

Rinderpest Eradicated

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Posted on 21 June 2011



Rinderpest caused hundreds of millions of animal deaths that preceded famines in Africa, Asia, and Europe.

After centuries of efforts to prevent outbreaks of the disease, international authorities announced in May that the disease was the second, after smallpox, to be eradicated through human efforts.

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) proclaimed May 25 that all 198 countries and territories with rinderpest-susceptible animals were free of the disease, and, at press time, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations was expected to declare June 28 that the disease has been eradicated. The announcements indicate the morbillivirus that caused rinderpest remains only in laboratories.

Efforts to fight the "cattle plague" were connected with the 1761 founding of the world's first veterinary school in Lyon, France, and the 1924 founding of the OIE. FAO information indicates rinderpest epizootics were also associated with the fall of the Roman Empire, the conquest of Christian Europe by Charlemagne, the French Revolution, the impoverishment of Russia, and extensive famines in Africa.

"Century after century, it swept around Europe and Asia with every military campaign, leaving disaster, death, and devastation behind it," FAO information states.

Outbreaks killed millions of animals in the 1980s alone in Africa, southern Asia, and the Middle East, and a 1994 outbreak in Pakistan killed tens of thousands of cattle, buffalo, and yak, according to the FAO. The last confirmed outbreak was in 2001, when buffalo were found to be infected in Kenya.

In honour of this momentous occasion in veterinary science the OPVSC held a champagne and cake breakfast for the staff and students of Onderstepoort on the 21st of June 2011. The event was opened by Prof van Vuuren. It was attended by the faculties Dean, Prof Swan and the president of the South African Veterinary Council Dr Moerane.



