

Foot and mouth 'came from science labs'

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The official investigation into the foot and mouth outbreak has said there is a "strong probability" the strain originated from the Pirbright laboratory facility.

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But the interim [Health and Safety Executive report](#) failed to conclusively identify whether it came from the Government-sponsored Institute for Animal Health, or Merial, the commercial firm on the site.

Inspectors said there was a "real possibility" the disease was spread by human movement, dismissing the chances of aerial or surface water transmission as "negligible".

Government scientists had previously suggested flood water from overflowing sewers as a possible source of the virus, and this is still being investigated.

The inspectors could find no evidence of biosecurity measures breaking down at either laboratory.

They confirmed the strain found at the first infected farm was being worked on at both Pirbright laboratories between July 14 and 25.

This involved large scale production at the Merial site (10,000 litres) and a series of small scale experiments (fewer than 10 millilitres in each case) at the IAH site.

The HSE will now continue its work and report further as necessary.

Peter Ainsworth, the shadow environment secretary, said today's interim report was "bland and inconclusive", and said it would do nothing to reassure farmers.

advertisement Gordon Brown, speaking after the report's publication, said: "The work goes on to isolate, to contain, control and eradicate the disease."

The farmer at the centre of the foot and mouth outbreak said today his family were "devastated", as a second case of the disease was identified nearby.

Roger Pride, who runs Woolford's farm near Godalming in Surrey with his wife Valerie, said they were victims of circumstances beyond their control.

In a statement read at a press conference by Anthony Gibson from the National Farmers' Union, Mr Pride described the moment when it was confirmed his animals were infected.

He said: "For a moment we couldn't believe it. We were completely shocked and devastated.

"If felt as if our whole world was turned upside-down."

His statement came as it was confirmed that a second outbreak of foot and mouth disease had been found among cattle within the three-kilometre exclusion zone in Surrey where the outbreak was first detected last Thursday.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) immediately ordered a cull with over 100 cows being slaughtered.

The agency has since extended the surveillance and protection zones.

Although Hilary Benn, the Environment Secretary, praised the speed with which the second outbreak was identified, the discovery has dashed hopes that last Thursday's case might have been a one-off.

The source of the second outbreak is unknown but experts predicted it was likely to have come from the original contamination source, rather than a secondary infection.

Laurence Matthews, who owns the land where the latest outbreak was found - though not the infected cattle - said the news had crushed the hopes of the local community that the crisis would end quickly after more than 24 hours had passed without a new case.



Probable source: The Pirbright laboratory

The farmer whose herd was culled is "absolutely devastated," Mr Matthews said.

"We were starting to think that maybe this virus has been contained and maybe we'd get back to normality within the next few weeks," Mr Matthews told BBC Radio 4's Today programme.

"Most farmers... are very, very scared and all activity on farms has almost come to a standstill," he said.

Mr Matthews attacked the Government for failing to shut footpaths in affected areas.

Peter Ainsworth, MP for East Surrey, said that although the Government had got its response to the outbreak "broadly right", farmers locally were very worried that the disease could spread because footpaths in the exclusion zone were not being blocked off.

"Most farmers here think it's quite bizarre that you can have a protection zone and people can wander straight through it," he said.

Mr Benn defended the Government's policy, saying: "Footpaths that are connected to infected premises are closed and other footpaths may be closed based on the veterinary assessment on the ground of the risk."

It has been claimed that the policy of transporting slaughtered infected animals across the countryside to an incineration plant in Somerset risked spreading the disease beyond the infected farm in Surrey.

But Mr Benn insisted that the carcasses were being transported to the best equipped facilities to deal with them. The trucks are carefully monitored to prevent any risk of a leak of the virus, he said.

But Richard Haddock, the chairman of the South West National Farmers' Union, said: "How they can claim to be containing the outbreak while they are prepared to transport the carcasses halfway across the country, I just don't know."

He said portable, on-site incinerators should be used to help contain the infection.

Full coverage: [Foot and mouth homepage](#)

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