exchanges.