

EC AND U.S. RESOLVE MEAT INSPECTION DIFFERENCES

The European Community and the United States have reached an agreement in an exchange of letters which will help safeguard the future of pork and beef trade between the EC and the US. It points out that both regulatory systems basically provide equivalent safeguards against public health risks.

The agreement sets out agreed procedures for improved communication and cooperation at administrative, inspection and scientific levels. Such procedures will enable potential misunderstanding between the two sides to be more easily resolved in the future. For example, they establish an improved on-the-spot dialogue between veterinarians at plant level with the objective of finding on-the-spot solutions.

The two parties agree to initiate discussion as soon as possible on other veterinary problems in relation to trade in animals and products of animal origin. This includes monitoring of residues, poultrymeat, and meat products.

The agreement has the target date for full implementation of December 31, 1993. It represents a balanced outcome with positive elements for both sides.

For the Community:

- In the context of the completion of the EC single market, the US recognizes the need to apply uniform principles to EC member states.
- The US accepts the EC's principle of regionalization for the control of animal diseases and is prepared to amend its import regulations.
- The US agrees to, and undertakes to implement, an enhanced role for the US Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) concerning the procedures for US meat plant approval for export of meat to the Community.

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For the United States:

- Following full implementation, the agreement will provide in the long term a more clearly defined framework for EC approval of US meat-exporting plants to the Community, including the possibility of approving plants certified by FSIS as being in compliance with EC requirements prior to visits by reviewers.
- The agreement contains detailed interim measures which will apply immediately. These measures allow certain steps to be phased in at once and allow for EC approval of additional US meat plants in the intervening period prior to full implementation of the Agreement.

Background

Under the EC Third Country Meat Directive, the Community annually imports 9-10 billion ECU* of fresh and chilled red meat from over 42 countries around the world, including the United States.

US meat plants exporting to the EC are currently approved following an EC veterinary inspection to establish conformity with the EC Third Country Meat Directive (TCMD) which applies EC veterinary requirements to imports. Those plants gaining export approval are then listed in the EC's Official Journal. In 1990 the EC decided to "delist" a number of US slaughterhouses found in breach of EC veterinary and sanitation requirements.

This was followed by a US meat industry petition to the US Administration to take retaliatory action against the Community under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974. This petition has been suspended by the US recently when the agreement was reached.

* 1 ECU = \$1.26 as of November 13, 1992

Press Contacts: Peter Doyle
Tel: (202) 862-9530

Ella Krucoff
Tel: (202) 862-9540