

Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA)  
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Bern, 29th September 2017

In 2006 our laboratory was assigned by the federal food safety and veterinary office (FSVO) as the Swiss national reference laboratory for brucellosis. Our tasks and duties follow regulation according to the EU directive 882/2004. Among others, confirmation of *Brucella* suspected cases is an important mandate. This comprises confirmation of suspected isolates from approved laboratories as well as serological testing for suspected serum samples. In this context, we organize proficiency testing for our approved laboratories in Switzerland, to maintain and strengthen the performance of these laboratories in brucellosis. In Switzerland, livestock is official free for brucellosis, hence only passive surveillance of the cattle population is dedicated by analyses of abortion if cases cumulate on farm. Direct detection by Stamp modified Ziehl-Neelsen staining is the prescribed method. Performance of this staining is therefore crucial for early detection of brucellosis.

Our laboratory has a long tradition in participation of the broad spectrum proficiency testing offered by APHA VETQAS. To our knowledge, it is the only European laboratory, which prepares fixed slides for direct detection of *Brucella*. Therefore, we contacted the team of VETQAS to discuss the potential for assisting us in organization of a Swiss proficiency testing in direct detection of *Brucella* species by staining for approved laboratories. The team was very competent and we get excellent support. VETQAS produced slides of a very good quality in the amounts and different detection levels we needed. Samples were produced in the timescale as announced and sample transport and presentation at arrival was excellent. We conducted by now proficiency testing rounds with 14 Swiss laboratories in two consecutive years. All laboratories evidenced the fit for purpose quality of the material provided.

We will choose VETQAS in the future again, as we appreciate the service and assistance of the team. With the excellent support of VETQAS we were able to assess and to improve performance quality of Swiss laboratories in direct detection of *Brucella* species by staining.

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