



European Commission
Directorate-general of Agriculture

Newsletter

ISSN 1560-1862

Hormone Meat: more evidence of risks

New evidence shows that the use of hormones to accelerate growth in cattle is putting human health at risk. That is the opinion adopted by the Scientific Committee on Veterinary Measures relating to Public Health on 30 April. The Commission, whose duty it is to ensure a high level of protection for consumers, has therefore kept its ban on the import of meat containing hormones, but wants to continue the talks aimed at finding a compromise which will not reduce the flow of transatlantic trade.

Committee opinion: the risks are real

Six growth hormones used in meat production (17 β oestradiol, progesterone, testosterone, zeranol, trenbolone acetate and melengestrol acetate) may have endocrine, developmental, immunological, neurobiological, immunotoxic, genotoxic and carcinogenic effects. The evidence is sufficient even though it varies in its conclusiveness and the available data do not allow a quantitative estimate of the risks. They are conceivable even at low doses, and a critical threshold cannot be established for any of the substances. Oestradiol-17 β , for example, has been identified as a complete carcinogen. Prepubertal children are most at risk from the substances. Those are the main conclusions contained in the opinion of the Scientific Committee* delivered after a thorough analysis of a wide range of scientific data, including very recent information.

Seventeen scientific studies financed by the Commission on growth hormones are currently in progress. They are being carried out by independent scientists in various countries, including the Member States and the United States. The results are expected at the end of 2000.

In addition, a report drawn up by Commission representatives and independent experts has revealed a lack of controls which could permit the misuse of growth hormones contrary to the rules in force in the United States and Canada. This aggravates the risks which already exist of exposure to the substances.

The ban stays...

The Committee's conclusions have persuaded the Commission to maintain unchanged its ban on the import of hormone meat. Disputing the conclusions, the United States have asked the World Trade Organisation to authorise retaliatory measures worth 202 million dollars unless the European Union ends the ban. WTO authorisation would allow the USA to impose 100% customs duties on European products, thus barring them from the American market.

...but talks continue

The European Union, encouraged in its desire to guarantee consumer safety by the new evidence from the Scientific Committee but wishing to honour its international trade commitments, is looking for a solution which is mutually beneficial and leads to the expansion of international trade rather than restricting it, so it is willing to further open up its market to American products for the time being. The United States have for their part accepted the European offer of talks between scientific experts. Thus, both sides have expressed their willingness to continue the discussion in order to arrive at a better understanding of the hormone problem.

* Available on the internet:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg24/health/sc/scv/index_en.html

(From page 1:)

A decade of disputes

As a reminder, the use of growth hormones and the import of meat treated with them have been banned in the Community since 1988. In contrast, the import of meat without hormones has never been banned. However, the Commission recently considered temporarily suspending imports of American meat declared hormone-free unless checks were strengthened after hormone residues were found in 12% of samples analysed (see Newsletter No. 11).

After a case brought by the United States and Canada against the ban on meat containing hormones, a WTO panel concluded that the ban was incompatible with the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement). The Commission appealed and on 13 February 1998 the WTO Appellate Body found partially in favour of the Commission in acknowledging the right of govern-

ments to guarantee their citizens, on a scientific basis, a level of protection greater than that provided by international rules. The Body stated that the arguments raised need not coincide with prevailing scientific opinion and that the level of risk need not necessarily be quantifiable.

On the other hand, the Appellate Body concluded that the Commission's arguments on growth hormones were not sufficiently specific on the harmfulness of residues of the hormones in meat. It added that the assessment of the risks may take account of improper veterinary practices, abuses and control difficulties but that they had not been clearly assessed by the Commission. On 13 March 1998 the Commission declared its intention to carry out an additional assessment with a view to honouring its commitments to the WTO.

News in brief

Agenda 2000/agriculture formally adopted

On 17 May the Council of agriculture ministers formally adopted the regulations proposed by the Commission to reform the CAP on the basis of the discussions at the Council meetings between 22 February and 11 March and the Berlin European Council of 24/25 March. An important decision was taken on the common market organisation (CMO) for milk: the mid-term review was kept at 2003, with the aim of ending the current milk quota scheme after 2006. For arable crops, a related measure already included in that CMO was reinserted in the regulation because the basic rate of compulsory set-aside was fixed at 10% for 2000-06 in Berlin, in place of the zero percent initially proposed by the Commission; this is because long-term set-aside land and land reforested under the rural development regulation can be accounted for as compulsory set-aside by farmers. The regulations can be found on the DG VI website indicated below.

Tomatoes for processing: 1999-2000 quotas

On 26 April the Commission adopted Regulation (EC) No 865/1999 which establishes the following allocation by Member State and product group of quotas for fresh tomatoes for processing for the 1999-2000 marketing year (in tonnes):

Member State	Tomato concentrate	Preserved whole peeled tomatoes	Other products	Total
Greece	1 064 832	15 619	30 503	1 110 954
Spain	696 663	149 948	158 219	1 004 830
France	250 822	32 502	49 324	332 648
Italy	1 771 812	1 113 528	651 972	3 537 312
Portugal	801 124	9 522	39 872	850 518
Total	4 585 253	1 321 119	929 890	6 836 262

The allocation is based on the average quantities produced in the previous two marketing years for which the minimum price was paid. From the current year onward quotas per Member State and product group may not vary by more than 10% from one year to the next.



European Commission
Directorate-General of Agriculture (DG VI)

Editor: Stella ZERVOUDAKI, EC DG VI A.II.1. This publication does not necessarily express the official views of the Commission. In collaboration with the Directorates of DG VI.

For further information: Rue de la Loi 200, B-1049 Bruxelles/Wetstraat 200, B-1049 Brussel - Belgium - Office: L/130-4/148A
Telephone: direct line (+32-2) 295 32 40, exchange (+32-2) 299 11 11. Fax: (+32-2) 295 75 40.

Telex: COMEU B 21877. Internet: <<http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg06/index.htm>>

Printed on recycled paper.

CH-AA-99-005-EN-C