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The economic consequences of production diseases

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Cattle diseases are associated with considerable economic losses in the dairy sector. All actors in the dairy sector may incur economic losses due to cattle diseases. Spectacular losses are incurred with outbreaks of epizootic diseases such as foot and mouth disease. The economic losses due to the foot and mouth disease outbreak in the Netherlands in 2001 for the dairy sector (farmers and dairy processors), were estimated to be 375 million Euros (the total losses for all stakeholders together were estimated to be more than 1,000 million Euros). These epizootic diseases do receive, with good reason, much attention from policy makers. Costs due to endemic diseases associated with dairy production and the management of the dairy farmer (production diseases) receive less attention by policy makers. However, production diseases are always present on the farm and are, therefore, causing considerable economic losses.

Basically, endemic diseases associated with dairy production (production diseases) are decreasing the efficiency of milk production, requiring a higher level of input to produce the same amount of milk. To estimate the economic effect of a production disease the following cost factors should be taken into account: decreased (milk) production, veterinary services, diagnostics, drugs, discarded milk, labour, decreased product quality, increased risk of new cases of the same disease or of other diseases, increased risk of culling, and materials and investments for prevention.

Lately, estimates of economic losses of production diseases have been made for mastitis (clinical as well as subclinical), claw health, reproduction and ketosis for the Dutch circumstances. The total economic damage of these diseases adds up to approximately € 200 per cow per year. Although not all of these costs can be prevented, the room for improvement is large. During the presentation, the underlying figures of the separate cattle diseases will be presented. Some of these figures are new and not yet published. Finally the economic consequences of production diseases will be discussed in relation to other health problems.