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INFORMATION MEMO

Harmonization of veterinary legislation

The Council of Ministers of EEC has just issued a directive on health requirements for intra-Community trade in fresh meat. The aim is to replace by uniform rules the varied veterinary legislation at present in force in Member States. Harmonization in this field will facilitate free trade in meat within the Community. (Cf. also information memo P-24 on health regulations for trade in pigs and cattle).

The directive requires precise health regulations to be drawn up covering the treatment of meat to be exported to another Member State. It will give importing countries stronger guarantees against the import of meat not conforming to their health regulations.

An annex sets out detailed regulations on the equipment of slaughterhouses, cutting rooms and cold stores and on storage and transport conditions.

It is for exporting countries to see that these rules are observed, since they are responsible for licensing slaughterhouses and cutting rooms and for withdrawing licences if necessary. Furthermore the Commission can on the request of a Member State and after obtaining a report from experts, authorize a temporary ban on entry into a member country of meat from a slaughterhouse or cutting room which does not fulfil the conditions laid down by the directive.

Each consignment of fresh meat must be accompanied by a health certificate issued by the appropriate veterinary authority in the country of origin and constituting proof for the owner of the goods - and for the importing country - that the competent authorities in the country of origin have ensured compliance with the standards laid down in the directive. The certificate must accompany the consignment to its destination.

If, despite a check at the time of dispatch, a consignment is found on arrival to be unfit for human consumption, or if the provisions of the directive have not been observed, the country concerned can refuse the consignment or have it returned; however, the consignor may challenge the refusal of entry by calling in a veterinary expert chosen from a list drawn up by the Commission. The expert must have the nationality of a "neutral" Member State.

If there is a danger of spreading contagious diseases a Member State may also temporarily place a partial or total ban on imports of fresh meat from another Member State, but must inform the Commission and the other Member States of its reasons. As soon as possible more far-reaching measures of harmonization will be introduced in this sphere.

The system of approved slaughterhouses in the country of origin as laid down by the directive is in itself a very important step towards the harmonization of veterinary legislation, which is an essential condition for the free movement throughout the Community of meat produced in any member country. The object of such harmonization is gradually to abolish controls in the importing country.

Annex I to the directive contains precise provisions on standards for licensing slaughterhouses and cutting rooms, on hygienic conditions relating to staff, premises and equipment, on sanitary inspection before and after slaughter, marking, certificate of fitness for human consumption, storage and transport.

Annex II contains a specimen certificate of fitness for human consumption. This directive has to a great extent been drawn up in the light of work on the subject by the International Office of Epizootics and OECD. Relations between the Member States and non-member countries have also been taken into account.