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INFORMATION MEMO

Sanitary regulations for trade in fresh meat

The Council has just approved a directive concerning certain sanitary problems relating to intra-Community trade in fresh meat. This forms a first set of provisions aimed at securing uniform regulations in place of the present variety of veterinary provisions applicable in Member States.

Under the common agricultural policy Member States are required to harmonize their legislation; an important step in this task is the working out of precise sanitary regulations for the treatment of meat intended for export to another Member State; if this were not done, Member States might find that their meat exports were refused entry because the importing country did not accept the sanitary guarantees provided by the country of origin.

This new step will not only give extra guarantees to importing countries, but will provide the exporting country that enforces the directive on its territory with greater opportunities for sending meat to the other Member States. It is for this reason that an appendix to the directive lays down detailed conditions for bringing export slaughterhouses and cutting rooms up to standard and regulates meat-storage and transport conditions.

It is up to exporting countries to see that these rules are observed. As they are responsible for licensing the slaughterhouses, they must withdraw the licence granted if they find that the conditions of the directive are no longer fulfilled.

As it is the exporting country that is to be given the responsibility for licensing, a Community procedure had to be found to ensure that the standards laid down are respected and to take into account the legitimate fears of importing countries. The Commission has therefore been empowered to obtain an objective report from experts and to authorize importing countries to place a general ban on meat from an exporting country if the Commission had good cause to believe that the said country had issued a licence that should never have been issued or had failed to withdraw one that should have been withdrawn.

Each consignment of fresh meat must be accompanied by a sanitary certificate drawn up in at least the language of the importing country, to be issued by the appropriate veterinary authority in the country of origin and constituting proof for the owner of the goods - and for the

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importing country - that the competent authorities in the country of origin have ensured compliance with the standards laid down in the directive.

If, despite a check at the time of dispatch, a consignment is found to be unfit for human consumption on arrival in the country of destination, or if the provisions of the directive have not been observed in the country of origin, the importing country retains the right to refuse it entry. However, the legal position of the owner has also been strengthened in such cases, since the consignor affected by such a refusal can call in a neutral veterinary expert who is a national of one of the other Member States for an opinion.

If an epizootic disease or a new animal disease of a serious and contagious nature arises in a Member State, another Member State may, if the introduction of fresh meat from that State might spread the disease, temporarily refuse or place restrictions on the entry of this meat. There is also provision for action by the Community.

This directive, however, does not affect domestic provisions on antibiotics, estrogens, thyreostatics or tenderizers nor on the addition of extraneous matter to fresh meat or its treatment with ionizing or ultraviolet radiation.

Member States must bring their legislation into line within twelve months of being notified of this directive. Its importance derives principally from the common organization of the pigmeat market, which from September will be extending its activities to cover cuts of pork. Member States will no longer be able to prohibit or restrict the entry of whole, half or quarter beef or pork carcasses or to refuse entry to a number of other pork cuts on veterinary grounds.

The Council is examining a further draft directive on the sanitary problems of intra-Community trade in cattle and pigs. By the end of the year the Commission will also put forward proposals concerning preserved meat and poultry meat.