

**From Dr Colin G Fink,
Micropathology Ltd, University of Warwick Science Park, Coventry CV4 7EZ**

Mr Loudon Hamilton
Secretary to the FMD Enquiry
Royal Society of Edinburgh
22-26 George Street
EDINBURGH EH2 2PQ

22nd January 2002

Dear Sir

I have been encouraged by my colleagues here to write to you concerning my experience during this outbreak.

We specialise in developing and implementing rapid *molecular* diagnostic tests for infectious disease with an emphasis on virus disease. We undertake a large part of the transplant work for the United Kingdom and also perform specialist rapid testing for Great Ormond Street, St Mary's Paddington St Georges, Yorkhill Glasgow, Royal PG Hospital Hammersmith and many other UK public and private laboratories and hospitals.

In late March 2001 I telephoned MAAF to offer a rapid diagnostic test service for FMD. This was turned down because they were "*too busy fighting the disease*" "*the methodology was unaccredited in the European Union*". In April 2001 after a Country Land Owners Association meeting and also a Committee room meeting at the House of Lords chaired by the Rt Hon Countess of Mar , I offered once again a rapid assay for the epidemiological survey of infection in the culled animals (no accreditation required) and also as a diagnostic test for virus in animals in the suspected infected area. It would be fair to say that I was rebuffed rudely by the officials to whom I spoke at MAFF.

During April - November 2001 I was approached many times by farmers wanting independent testing for their animals. In one case I was asked for advice by a lady with a herd of 40 sheep who were blood tested by the Ministry, I challenged the finding of all 40 being seropositive for FMD far from the infected area. The finding seemed biologically implausible. I discussed this finding with Dr Paul Kitching at the Vet Lab.Pirbright and he agreed with my observation and suggested re-testing. The official; to whom I spoke at MAFF,Page Street, dismissed my concern and was openly grotesquely personally offensive. The herd of sheep were destroyed.

It became evident at this point that MAFF took no advice from the Virologists at Pirbright. It was also apparent that MAFF officials had no real understanding of the limitations of their own Ministry testing service and were out of their depth in understanding the science.

My experience is that all my offers to provide modern technology both for testing for virus presence to direct the culling programme and also for retrospective testing on culled animal

material to provide invaluable information of the natural history of the infection, was dismissed out of hand and with extraordinary discourtesy.

Since then I have contacted DEFRA and the Pirbright agency to continue to ask for denatured viral material to calibrate our quantitative assay. A number of questions on my behalf have been tabled in the House of Lords. On all occasions a series of barriers to co-operation have been raised all of which are evidently spurious but politically convenient. The most worrying of the excuses of late is that I am told that due to an exclusive commercial agreement between the Vet Lab agency at Pirbright and commercial concerns in Europe they are prevented from any co-operation with commercial companies in the UK. I am very doubtful of the legality of any such exclusion by a Government funded agency.

I hope that this gives you a flavour of the experience that I have encountered in the last nine months.

This is not a pleasing tale to tell and reflects unfavourably on the structure and competence of the Ministry.

Yours sincerely,

Colin G Fink B.Sc.,MB.,Ch.B.,Ph.D.,FRCPath
Virologist, Physician and Jt Scientific Director of the company