



<https://doi.org/10.29326/2304-196X-2024-13-1-6-10>



# Contribution of Federal Centre for Animal Health to Rosselkhoznadzor's international mandate delivery

Vasily V. Lavrovsky

Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance, 1/11 Orlikov per., Moscow 107996, Russia

## ABSTRACT

The paper covers the history of the Federal Centre for Animal Health, which started 65 years ago by the foundation of the All-Union Foot and Mouth Disease Research Institute. The main research area – FMD prevention and control – was and still remains the leading one for the Centre. The current history of the Federal Centre for Animal Health development is inextricably associated with the public administration reform in agriculture in 2000s, when the Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance (Rosselkhoznadzor) spun off the Ministry of Agriculture of the Russian Federation as an independent executive authority with broad powers in the area of the veterinary and phytosanitary control and surveillance. The grounds for the re-subordination of the Federal Centre for Animal Health to the Rosselkhoznadzor, historically novel executive authority in Russia, included high international prestige of the Centre and nationally and internationally acknowledged qualification of its employees in the field of contagious animal diseases.

**Keywords:** All-Union Foot and Mouth Disease Research Institute, Federal Centre for Animal Health, Rosselkhoznadzor, foot and mouth disease (FMD), infectious animal diseases

**For citation:** Lavrovsky V. V. Contribution of Federal Centre for Animal Health to Rosselkhoznadzor's international mandate delivery. *Veterinary Science Today*. 2024; 13 (1): 6–10. <https://doi.org/10.29326/2304-196X-2024-13-1-6-10>

**Conflict of interests:** The author declares no conflict of interests.

**For correspondence:** Vasily V. Lavrovsky, Cand. Sci. (Agriculture), Adviser to the Head of the Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance, 1/11 Orlikov per., Moscow 107996, Russia

УДК 619:061:616.98-48.87

# Вклад ФГБУ «ВНИИЗЖ» в реализацию международных полномочий Россельхознадзора

В. В. Лавровский

Федеральная служба по ветеринарному и фитосанитарному надзору (Россельхознадзор), Орликов переулок, 1/11, г. Москва, 107996, Россия

## РЕЗЮМЕ

В статье освещается история Федерального центра охраны здоровья животных, начало которой было положено 65 лет тому назад при создании Всесоюзного научно-исследовательского ящурного института. Основная научная тематика – профилактика и борьба с ящуром – была и остается главенствующей для учреждения. Современная история развития Федерального центра охраны здоровья животных неразрывно связана с реформой государственного управления в области сельского хозяйства в стране в 2000-х гг., когда в июле 2004 г. из структуры Министерства сельского хозяйства Российской Федерации была выделена Федеральная служба по ветеринарному и фитосанитарному надзору (Россельхознадзор) в виде самостоятельного федерального органа исполнительной власти с широкими полномочиями в сфере ветеринарного и фитосанитарного контроля и надзора. Основанием для переподчинения Федерального центра охраны здоровья животных Россельхознадзору, исторически новому для России органу исполнительной власти, явились высокий международный авторитет научного центра и признанная на национальном и международном уровне квалификация его сотрудников в области заразных болезней животных.

**Ключевые слова:** ВНИИЗЖ, ФГБУ «ВНИИЗЖ», Россельхознадзор, ящур, инфекционные болезни животных

**Для цитирования:** Лавровский В. В. Вклад ФГБУ «ВНИИЗЖ» в реализацию международных полномочий Россельхознадзора. *Ветеринария сегодня*. 2024; 13 (1): 6–10. <https://doi.org/10.29326/2304-196X-2024-13-1-6-10>

**Конфликт интересов:** Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

**Для корреспонденции:** Лавровский Василий Владимирович, канд. с.-х. наук, советник руководителя Федеральной службы по ветеринарному и фито-санитарному надзору, Орликов переулок, 1/11, г. Москва, 107996, Россия

Each anniversary is a good reason to sum up results, outline new plans, honor the memory of tutors and colleagues who created the prestige and glory of the Center as well as to support new generation entering the scientific path in the time of challenges experienced by our country.

Fortunately, we still have talented scientists among us, who in the 60s of the XX century were entrusted with important tasks for the development of domestic livestock production, who made a huge contribution to the study of the nature of foot-and-mouth disease and other infectious animal diseases, methods of their prevention and treatment, who earned the gratitude and recognition of the domestic and foreign colleagues.

It is impossible to cover the entire scale of events and achievements of the Federal Centre for Animal Health (FGBI "ARRIAH") over 65 years in one article, so let's focus on the time period, part of which I witnessed and directly participated as an adviser on agriculture in the Russian Federation Embassy in Canada (2001–2005), then at the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union and Euratom (2006–2013) and as Head of the Rosselkhoz nadzor Department for Inspection Work within the Framework of International Cooperation in the Veterinary Field and WTO, Assistant and Adviser to the Head of the Rosselkhoz nadzor for International Activities (from 2013 to the present).

The history of the Federal Centre for Animal Health cannot be considered in isolation from the problems, tasks and achievements of the domestic agriculture, formation of industrial livestock production in response to the demand of the country's population for high-quality animal products, and their entry into the global markets.

The stages of the Federal Centre for Animal Health development are inextricably linked with the reform of public administration in the field of agriculture in the early 2000s, with the separation of the new Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance (Rosselkhoz nadzor) from the Ministry of Agriculture of the Russian Federation in July 2004 in the form of an independent federal executive authority with broad powers in the field of veterinary and phytosanitary control and surveillance.

In accordance with the Regulations on the Rosselkhoz nadzor, the agency received unique powers in the field of international cooperation:

- direct interaction with the veterinary and phytosanitary competent authorities of foreign countries, within which the agency has the right to carry out control and inspection activities in other countries;
- provision of official guarantees (certificates) as for the safety of the imported and exported regulated products through the border control of the commodities, as well as confirmation of the traceability and safety of the commodities of the foreign and Russian origin by means of the laboratory and analytical methods;

- the right to represent the interests of the Russian Federation in international specialized organizations, such as the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH, founded as OIE), where the Deputy Heads of the Service have been Council members for many years, the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC); the right to participate in the activities of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, established by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The basic principle, which determines the effectiveness of the Rosselkhoz nadzor's activities, is the implementation of the control and surveillance permissive and restrictive measures during the manufacture and movement of regulated commodities exclusively on the basis of modern scientific knowledge and methods based on the international recommendations (codes).

With this approach, the subordinate research institutions (All-Russian State Center for Quality and Standardization of Veterinary Drugs and Feed, All-Russian Plant Quarantine Center and, of course, the Federal Centre for Animal Health, which celebrated its 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary, became a significant Rosselkhoz nadzor's pillar in the implementation of the new tasks.

The reason for the reassignment to the Rosselkhoz nadzor was high international prestige of the Federal Centre for Animal Health, nationally and internationally recognized qualifications of its staff, established school for training scientific manpower, serious methodological and infrastructural support for activities, long-term practical experience in the prevention and control of infectious animal diseases in various regions of Russia and the CIS, high effectiveness of the preventive and quarantine measures, history of the veterinary standard-setting activities.

By the start of the public administration reform, the country's leaders had formed a clear understanding of the need for governmental support of the most important sectors of agriculture as well as for regulation of foreign trade in food, which was implemented in the Federal Law "On the Development of Agriculture" of 29 December 2006 No. 264-FZ. In this law the Russian government for the first time declared its direct responsibility for ensuring food security through targeted financing of the leading sectors of the agricultural economics, primarily livestock and crop production.

In the process of preparing these transformations, the experience of the leading agrarian countries of the world (the USA, Canada, Germany, Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, India, and European Union countries) was, of course, actively borrowed.

The reforms were also pushed by the vector to the WTO accession taken back in 1995, the initiators of which promised significant benefits from equitable trade turnover of the Russian commodities on international markets.

One of the reasons why the world's leading food exporters persistently involved Russia in the WTO, promising its free access to global food markets, was annoying allegedly excessive requirements of the national veterinary legislation for imports, which allowed them to subsidize exports and offer dumping prices for the notorious "Bush legs" despite the undeniable competitive advantages of the developed countries.

The Russian Federation accessed the WTO in 2012 as a "developed country" despite the serious economic difficulties caused by the transformation of the state structure and adaptation of the economy to market conditions as well as irrespective of the need to pay off external debts and maintain economic ties within the CIS, which were broken due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. This meant rejection of many trade benefits and preferences that extended to most of the "developing" founders and members of this "trade club", established in 1995, and at the same time a very modest level of governmental support (\$9 billion in 2012 and a decrease to 4.4 billion by 2018), as compared, for example, with the developed member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and even those funds lacked in the country's budget at that moment.

Russia received modest opportunities for customs and tariff protection in the food sector (the doors were especially wide open for the supply of live slaughter pigs that subsequently put serious pressure on the industry). Meanwhile, the developing countries in Latin America, Middle East, Indochina, India, Turkey, not to mention Africa, still easily impose prohibitive duties of tens or even hundreds percent, and they do not hesitate to declare that this is done to protect their own production and promote rural employment.

It would be fair enough to admit that in the midst of negotiations on the WTO accession, Russia was tightly "on the needle" of food imports, and governmental mechanisms to support agriculture were launched with great difficulty.

Under these conditions, the authority to use sanitary and phytosanitary protection measures (the benefits of the WTO "green" and "amber" boxes allowed investments in food safety) made the Rosselkhoz nadzor an important "player" regulating the food turnover on the foreign market, of course, with scientific substantiation of its requirements.

In this regard, it became possible to invest serious funds in development of the skills of veterinary personnel, improvement of the methodological, laboratory and information and analytical activities, in capital construction and purchase of modern equipment to achieve equivalence and confirm scientific validity of the actions aimed at the protection of the domestic market from the subsidized and often substandard imports on the one hand, and to ensure credibility of guarantees as for the safety of domestic exported agricultural products on the other hand, which was accompanied with the harmonization of the national legislation with the international one.

It should be emphasized that at all stages of the WHO accession and membership Russia has been faithfully committed to its obligations, although the "alarm bells" have long been heard, indicating that its concerns in the development of the national market, and even more so the claims to international markets are of no interest for the partners in the West.

Thus, in the year of the Rosselkhoz nadzor's formation, ten countries joined the European Union, most of which are in Eastern Europe (Baltic States, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary) and used to represent an important export market for Russian food and feed. The European Union unceremoniously tore up all existing trade agreements between Russia and these countries, including those in the veterinary and phytosanitary areas, without any conditions or compensation for the loss of the markets (while the United States and Canada received such compensations). In the same year, after Russia's extremely successful export of a large batch of grain to the European Union after a record harvest in 2003–2004, the European Union in collusion with the United States and Canada introduced a tough tariff quota for imports of "Black Sea" (read: Russian) low-protein (it was even called fodder) wheat; after that there were no more records in trade with the European Union.

Despite Russia's heavy dependence on regular meat imports from the European Union, especially in large cities, the "newborn" Rosselkhoz nadzor managed to put the European Union in place, forcing, after a three-month ban on the import of all livestock products, to sign a Memorandum on the terms of supply from the European Union, after which it launched a wide-ranging campaign to inspect establishments of the European Union member states and approve new bilateral veterinary certificates.

It was a great disappointment in the fairness of the "free market" and the universality of the international SPS rules, but an important test of the Rosselkhoz nadzor's ability to defend the interests of domestic pig farming under the terms of the WTO membership was the dispute in the panel of this organization in 2014 over the legality of the Russian ban on the supply of pig products from the European Union to Russia due to African swine fever (ASF) outbreaks in Lithuania, Poland, Latvia and Estonia, risks of the disease spread over Western Europe and its introduction into Russia.

At that time, the Federal Centre for Animal Health provided expert support at all stages, participated in inspections to the affected areas and in the preparation of the scientific analysis of the risk of ASF spread in the European Union and its entry from the European Union into the Russian Federation. As time has shown, the scientific forecast proving the validity of Russia's concern about the possibility of ASF spread has been fully confirmed. African swine fever spread to half of the European Union member states and caused serious damage to the pig industry in the Baltic States, Poland, Germany, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Italy. Unfortunately, at the stage of the proceedings before the WTO panel, the Russian assessments were arrogantly rejected due to "non-compliance" with European criteria for the risk probability.

Faced with the manipulative nature of the *highly likely* principle without sufficient evidence of threats or damage, employees of the Federal Centre for Animal Health, who developed the system of risk assessment and Russian establishments' ranking according to the degree of their veterinary safety in the Rosselkhoz nadzor's electronic information systems, subsequently made it a rule to proceed from the actual history of violations committed by the establishment in the course of its activities and keep its personal dossier.

At the same time, with the direct participation of the Federal Centre for Animal Health, the process of strengthening trade relations was developed, and harmonization of the legislation of the countries of the Customs Union, its expansion and transformation into the Eurasian Economic Union with a single market (by the way, the European Union categorically refused the recognition of its establishment in 2011), and therefore, with a unified, as far as it was possible, veterinary and phytosanitary regulation was carried out.

The coup d'état in the Ukraine, annexation of Crimea to Russia (the new authorities of the country then ignored the year-and-a-half intergovernmental negotiations (2014–2015), which could, among other things, preserve full-fledged relations of the surveillance services and beneficial, primarily for Ukraine, food trade with Russia), imposition of economic sanctions by the United States, European Union, Australia and Norway and imposition of retaliatory “counter-sanctions” on the export of a number of agricultural products from these countries resulted in the reversal to the markets of the friendly countries, and the process of food import substitution was launched. In addition to active operation in the domestic market, this process was accompanied with serious negotiations and inspection activities with developing countries, primarily Asian and Latin American, where timely information support and risk assessments performed by the employees of the Federal Centre for Animal Health allowed to avoid meat shortages without compromising the veterinary safety of Russia.

Being isolated from the pressure of the subsidized food exported from unfriendly countries, Russia took effective measures to develop its own agriculture. The problem of dependence on imported meat was replaced by the task of opening export markets by exporting the surpluses.

The control system well-established by this time, updated laboratories, modern establishments building their business according to the recommendations and with careful inspections by the Rosselkhoz nadzor officers, state registration of the establishments capable of being compliant with the requirements of the foreign countries – all these aspects, linked into a single information system “VetIS” moderated from the Federal Centre for Animal Health and ensuring full traceability of products from disease-free zones, make a proper impression on the potential importers.

Suffice it to say that by 2020 Russia became a net food exporter, and in 2023 export revenue exceeded 45 billion US dollars, *inter alia* due to reliable guarantees from the Rosselkhoz nadzor regarding the safety of the exported products.

Due to high competencies in the field of prevention and control of animal diseases, the Federal Centre for Animal Health became an essential link in the inspection programs by the representatives of the foreign veterinary services, and the governmental support of the exports of the livestock products made such visits available to specialists from developing countries who see Russia as a worthy competitor to traditional exporters, capable of providing competitive prices and an impeccable level of safety of beef, mutton, poultry meat, table eggs, dairy and fish products.

When summing up, it can be concluded that the choice made by the Rosselkhoz nadzor in 2004, when it included

the Federal Centre for Animal Health among the organizations providing scientific support to regulatory measures and execution of the new powers of the Service, was fully justified. In any case, at all important stages, where the Rosselkhoz nadzor faced the need to change approaches in its work and adapt to changing external conditions, the employees of the institute proved to be on top, worthy of the difficult tasks that befell the industry and the country over the past 20 years.

In the Rosselkhoz nadzor system the Federal Centre for Animal Health confirmed its high status as an international center for animal health protection, as evidenced by its diverse and fruitful external relations, recognition of its activities by international organizations such as the WOA and FAO, the Russian Academy of Sciences, as well as by leading research centers of the world, demand for highly effective author's products (vaccines, diagnostics, test-kits) far beyond the borders of our country.

Over the past 20 years, the Federal Centre for Animal Health not only preserved, but also increased its traditional competencies in the field of dangerous human and animal disease prevention and control (development of control methods and means), while reliably performing the functions of a leading information and analysis center necessary for successful governmental management of the animal husbandry and the market of animal products based on scientifically justified recommendations, new scientific facts, accurate and reliable forecast of the development of the animal disease situation and an immediate response to every case of a disease occurrence.

The Federal Centre for Animal Health became the main base and industry flagship in the development and widespread use of modern biotechnologies and electronic information systems, which made it possible to combine and systematize a huge amount of data on the origin and movement of any regulated animal products in the country.

On this basis, a unique system of regionalization of the country's territory for animal diseases was built, which allows real-time regulation of commodity flows, including those moving across the state border, taking into account information on the animal disease situation, changes in veterinary legislation, departmental instructions and legal veterinary norms, which are constantly updated with the participation of the staff of the Federal Centre for Animal Health.

It was the development of information systems and continuous generation of an objective evidence base on the farm animal disease situation and animal product safety that made it possible to make a breakthrough in the acquisition of a number of international dangerous animal disease-free statuses and, most importantly, to convince during numerous inspections the world's leading importers of the safety of Russian animal products that already in 2023 allowed to increase the animal product exports to 2 billion US dollars, according to the estimates of the National Meat Association.

Knowledge and skills in the Rosselkhoz nadzor information systems are mandatory for the organization of the production process and control of the establishments involved in the animal product manufacture and marketing chain, and such systems significantly reduce the burden on the diligent business operators. It is important to emphasize that thanks to the coordinated

work of the Rosselkhoznadzor and its scientific departments, unification and standardization of sampling and processing techniques, improvement of laboratory equipment, state accreditation and international system of proficiency tests, an acceptable level of risk is achieved, confidence in the security system in the country is strengthened, and the risks of introducing counterfeit products into circulation through fraudulent schemes are reduced.

Despite the continuing risks of the occurrence of single outbreaks of ASF, avian influenza, and a number of other diseases, the epizootic situation in the country remains under control. This is evidenced by the increase in the animal product manufacture and consumption, sustained level of governmental support for the agricultural sector, and

most importantly, in the continued growth of private investment in dairy and beef cattle breeding, pig farming, poultry farming, industrial processing, storage and retail. The processes of animal waste processing and disposal are developing, which in turn has a beneficial effect on production safety.

People, both consumers and manufacturers, trust the Service and its scientific branch, this is the main result of the activities of the Federal Centre for Animal Health, which celebrated its 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

*The report was made on the Scientific and Practical Conference "Veterinary Science for Food and Biological Safety" dedicated to the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Federal Centre for Animal Health (Vladimir, 7–8 December 2023).*