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NEWS

EC COMMISSION RECOMMENDS CONTINUING BAN OF BST MILK HORMONE

The EC Commission has recommended extending for seven years a ban on the use and sale of Bovine Somatotrophin (BST), a hormone-derived substance capable of substantially increasing milk yields in cattle.

The recommendation, contained in a July 13 Communication to the EC member states and the European Parliament, cites market balance, consumer preference and animal health as the main reasons for the Commission's decision against BST authorization. It will be discussed at a future EC Council of Agriculture Ministers.

Market Balance... milk production in the Community is to a large extent limited by milk quotas established under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In a quota system, use of BST - which can increase milk yields by between 6 and 20 percent - should not lead to significant increases in production but could have structural effects. Because it is most effective when used on a large scale, larger producers would benefit, pushing smaller, less competitive producers (and the processing facilities they serve) out of business. This would be damaging to the EC's poorer areas where small dairy holdings tend to be. In addition, the expected slaughtering of dairy cattle, with possible switches to beef production, would aggravate the EC beef market situation.

Consumer Preference....studies carried out in EC and non-EC countries alike have shown that consumers are strongly opposed to the use of BST. Authorization of BST could cause dairy and beef consumption to decline, leading to new market imbalances. As there is no test to distinguish milk produced using BST from milk produced without the hormone, consumer preference is not protected by a labelling system.

Animal health....experts on the EC's Committee for Veterinary Medicinal Products and an Ethics Committee have said that while BST satisfies criteria for consumer safety and efficacy, BST authorization would require veterinary controls to ensure the health and welfare of treated animals. Such controls would be costly and difficult to enforce.

Commenting on the Commission paper, Agriculture Commissioner Rene Steichen said he "could find no logical basis at this time to recommend that BST use be allowed." Its use would reduce the effectiveness of recent CAP market reforms by causing a reduction in the number of dairy farmers and more regional intensification of production, and would tarnish the image of a product that at present is considered natural, wholesome and of high quality by the consumer. The EC first moved against introduction of BST in 1989.

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