

The surveillance and control programme for *Campylobacter* spp. in broiler flocks in Norway

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The surveillance and control programme for *Campylobacter* spp. in broiler flocks in Norway 2012

Merete Hofshagen, Attila Tarpai, Margareth Opheim

Introduction

Campylobacteriosis is currently the most commonly reported bacterial infectious disease in the Norwegian human population. In almost half of the cases, the infection is acquired in Norway. Consumption of poultry meat purchased raw has been identified as a significant risk factor together with drinking undisinfected water, eating at barbecues, occupational exposure to animals, and eating undercooked pork (1).

The action plan regarding *Campylobacter* spp. in Norwegian broilers has been running since spring 2001 (2, 3, 4). The action plan is a joint effort involving several stakeholder groups from "stable-to-table". The Norwegian Zoonosis Centre at the Norwegian Veterinary Institute coordinates the programme, and is responsible for the collection and analyses of data and the communication of results.

The action plan is updated regularly and the details for 2012 together with other information regarding the action plan can be found at www.vetinst.no.

Aim

The objective is to reduce the human exposure to thermophilic *Campylobacter* spp. through Norwegian broiler meat products.

Materials and methods

In 2012, all Norwegian broiler flocks that were slaughtered before 51 days of age between 1 May and 31 October were sampled by the owner maximum four days before slaughter. The sample consisted of ten pooled swabs from fresh faecal droppings. The samples were submitted to the Norwegian Veterinary Institute's laboratory in Trondheim, where they were analysed for *Campylobacter* spp. by real-time PCR. The carcasses from the positive flocks were either heat treated or frozen for a minimum of three weeks before being marketed.

In addition, flocks with unknown status at the time of slaughter, were sampled at the slaughter house.

Results

A total of 2,417 samples taken before slaughter (approximately corresponding to number of flocks, although a few flocks might have been sampled more than once) were analysed from a total of 579 farms. A total of 106 (4.4%) of the samples were positive for *Campylobacter* spp.

The positive samples originated from 89 (15.4%) of the farms. Regional differences in the proportions of positive farms are shown in Table 1 and Figure 3.

The proportion of *Campylobacter* positive flocks has varied substantially since the action plan was launched (Figure 1). In Figure 2, the percentage of flocks (in 2008 - 2012 samples) positive for *Campylobacter* spp. at the pre-slaughter sample in May - October is shown.

Table 1. Farms positive for *Campylobacter* spp. by county in May - October 2012.

County	N	No. Positive	(%)
Østfold	85	13	(15)
Akershus	13	2	(15)
Hedmark	112	28	(25)
Oppland	4	0	(0)
Buskerud	10	3	(30)
Vestfold	31	3	(10)
Telemark	2	0	(0)
Aust-Agder	5	1	(20)
Vest-Agder	2	0	(0)
Rogaland	112	13	(12)
Hordaland	9	1	(11)
Møre og Romsdal	1	0	(0)
Sør-Trøndelag	75	10	(13)
Nord-Trøndelag	118	15	(13)
Total	579	89	(15.4)

Figure 1. Monthly incidence of *Campylobacter* spp. in slaughtered Norwegian broiler flocks from May 2001 throughout 2012. The blue line represents flocks positive for *Campylobacter* spp. (up to and including 2007 these data are based on two samples; before slaughter and at slaughter). The green line represents flocks (from 2008 onwards: samples) positive for *Campylobacter* spp. at the sampling at farm before slaughter. No sampling occurred for flocks slaughtered in January - April and November - December in 2009 - 2012.

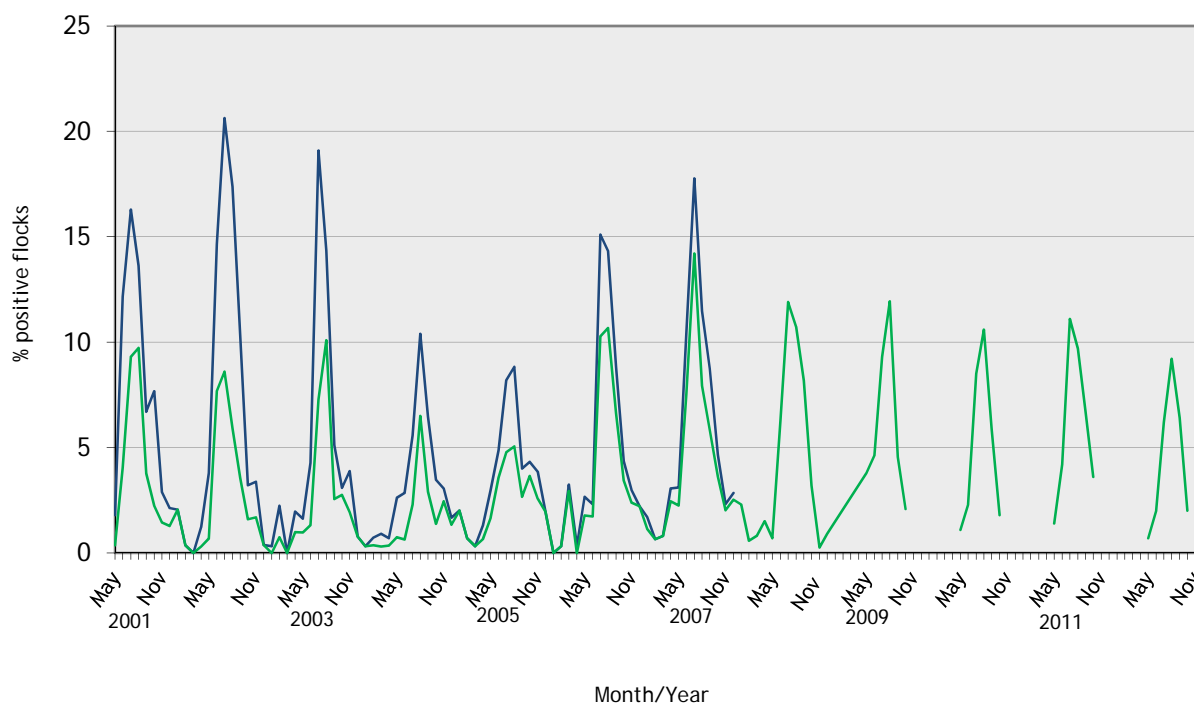
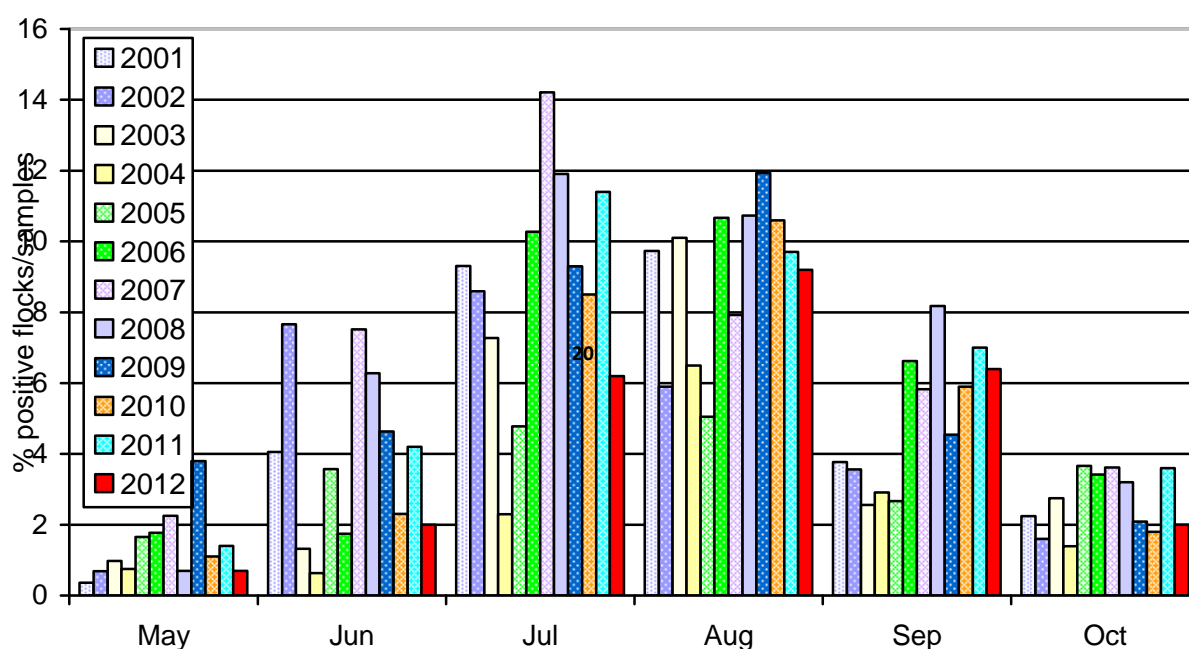


Figure 2. Percentage of flocks (in 2008 - 2012 samples) slaughtered May - October positive for *Campylobacter* spp. in the pre-slaughter sample. Up to and including 2004, this sample was taken approx. one week before slaughter, from 2005 onwards, approx. four days before slaughter.



Discussion

In the period 2002 - 2007, when all flocks were sampled twice, the results were as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Results from the Action Plan against *Campylobacter* spp. in broilers in the period 2002 - 2007.

Year	Number of sampled flocks	Number (%) of positive flocks	Number of positive flocks discovered at slaughter only*
2002	3627	228 (6.3)	127
2003	3550	175 (4.9)	85
2004	3626	118 (3.3)	58
2005	3652	132 (3.6)	42
2006	3908	190 (4.9)	48
2007	4145	237 (5.7)	58

* This is the maximum number of flocks positive for *Campylobacter* spp. which had the possibility to reach the market without previous freezing or heat treatment.

Up to and including February 2005, the pre-slaughter samples were taken approximately eight days before slaughter, and approximately 50 % of the positive flocks were detected only at slaughter. From 1 March 2005 onwards, all flocks were sampled maximum four days before slaughter, and in 2005, 31.8 % of the positive flocks were detected only at slaughter. In 2006 this was further reduced to 25.3 %, and in 2007 the corresponding figure was 24.5 %.

From 2008 onwards, the sampling at slaughter was terminated. Comparable data to evaluate the effect of the Action Plan, and to calculate how many flocks positive for *Campylobacter* spp. which were going on the market without freezing or heat treatment are therefore lacking. Still, if one anticipate that 2008 - 2012 were equal to 2007 in respect to the proportion of positive flocks being identified at the pre-slaughter sample (approx. 75%), the seasonal distribution (approx. 80% of positive flocks are slaughtered during the summer months) and that the number of samples equals the number of flocks, calculations can be made (Table 3).

Table 3. Estimated results from the Action Plan against *Campylobacter* spp. in broilers in the period 2008 - 2012.

Year	No. of investigated (positive) samples*	Estimated number of flocks**	Estimated number (%) of positive flocks	Estimated number of non-identified positive flocks***
2008	4675 (193)		257 (5.5)	64
2009	1924 (117)	4000	195 (4.9)	78
2010	2170 (110)	4400	184 (4.2)	74
2011	2282 (139)	4560	232 (5.1)	93
2012	2417 (106)	4830	177 (3.7)	71

* Equals approximately number of slaughtered (positive) flocks.

**In 2009 - 2012, this estimate for the whole year is based upon number of slaughtered flocks in the period May - October.

*** The estimated maximum number of flocks positive for *Campylobacter* spp. which had the possibility to go out on the market without previous freezing or heat treatment.

Regarding the flock prevalence, one can conclude that after some years with a positive development (2002 - 2005), the situation again got worse (2006-2008) and has varied between 3.7% and 5.1% since then. The estimated flock prevalence in 2012 is the lowest since 2005.

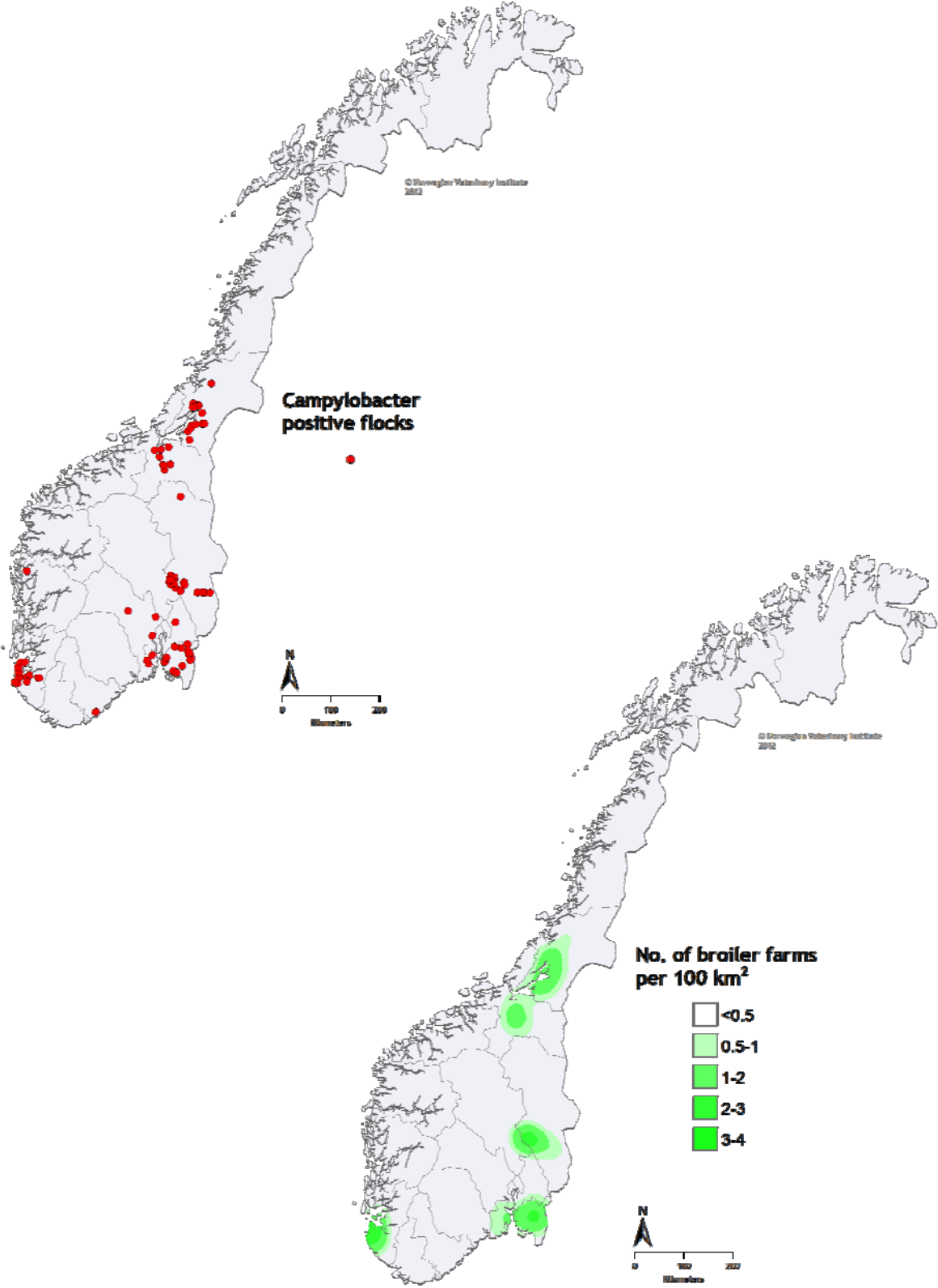
For the number of flocks positive for *Campylobacter* spp. reaching the market without freezing or heat treatment, improvement was seen 2002 - 2005, but thereafter there has been a negative trend, but 2012 was better than 2009-2011.

In 2009-2012, no flocks have been sampled during the six "winter months". Positive flocks in that period therefore had no possibility of being detected and could as a consequence not be scheduled for heat treatment or freezing.

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Figure 3. Geographical distribution in 2012 of the location of farms with one or more flock positive for *Campylobacter* spp.



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