

'Goat plague' threat to global food security and economy must be tackled, experts warn

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"Goat plague," or peste des petits ruminants (PPR), is threatening global food security and poverty alleviation in the developing world, say leading veterinarians and animal health experts in this week's *Veterinary Record*.

They call on the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the World Organisation for [Animal Health](#) (OIE) to turn their attention now to ridding the world of the PPR virus, which carries a very high risk of death among infected animals.

The call follows the formal announcement this week by the FAO that a related virus, rinderpest, better known as "cattle plague," has now been eradicated around the globe.

In an editorial, senior vets, all of whom were variously involved in the global rinderpest eradication campaign, say that getting rid of that virus has had far reaching effects.

"What is not generally appreciated is that the eradication of rinderpest has yielded benefits that surpass virtually every other development programme in agriculture, and will continue to do so in future," they write.

They cite the case of Chad, where between 1963 and 2002, every dollar spent on rinderpest eradication made a return of at least \$US16.

Now the world must focus on achieving the same for PPR, which is

endemic in most of [sub Saharan Africa](#) "as well as a swathe of countries from Turkey through the Middle East to [south Asia](#)," they say. The virus has also recently been reported in North Africa, central Asia, and China.

It's important to control the infection because it spreads quickly through goat herds and sheep flocks, decimating their numbers, and taking a terrible financial toll on the farmers and families who depend on these animals for their livelihoods, say the authors.

And it has also spread to wildlife species, many of which are endangered or threatened.

"Because poorer people are more likely to keep small ruminants than cattle, women and children tend to have more access and control over them, PPR control and eradication would be both pro-poor and pro-women and children. It fits many development objectives for nutrition, [food security](#) and poverty alleviation," they write.

"We believe that a global programme for the total eradication of PPR should be established as an international undertaking without delay," they declare.

"Given support from governments, international organisations, and funding agencies, we believe that another great success could be achieved within a 10 year time frame with concerted international effort," they suggest.

In a review published in the same issue, senior international vets, including from the Institute for Animal Health in Pirbright, Surrey, document the history of the infection and explain the scientific basis for eradication of the virus.

"Although PPR has not yet been seen in the UK, and is currently absent

from most European countries, it is without doubt the fastest growing and potentially the most economically important disease of sheep and goats anywhere in the developing world," they write.

They go on to say that there has been a reluctance to tackle the issue because sheep and goats are considered to be of lesser economic value than cattle, and their shorter working lives mean that it would cost more to eradicate PPR.

But they warn: "The ever advancing spread of PPR has made the economic impact of the disease, and consequently the benefits of its eradication, much greater. The imperative for coordinated action is therefore much stronger."

Provided by British Medical Journal

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