With so many people and animals coexisting in close proximity, it is essential to have an accurate system monitoring the health of all farm animals in the Netherlands. The government and livestock industry initiated a monitoring and surveillance system. GD has been commissioned to lead this countrywide surveillance.

Animal Health Surveillance System

The national Animal Health Surveillance System (AHSS) is an accessible and voluntary system, providing a broad safety net for the earliest possible detection of animal health signals. Such signals originate from farmers in various livestock sectors (cattle, pigs, poultry, sheep and goats), veterinarians, the processing industry, research institutes and public health authorities. The AHSS researches, bundles and analyses these signals derived from a number of complementary instruments. The results are shared with farmers, veterinarians and relevant parties such as the government, livestock sector, human healthcare providers and (if necessary) neighbouring countries who may need to take action.

Three goals

Animal health monitoring is vital for animal health and welfare, food safety and export position of the Netherlands. These interests are translated into monitor goals.

- Detection of outbreaks of recognised pathogens, which are not known to be otherwise present in the Netherlands.
- Detection of unknown diseases or pathogens.
- Description of trends and developments in animal health.

How does it work?

Step 1. Data collection

The AHSS gathers signals from the field, both reactively and proactively. Reactive gathering aims to detect signals from the field in the broadest possible sense, and relies on the initiative of farmers, veterinarians and other parties who visit farms to provide us with information.

In the proactive instruments, the initiative to gather information lies with GD Animal Health. Information derived from these instruments provides insight into trends and new developments in animal health.

Reactive instruments

- **Veekijker**
  
The ‘Veekijker’ is a telephone help desk for veterinarians and farmers. Experienced and specialised GD veterinarians provide expert, tailored advice and assistance, free of charge.

- **Pathology**
  
  Farmers and veterinarians can submit animals for necropsy by a veterinary pathologist in order to gain insight into the cause of death and/or farm problems, or simply to preclude certain problems.

- **Veterinary Monitoring Poultry (VMP)**
  
  VMP is a cooperative agreement between a number of poultry veterinary practices and GD Animal Health. Practitioners voluntarily provide digital information on poultry health, including the vaccinations administered and their findings during farm visits, along with registration of any prescribed antibiotics.

- **Online Pig Health Monitor**
  
  In the Online Pig Health Monitor, pig veterinarians record their findings following each farm visit, including any animal health problems detected.

- **Veterinarian Environmental Toxicology**
  
  GD offers support to livestock farmers and veterinarians as to whether animal health problems are related to environmental pollution. Early detection of such problems can prevent public health problems, production/processing problems or sector image issues.
**Proactive instruments**

- **Data analysis**
  Data analysis on anonymised data maps out trends and developments of general health traits and diseases. This involves data both from GD’s internal lab research and from external data suppliers GD works closely with. The information they supply includes data on milk production, milk quality, fertility, the use of antibiotics, purchase and disposal, and mortality.

- **Prevalence study**
  Studies are regularly conducted, into the prevalence of (endemic) animal disease. The diseases to be monitored are determined on the basis of issues such as economic damage, zoonotic importance and the possibility of implementing measures.

- **Surveillance programmes**
  The EU requires testing of a number of animal diseases, in a proportion of the Dutch herds, in order to detect or preclude the presence of such diseases. GD commissioned the execution of a number of these prevention programmes, such as Brucellosis, leukosis and Avian influenza.

- **Warning systems**
  These systems gather information in order to provide a prognosis for certain (non-)infectious diseases, for example liver fluke. The information allows farmers and veterinarians to take preventive measures and to specifically tackle the diseases.

**Step 2. Analysis**

The ‘Veekijker’ veterinarians regularly discuss and analyse all signals and results, together with other experts, during the ‘Veekijker’ consultation.

**Step 3. Interpretation**

GD makes quarterly or half-yearly reports for each livestock sector, giving results and possible recommendations for further action.

**Step 4. Communication**

GD periodically shares the results of the monitor with government and industry, farmers and veterinarians, humane healthcare organisations and neighbouring countries. In the event of a possible (acute) risk for animals and/or human beings, GD directly contacts the government, livestock sector, humane healthcare providers and (if necessary) neighbouring countries. The government and livestock industry subsequently decide whether further action must be taken in the industry, such as extra studies, communication or adaptations in policy.

**Information**

Like to know more about the Animal Health Surveillance System? Visit our website www.gdanimalhealth.com or email monitoring@gdanimalhealth.com