

GREEN EUROPE

NEWSLETTER ON THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY



THE DEVELOPMENT OF VETERINARY LEGISLATION



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A separate chapter of the Commission's Report on "The agricultural situation in the Community" (1) in 1981 is devoted to the development of veterinary legislation. In view of their economic importance we are reprinting the complete text in question in this issue of "Green Europe".

(1) Office for Official Publications of the European Communities
ISBN 92-825-2707-7
Catalogue number : CB-32-81-641-EN-C

Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications
of the European Communities, 1982

ISSN 0250-5886

Catalogue number: CB-AV-82-186-EN-C

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Printed in Belgium

The general public is apt to think of the common agricultural policy purely in terms of markets. It is sometimes remembered that the Community is also making a major effort to improve farm structures. But the policies which concern more technical areas, such as veterinary medicine, plant health, animal feed and seeds are all too often completely forgotten.

It is, indeed, not easy to trace, in the welter of decisions, directives and regulations adopted in the field of harmonization of legislation, the development of a policy which is none the less the expression of two important principles: that of the maintenance of quality in the widest sense in line with technological developments and that of the free movement of goods. Veterinary legislation makes a valuable contribution to this.

This sector does sometimes catch the headlines, but often this is when — and because — a problem has arisen in an area which is not yet covered by Community rules: the 'pig war' between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Netherlands on trichines, the hormone question, the ban on imports of eggs and poultry into the United Kingdom connected with the Newcastle disease. It is true that Community rules are still incomplete. But over the years a consistent policy has brought the Community steadily nearer its goals.

In 1981 the Commission laid before the Council a number of proposals in this sector and several important decisions were taken.

The objectives

The objectives of this policy are in fact the same as those of national policies in the same area: to ensure the protection of the consumer both against pathogenic micro-organisms and against substances harmful to health and to

prevent the propagation or spread among animals of contagious diseases, some of which can be transmitted to man. Obviously the health of livestock is important in terms of farmers' incomes. But this policy is also designed to allow the free movement of goods in the Community — a fundamental principle of the Treaty.

To achieve these objectives, veterinary legislation must be so framed as to cover properly changes in livestock farming methods in the Community, in particular in modern technology and in production inputs and structures, and also the development of the distribution facilities serving the Community market.

The economics of modern livestock production are conditioned by numerous factors, two of which are of particular technical importance: firstly, the maintenance of the highest levels through introducing measures to protect against or to combat infectious and contagious diseases and secondly the use of the most appropriate genetic measures. The absence of disease or the elimination of certain types of infection have beneficial consequences for the consumer by protecting him from animal diseases such as tuberculosis and brucellosis which can be transmitted to him by animals or by livestock products. This type of consumer protection must extend to the entire production chain of foodstuffs of animal origin to prevent any introduction of extraneous pathogenic micro-organisms or any toxic or harmful substance used in livestock farming or which is present in the environment, the residues of which would be dangerous to the human consumer. This last aspect is of increasing importance in view of the modernization of production technology.

Three stages

Plainly the changes involved could not be introduced overnight. It was decided to implement them in three main stages. An important question to be settled at the outset was: should the Community start by liberalizing trade through the fixing of standards which goods had to satisfy before they could be traded, pending common rules on methods of combating diseases, or should it start by harmonizing public health and animal health requirements to arrive at a common standard? Obviously free movement without obstacles of any kind can be achieved only when the situation with regard to the protection of public health and of

animal health is the same throughout the Community. In fact, adoption of the second approach was not feasible given the differences which would have had to be overcome, and a pragmatic approach won through: priority was given to the establishment of regulations governing trade between the Member States, enabling a start to be made on improving the animal health situation in the Community.

The Member States' traditional veterinary policies, based on the protection of their territories by systematic supervision of imports involving restrictions or even prohibition, have been adapted to the needs of the large market within which there should be no barriers to trade.

Major differences in public health and animal health conditions in the various Member States necessitated adjustment by stages, the legislation introduced being tailored to the products concerned, the diseases involved and the scope of the arrangements being made to facilitate free movement of goods.

This prudent approach led to the definition of standards applicable only to trade between the Member States while allowing the Member States to retain their own standards for domestic products marketed at home: this disparity seemed acceptable as a first stage. Although consumers are in principle entitled to the same protection whether the product originates at home or is imported, the measures did in fact help to raise general standards and this has gradually influenced national production.

The second stage was the extension of the trade requirements to home-produced food. There were teething difficulties, but the policy has been accepted and major progress has already been made.

The third stage — the introduction of a single Community system for imports from non-member countries — was in fact run in parallel with the second. The system is of fundamental importance. A veterinary policy makes sense for the Community only if identical measures are applied to non-Community countries; the health situation of the entire Community could be jeopardized if individual members permitted certain imports which might introduce an exotic disease into the Community. Free movement within the Community not only of imported meat but also of products made from this meat would be dangerous if there were no common rules in this area.

Work has been carried out in these three stages in both fields covered by veterinary legislation — public health and animal health.

Protection of public health

As regards public health, since 1964 a Directive has laid down the principles with regard to meat in intra-Community trade. This Directive laid down the condition of production which this meat must satisfy (the facilities and operation of slaughterhouses and cutting plants) and the relevant rules on meat inspection. Slaughterhouses which meet the standards must have been approved by the national authorities.

The adoption of strict rules has led to a gradual raising of health protection standards throughout the Community. All the investments made have been to that end. Meat which has obtained a Community stamp in practice often sells at a higher market price.

In some Member States all production now meets Community standards, in others 90%. There has, therefore, been an improvement in practice which means that gradually a common standard will be reached.

All that has been proposed in 1981 is a revision of the rules for slaughterhouses and cutting plants in the light of experience and technological progress and their extension to cold stores, the definition of microbiological control methods which should make possible effective action against any dangerous incidence of pathogenic micro-organisms or, better still, actual prevention, in particular in the case of salmonella, and measures to ensure the uniform application of the rules adopted.

In 1971 poultrymeat was also brought under a Directive. The basic concept is the same: first of all to introduce rules on intra-Community trade by fixing the standards which the various establishments have to comply with and rules on meat inspection. However, the second stage was the extension of these rules to national production after a short four-year adjustment period. However, this raised considerable difficulties and various amendments were made to take account of the special conditions of some types of production (foie gras) or of technological changes; the period of grace was also lengthened with regard to carcass inspection.

Marked differences in the manner of implementation were also discovered. The purpose of the 1981 proposals (apart from dealing with the specific case of inspectors in the United Kingdom, a problem which also affects meat products)

is to arrive at a more uniform application by fixing more detailed verification standards and to provide for the use of micro-biological analysis methods as a better way of assessing health protection levels. Finally, the proposals lay down in this field, as for the other types of meat, the principle of uniform financing throughout the Community of such controls, the cost of controls to be incorporated in the price of the products themselves; adoption of this principle, which is in line with the general trend in the Member States, would enable current distortions in competition to be held within bounds. Community inspectors will also be visiting slaughterhouses so as to ensure uniform application of Community rules.

In order to ensure that all meat production entering into intra-Community trade is covered, a Directive was adopted in 1977 introducing rules on health protection and veterinary inspection criteria for meat products, whether or not combined with other foodstuffs, traded between the Member States. This Directive specifies the techniques for preserving these products and consequent public health and consumer protection requirements.

These basic rules still have to be supplemented on various important points. In 1981 the Council adopted a Directive on the use of hormones prohibiting the use in livestock farming of any substances with a hormonal or thyrostatic effect other than those on which the Commission is to submit a report and appropriate proposals during 1982.

A proposal was also made in 1981 on controls to ensure that there are no residues of antibiotics in meat. The basic principles which should guide the Community in drawing up microbiological standards were also the subject of proposals in 1981. In all these cases the rules apply both to trade between Member States and to national markets.

Obviously these measures must be pursued, extended to other livestock products and to other categories of residues.

Parallel to internal policy, a single Community system, common to all the member countries, covering imports from non-member countries has been gradually built up. The basic Directive for this third stage was adopted in 1972. However, its application only began in practice in 1979 following the setting-up of a team of Community veterinary inspectors. To safeguard consumers, standards very close to those applicable to intra-Community trade are applied to slaughterhouses,

cutting plants and cold stores in non-member countries. They have to meet specific criteria with regard to facilities, operation and veterinary inspections. It is the Commission which approves these establishments. In 1981 lists of establishments in Latin America were adopted. The inspections carried out in most of the non-member countries have shown that certain criteria must be adjusted to technological progress and to special types of production, though without any lowering of health-protection standards. A proposal put forward in 1981 therefore provides for the complete alignment of standards applicable in the non-member countries on those applicable in the Community but allows the recognition in certain cases of alternative arrangements which yield the same result.

This Directive, properly and consistently implemented, will ensure that imports are safe and will help to improve production conditions at international level.

Protection of animal health

On animal health policy, progress within the Community has been made by the same two stages as for public health — intra-Community trade and domestic production.

Work began in 1964 with the adoption of rules on intra-Community trade in live bovine animals and swine and these were then extended to fresh meat.

Adequate safeguards have been stipulated with regard to the most serious diseases endangering animal and even human health: tuberculosis, brucellosis, foot-and-mouth disease and swine fever. The system used means that the safeguard is the responsibility of the exporting Member State, the intention being to phase out other controls.

The assurances provided by the exporting Member State, in the form of accompanying certificates, are adapted to the disease: certification in respect of region and in respect of farm of origin for foot-and-mouth disease and swine fever, certification in respect of herd of origin and the animal itself with regard to tuberculosis and brucellosis. As regards these latter two diseases, the certification of herd of origin has led to the creation of herds where animals are regularly subjected to tests or laboratory examinations and are classed as officially free of disease, so that trade in animals from these herds is completely unrestricted. To provide uniform health criteria for these herds and for animals which are traded, the analysis methods and reagents used have been harmonized so as to obtain

results of the same value throughout the Community. The creation of disease-free herds and the use of harmonized rules to control these diseases have exerted, over the years, a crucial impact on disease prevention methods used in the Member States.

Nevertheless, a new problem arose with the first enlargement of the Community. The animal health situation in the three new Member States differed from that in the original Six in the case of the major diseases: tuberculosis, brucellosis, foot-and-mouth disease and swine fever.

Here too, measures have been gradual; initially the Accession Treaty provided for certain exemptions permitting the temporary retention of national rules.

Subsequently it was agreed that methods to combat the diseases should be gradually standardized and a common effort was undertaken to intensify the total elimination of the diseases throughout the Community. The first measure was the Community plan for the eradication of brucellosis, tuberculosis and leucosis, which was financed by the Community, enabling the exemptions to be abolished and action against these diseases to be speeded up. So far the measures taken have had considerable success as regards the profitability of livestock farming in the Community, but more importantly the protection of public health has also been improved (1 500 000 infected animals have been slaughtered) (see Table). In 1981 the Commission proposed that the initial three-year programme should be extended for a further two years to ensure that the measures were fully effective; the original cost estimate would not be exceeded.

In the case of swine fever, too, measures financed by the Community have been put in hand. These should help prevent any new offensive by the infection without the need for systematic vaccination, which is a very expensive method of general prevention, and should enable exemptions to be phased out and trade to be liberalized. In the case of these diseases, the Community has therefore advanced from mere rules on trade to a common policy on measures to improve the health of livestock. To improve coordination of these common measures, the Commission proposed in 1981 the introduction of a system of compulsory notification which enables the situation throughout the Community to be closely monitored.

To complete the arrangements for animal health, as for public health, a single Community system governing imports from non-member countries has been gradually established.

The 1972 Directive laid down the principles: the safeguards required were to take account of the health protection situation in each of the non-member countries. Visits by Community officials assisted by experts from Member States enabled the necessary safeguards to be worked out. In 1981 most non-member countries were covered by this scheme as regards meat.

The principle of regionalization was widely used to enable trade flows to be maintained while ensuring the necessary safeguards. In this context it was decided that only boned meat may be imported from countries where foot-and-mouth disease still exists.

Whatever the safeguards required, there is always the risk, small but real, that by fraud or by accident an exotic disease can be introduced into the Community in the course of trade with non-member countries. In such a case the infection must be eliminated immediately. So that the reaction can be prompt and energetic, the Community has funds — first appropriated in 1977 — to finance specific emergency veterinary measures to help the Member States.

Some diseases, such as African swine fever, have reached the Community from adjacent countries, others, such as non-European foot-and-mouth disease, have several times threatened the Eastern European countries from the Middle East. The case for action to combat or prevent these diseases in the regions where they occur before they reach the Community is therefore a strong one, and this is a strategy which has been employed effectively for over 15 years against exotic foot-and-mouth disease, by the creation, with the financial assistance of the Community and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), of a buffer zone in Thrace (Greece) where all ruminants are vaccinated annually.

Similarly, it was decided to provide financial aid for countries neighbouring the Community where African swine fever occurs so as to establish a rational programme to eliminate the disease (Malta, Spain and Portugal). The action programmes in Spain and Portugal have just begun. In Malta, a three-year programme started in 1978 has eliminated the disease and re-established normal pig production, the health situation of which no longer constitutes a risk for the neighbouring areas of the Community.

However, the Community must remain vigilant since African swine fever is definitely tending to spread to other countries around the Mediterranean. It has reached Sardinia, where the Italian authorities, with financial aid from the

Community (Emergency Fund), have carried out energetic measures to combat it and will undertake the systematic eradication of the disease as part of a special joint financial programme.

When proposals now tabled are adopted, further progress will be made. Work will continue with the extension of the measures to other species, and on the solution of problems arising from differences in the measures to combat foot-and-mouth disease, Newcastle disease or other diseases so as to arrive, gradually, at a coherent policy ensuring the development of trade while respecting the objectives laid down.

Procedures

The basic principles of this policy were adopted by the Council on a proposal from the Commission after consultation of Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee. Wide powers of implementation were conferred on the Commission in accordance with the procedure of the Standing Veterinary Committee, thus ensuring that the Member States are properly involved in the management of the policy. This procedure, which had been periodically renewed, was made permanent by the Council in 1981.

To assist it in its task, the Commission also has the Advisory Veterinary Committee, made up of representatives of the sectors concerned (producers, consumers, industrialists, trade unions, veterinarians).

In 1981 the Commission decided to set up a new committee, the Scientific Veterinary Committee. The Commission invited onto that Committee leading academics, the best European experts on toxicology, nutrition and public health and members of the *Conseil supérieur de l'hygiène* or similar bodies which advise the governments of the Member States on areas where the protection of public health or animal or plant health is involved.

The Commission consulted them initially by setting up boards having no specific status. The boards were then formally appointed as Scientific Committees, whose role is of great importance. Their opinions have combined scientific rigour

with moderation and the Commission has consistently drawn heavily on their advice in all its proposals and decisions. Public opinion, extremely sensitive in this area, is not always given well-informed guidance in the media, and the contribution made by the learned members of these committees in their unremitting effort to protect public health and give really reliable information to policy-makers and the public is therefore all the more valuable.

Their advice goes beyond the purely technical field, and covers economic problems as well — the implication for producers and consumers of measures envisaged must be worked out in advance. Consumer protection has an influence on prices and therefore also on demand. Moreover, as regards the eradication of animal diseases, a detailed cost-benefit analysis should make it possible to determine, with full knowledge of the facts, which infections should be combated and the most economic ways of implementing an effective strategy.

The work at present being accomplished is useful, but the common interest would have been better served if it had been pressed forward faster. Care must be taken in the future to adjust the means more efficiently to aims. The difficulties which arise in trade make it vital to continue the work at a time when the countries may be sorely tempted to use loopholes and gaps in present Community legislation for protectionist measures. The Commission will continue with these measures in order to ensure progress in market integration and the development of a coherent policy giving the consumer the safeguards to which he is entitled.

**Progress of Community eradication programmes
in Member States where brucellosis
and tuberculosis persist**

Brucellosis

Member State	Percentage of herds subject to control measures		Percentage of herds infected	
	1978	1980	1978	1980
United Kingdom	88 %	100 %	14 %	1.5%
Ireland	44 %	100 %	35 %	5.0%
France	100 %	100 %	20 %	4.0%
Belgium	97 %	100 %	2.4%	0.6%
Italy	46 %	55 %	6 %	5.0%
Greece	60.5%	60.5%	2% in herds subject to control measures	2% in herds subject to control measures

Tuberculosis

Ireland	100 %	100 %	9%	9%
France	99 %	99 %	less than 1%	less than 1%
Italy	91.6%	98 %	1.6% in herds subject to control measures	1.34% in herds subject to control measures
Greece	66.2%	66.2%	2.4% in herds subject to control measures	2.4% in herds subject to control measures

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ECU 1.20 Price (excluding VAT) in Luxembourg
BFR 50 IRL 0.85 UKL 0.70 USD 1.30



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ISSN 0250-5886