ILRI scientists put livestock squarely on the (human) health table

Delia Grace and John McDermott

For the last couple of years, Delia Grace, an Irish veterinarian and veterinary scientist, has worked closely with John McDermott, another veterinary researcher and former deputy director general for research for ILRI. McDermott departed ILRI last Friday to take up an appointment as director of a new CGIAR Research Program on nutrition and health. Starting today, McDermott will be based at ILRI’s sister institute, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), in Washington, DC.

Grace will lead ILRI’s livestock inputs to the multi-centre CGIAR Research Program on Nutrition and Health that McDermott now directs.

Earlier this year, Grace and McDermott helped put livestock issues squarely on the (human) health table when they made key presentations at a high-profile IFPRI conference, Leveraging Agriculture for Improving Nutrition and Health, held in Delhi in Feb 2011.

At that time, Reuters published this report on ILRI’s contribution to the conference.

‘A growing number of livestock, such as cows and pigs, are fuelling new animal epidemics worldwide and posing more severe problems in developing countries as it threatens their food security, according to a report released on Friday.

‘Epidemics in recent years, such as SARS and the H1N1 swine flu, are estimated to have caused billions of dollars in economic costs.

‘Some 700 million people keep farm animals in developing countries and these animals generate up to 40 percent of household income, the report by the International Livestock Research Institute said.

“Wealthy countries are effectively dealing with livestock diseases, but in Africa and Asia, the capacity of veterinary services to track and control outbreaks is lagging dangerously behind livestock intensification,” John McDermott and Delia Grace at the Nairobi-based institute said in a statement on the report.
“This lack of capacity is particularly dangerous because many poor people in the world still rely on farm animals to feed their families, while rising demand for meat, milk and eggs among urban consumers in the developing world is fueling a rapid intensification of livestock production.”

‘Seventy-five percent of emerging infectious diseases originate in animals, they added. Of these 61 percent are transmissible between animals and humans.

“A new disease emerges every four months; many are trivial but HIV, SARS and avian influenza (eg. H5N1) illustrate the huge potential impacts,” McDermott and Grace wrote in the report. . . .

‘The two researchers urged developing countries to improve animal disease surveillance and speed up testing procedures to help contain livestock epidemics before they become widespread.’

On 9 and 10 November 2011, the ILRI Board of Trustees hosted a 2-day ‘liveSTOCK Exchange’ to discuss and reflect on livestock research for development.