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INFORMATION MEMO

HARMONIZATION OF HEALTH PROTECTION POLICY: POULTRY AND MEAT
PRODUCTS

At the end of 1963 the Commission laid before the Council two draft directives concerning health problems in trade in fresh poultry meat and in meat products. The Council has referred the proposals to the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee.

These directives go one stage further in the establishment of uniform health protection rules. The Commission made its first proposals on this subject in 1962 in the shape of directives on intra-Community trade in fresh meat and in pigs and cattle.

Harmonization of health protection rules is made necessary by the entry into force of regulations for the gradual establishment of common organizations of the pigmeat and poultry markets, and by the impending entry into force of similar regulations for beef and veal. Harmonization of standards will mean an added guarantee of quality for importing countries, whilst at the same time giving producing countries greater scope for exporting to other Member States. The trade organizations concerned, including consumer organizations, have been consulted, and their comments have been taken into consideration as far as possible.

Like the first two directives, the new proposals are based on Article 43 of the EEC Treaty (common agricultural policy) and not on Article 100 (general rule concerning the approximation of legislation). Article 100 requires a unanimous decision from the Council even after the end of the transition period, whereas for decisions based on Article 43, a qualified majority only is required from the third stage onwards.

Under the arrangements proposed, the responsible authority in each Member State will approve and supervise slaughterhouses and factories and will withdraw approval if it is found that they fail to reach the standards laid down in the directives. To ensure compliance with these standards a Community procedure has

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been laid down which provides for the parties to call for an expert opinion.

Sanitary inspection is to be carried out by a veterinary officer assisted in certain circumstances by persons specially trained for such work. Each consignment of poultrymeat or of meat products must be accompanied by a certificate of fitness for human consumption signed by a veterinary officer, the purpose of which is to provide an assurance for the owners and for the importing country that the responsible authority of the exporting country has seen that the rules set out in the directive have been observed.

Where, despite inspection, a consignment proves unfit for human consumption or where the directive has not been complied with in the exporting country, the importing country may forbid the marketing of the consignment on its territory. In this case, however, the owner's legal position has been strengthened.

Until the entry into force of the Community provisions, national arrangements will be maintained in fields where closer study is still needed, for example the effects on meat of the use of antibiotics, oestrogens, tenderizers and ionizing or ultra-violet radiation.

Common rules for health control will also be worked out later. However, where there is a danger of spreading animal diseases, the directives make some provision regarding the responsibilities of Member States; they provide in particular for a ban on the marketing of the products in question in certain circumstances and in such cases make notification of the other Member States and of the Commission obligatory. They also establish a consultation procedure under the aegis of the Commission.

The directives include a rule requiring Member States, pending the establishment of Community arrangements for trade in the products in question with non-member countries, to apply to imports from outside the Community rules and regulations which must not be more lenient than those applying to intra-Community trade.

POULTRY

This directive covers trade in fresh poultrymeat and in chilled or frozen meat of hens and chickens, turkeys, guinea-fowl, ducks and geese. Community rules will be established later for trade with non-member countries and trade in poultry cuts and prepared poultrymeat.

Poultrymeat treated with hydrogen peroxide, chemical bleaching or colouring agents, antibiotics or preserving agents is banned. The conditions laid down for the treatment of poultrymeat will be applied in the first instance to trade between member

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countries and later to poultrymeat produced and marketed in the same country. These health protection conditions apply to live birds for slaughter, the fitting out and operation of slaughtering establishments and the storage and transport of meat.

Annex I of the proposal contains regulations concerning the approval of slaughtering establishments and sanitary regulations for staffs, premises, working equipment, inspection before and after slaughter, slaughtering itself, stamping, certificate of fitness for human consumption, storage and transport.

This directive will enter into force in respect of intra-Community trade on the same date as the **above-mentioned** directive on fresh meat. Within a period of six years from the notification of the directive to the Member States, the provisions concerning marketing on the territory of each Member State must be brought into force. Exception is made, however, for meat sold direct from producer to consumer.

MEAT PRODUCTS

This directive applies to trade in products manufactured from fresh or chilled beef and veal, pork, mutton and lamb, flesh of goats and domestic solid-hoofed animals.

Community rules will be applied later to trade with third countries, cooked meat preparations and products manufactured from fresh meat of other animals.

Harmonization is pursued by fixing the conditions under which meat products for export to other Member States may be manufactured and treated. The conditions concern the fitting out and operation of factories, the meat used in the manufacture of meat products, and the preparation and composition of such products and their storage and transport.

Certain provisions come under the heading of food regulations, in particular provisions defining the composition of products and authorizing the use of certain substances for their treatment; These provisions apply to all meat products marketed within the confines of the Community, even if they come from non-member countries.

Annex I of the directive sets out conditions for the approval of factories and in particular specific health protection provisions concerning the premises, working equipment and personnel. It also embodies rules on meat for processing, sanitary inspection, packaging, marking, certificates of fitness for human consumption, storage and transport.

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As the number of approved slaughterhouses may be limited at the outset and many factories produce only in part for Community trade, it has been provided that in the first three years after the entry into force of the directive, the Member States may allow waivers to certain Community rules. Obviously in these cases, meat used for processing must comply with national health protection regulations.

Provisions under the heading of food regulations establish, inter alia, purity standards. This subject is covered partly by the present directive and Annex III and partly by the directive concerning preserving agents and a forthcoming proposal on antioxidants.

For lack of unanimous agreement among government experts a complete alignment of legislation has not been possible at this stage for certain substances which may enter into the compositions of meat products. In the meantime, the directive lays down temporary provisions.

This directive will come into force on the date on which the Member States are to put into effect the Council directive concerning health problems in trade in fresh meat.

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