



European Commission
Directorate-general of Agriculture

Newsletter

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Simplifying the legislation on agriculture

A report on simplifying the Community's legislation on agriculture was adopted by the Commission on 28 April. It reviews what has been done so far in the context of reforming the common agricultural policy and in other ad hoc exercises.

Simplifying agricultural legislation - which accounts for 50% of Community legislation - is essential in terms of increased transparency and bringing Europe closer to its citizens. Simplification also helps the farmers, agri-businesses and national civil servants who have to comply with or manage the CAP. The idea is to simplify rules and procedures so as to cut down on the administrative burden and facilitate implementation and controls as well as reduce the scope for fraud. The other aim is to ensure that legislation is clear and easy to understand.

A guiding principle

Simplification has been one of the principles guiding the Commission in the process of reforming the CAP. For instance, the regime for arable crops has been simplified by cutting out or redrafting a series of rules and exemptions, while the 23 regulations in the wine sector have been replaced by just one. Rural development will be regulated in future by a single regulation instead of nine.

In the area of food safety and livestock products, the Commission has regrouped 16 directives setting out rules common to all products, with specific provisions added for individual products. Simplifying this legislation is combined with ensuring a high level of protection for consumers.

The Commission has also been canvassing the views of the EAGGF paying agencies at national level on how rules and procedures might be simplified, and their suggestions have been taken into account or are currently being examined and will lead to more proposals for simplification over the next twelve months.

Making legislative instruments more easy to follow and understand

Other measures are being taken to make agricultural legislation easier to follow and understand. The approach is threefold:

- Informal consolidation of agricultural legislation. Texts which have been amended many times are being reissued with the changes incorporated into the original instrument. A first series of "consolidated" regulations of this kind is already available in a database launched at the start of 1999 which should be completed by the end of 2001 (see box). These consolidated texts are not authentic in legal terms (only texts published in the Official Journal are authentic), but they provide a valuable working tool to facilitate searching for the rules in force by anyone dealing with the CAP.
- Formal repeal of out-of-date and irrelevant instruments, or simply withdrawing instruments which have expired where their period of validity is clearly defined in the text. To date, some 35 texts have been repealed and a further 260 withdrawn.
- Finally, it is planned to standardise the Commission's published notices on export refunds. Once introduced, this new system will facilitate the electronic exchange of data and information between the Commission and the Member States.

How to find consolidated agricultural legislation on the Internet:

1. Consult the chronological index on the 'Europa' server at the following address:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg06/consleg/index_en.htm>

2. If you have the reference number of an instrument, you can directly access its consolidated version by inserting the reference number into the following address:

<<http://europa.eu.int/celex/consleg/yyTnnnn/lg/cov.htm>>*

* where: yy is the year - for example, 99 for 1999; T is the type of instrument: R for regulation, L for directive, D for decision; nnnn is the number of the instrument; and lg is the official language code.

For example: the address of the consolidated English version of Regulation (EEC) No 2081/92 will be:

<<http://europa.eu.int/celex/consleg/92R2081/en/cov.htm>>

WTO ruling on the banana import regime

In a ruling issued on 6 April, the World Trade Organisation found that the Community's new banana import regime, which came into force on 1 January 1999 as part of the common organisation of the market in bananas, does not comply with WTO rules in three respects:

- The preferential import rights for bananas from the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries are said to constitute discrimination against other members of WTO and are larger than the Community is allowed to grant to the ACP countries under the exemptions permitted by the WTO.
- The distribution of the tariff quota among supplier countries in South America is said to be based on out-of-date and non-representative reference quantities, as a result of the regime not being in line with WTO rules.
- The distribution of import licences is said to be still based on the old, discriminatory system.

The Community has taken note of the WTO's ruling and the Commission is considering the possible solutions in order to comply with it.

The WTO has also authorised the United States to take retaliatory action worth USD 191.4 million in the form of a 100% increase in customs duties on imports of specific European products selected earlier by the American authorities. This is only about a third of the penalty the United States had asked for. The Community has appealed to the WTO to desist from premature application of these penalties.

Readers will recall that the common organisation of the market in bananas was introduced in 1993, based from the beginning on a single import regime designed to safeguard the interests of Europe's banana producers while keeping the Community market open to South America imports and honouring commitments under the Lomé Convention to the ACP countries which export bananas.

Agricultural schemes to help the needy

This year the programme to distribute agricultural products to the most needy people within the Community - under Regulation (EEC) 3730/87 - will have a volume of EUR 187 million drawn from the EAGGF Guarantee Section, to be allocated among the ten Member States which have chosen to participate (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain). Member States have been taking part in this programme on a voluntary basis for more than ten years. As well as helping to regulate the market by reducing stocks, the scheme also fulfils a social purpose; the number of recipients during 1996/97 is put at more than 7 million. The allocation of the funds available among the Member States

is based on an assessment of poverty levels using data produced by Eurostat with the collaboration of DG V at the Commission.

The assistance usually takes the form of foodstuffs held in Union intervention stores (starting with stocks held in the applicant country): cereals, rice, olive oil, milk powder, beef and butter. The food actually distributed can substitute for the products in store provided it belongs to the same product groups. Distribution is in the hands of charities chosen by each Member State, which is also responsible for managing the aid scheme; the Commission supervises the overall smooth running of the programme.

In brief

Imports of US beef suspended

After the publication of an independent scientific study revealing the presence of residues of synthetic growth hormones in 12% of American beef and veal samples that had been declared as free of hormones, the Commission decided on 30 April to suspend imports from the United States of beef and offals for human consumption with effect from 15 June. In another decision since then, Member States are to extend their controls to all such imports, carrying out

tests on samples from each batch imported. The Commission may amend these decisions if the United States announces measures to render its "hormone-free beef" programme effective for exports to the Union by means of a system for tracing the origin of products, so that US stock farmers' declarations can be verified along with the proper separation of meat with and without hormones in US slaughterhouses.



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