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**PLENARY MEETING OF THE ADVISORY GROUP (AG) ON THE FOOD CHAIN AND ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH**

**Summary Record**

4 DECEMBER 2009

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**1. Introduction and Approval of the Agenda**

Ms Testori welcomed participants and outlined the recent changes for DG SANCO. Pending approval by the EP, John Dalli would become Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy covering the DG as it stands with some important changes. DG SANCO would, in addition, be responsible for Pharmaceuticals, Cosmetics and Medical Devices, environmental aspects of Biotechnology and Pesticides and Health. It would also become responsible for the European Medicines Agency (EMA). Ms Testori underlined the importance for stakeholders to respond to the consultation on Agenda 2020, which had been circulated to the AG. The agenda was approved.

**2. Review of the BSE surveillance in Member States**

The COM reported on the state of play of BSE surveillance in Member States. Ms Testori commented that BSE was one of the areas where a real improvement had been seen and the COM wished to reduce legislation and the administrative burden on operators.

In response to a question concerning the rules on specified risk material and the reintroduction of processed animal protein, the COM stated that any changes to the list of specified risk material would be based on scientific advice from EFSA. Controls were important and methodology for different species was required. A research project had been commissioned to establish species specific methodologies. The results were expected at the end of 2010 and the COM would then reflect on a review of the use of processed animal proteins meal in feed. Ms Testori underlined that the COM's intention early 2010 was to present a policy document setting out future steps to obtain the political agreement of MS and the EP to a readjustment of the legislation to reflect the risk.

**3. Commission report on the experience gained from the application of the Hygiene Regulations**

The COM explained that the purpose of the report, published in July 2009, was to examine the factual experience gained during the implementation of the Hygiene Regulations 2006 – 2008 and to identify difficulties based on information from MS, industry and consumer organisations and the FVO. The overall experience was positive and demonstrated that there was no need for a fundamental overhaul and it was too early to give a complete and balanced evaluation. The problems identified were more important in small establishments. There had been positive feedback on the establishment of guidance documents. The report would be used as a basis for further discussion to ascertain where modifications in the legislation are needed. It emphasised

that non-inclusion of information in the report did not mean that it would not be used but that, given the overall satisfaction with the hygiene package only small legislative amendments were needed.

With regard to composite products, a prolongation of four years had been given and this time would be used to define food safety public health rules for composite products relating to imports. The COM was in the process of finalising a document which would clarify for the competent authorities what flexibility is given and would contain a questions and answers part for producers.

In response to a call for an evaluation of feed hygiene legislation, the COM underlined that although it was not dealt with by the presentation a lot of work was ongoing in this area and a working group could be organised. The COM believed however that a report on feed hygiene would be premature. The FVO inspections would give a clearer picture of the implementation of feed hygiene legislation.

The COM explained that the objectives in the food hygiene legislation were general and good practice guides had therefore been developed to assist operators in implementing the rules. The COM further clarified that the Community guides of good practice were not product specific.

In response to a question about the COM proposal to exempt small businesses from the scope of HACCP, Ms Testori reported that the COM had developed the proposal in the frame of alleviating administrative burden. The proposal was opposed by MS and was still in the Council and EP.

With respect to future priorities the COM underlined that the review of the meat inspection is a major dossier. It was hoped to finalise the report on mechanically separated meat in the first quarter of 2010 and the COM intended to organise a round table in April 2010 with stakeholders and MS to look at the possibility of going to risk based meat inspection. It confirmed that the EP and international organisations would be invited to the round table on meat inspection.

#### **4. Animal Welfare**

- *Econ Welfare: Overview and preliminary results from an ongoing EU project on Socio-Economic Aspects of Farm Animal Welfare.*

Scientists from the *Wageningen UR Livestock Research* and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences presented an overview and the preliminary results of the ongoing EU project EconWelfare on socio-economic aspects of farm animal welfare (AW), funded under the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme. The three year project started in 2008, is divided into 5 horizontal work packages. The aim is to suggest to national and European policy makers how to improve farm animal welfare. In collaboration with stakeholder groups, it investigates policy options and their impacts on the livestock production chain, the animals and European society.

Further information is available at [www.econwelfare.eu](http://www.econwelfare.eu).

The presentation led to an interesting discussion with stakeholders focusing on the need for clearer consumer information as regards animal welfare standards while avoiding confusion with existing labelling schemes. The relation between animal welfare and sustainability was referred to as well as the need to better define "consumers". The scientists took note of stakeholder comments and informed participants that the work on the projects would now focus on more concrete policy options.

- *The FAO's initiative on Capacity Building to Implement Good Animal Welfare Practices*

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) presented its initiative on capacity building to implement good animal welfare practices, highlighting the benefits for developing countries of higher animal welfare. The presenter outlined the FAO's strategy on Farm Animal Welfare, its approach and achievements to-date which included the development of the *FAO Gateway to Farm Animal Welfare*, the organisation of specific stakeholder events and the establishment of a FAO multidisciplinary AW Working Group. It was highlighted that the work of FAO on animal welfare and particularly the Gateway is being carried out in close collaboration with an ample spectrum of stakeholders. The Gateway had been conceived as a participatory multi-stakeholder platform aimed at building awareness, foster sharing of information and facilitating access to scientific, technical and legislative and training materials, providing also a database of AW experts, organisations, education and research centres. Future steps include the development of FAO guidelines on good animal welfare practices.

The stakeholders appreciated that the FAO does not treat AW as a stand-alone issue but as one among many socially important goals including food safety and security, human and animal health, environmental sustainability and social justice. The presenter informed participants about the long-standing collaboration between the FAO and the OIE and highlighted that FAO efforts are specifically targeting the building of capacities in developing countries to develop and implement adequate standards.

FAO Gateway to Farm Animal Welfare <http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/themes/animal-welfare/en>.

- *Information on the outcome of the Commission Initiative on Global Trade and Farm Animal Welfare and discussion on future possible initiatives in this area.*

The COM's presentation aimed to provide information on the outcome of the events organised in 2008 and 2009 on the issue of animal welfare in international trade and to discuss possible future initiatives in this field.

DG SANCO and DG TRADE, together with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), Eurogroup for Animals, Compassion In World Farming and the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), organised an International Forum on Global Aspects of Farm Animal Welfare in April 2008 and a Conference on Global Trade and Farm Animal Welfare in January 2009.

Animal welfare is gaining momentum worldwide and is being increasingly considered as an added value to trade and as an opportunity to improved livestock production both in developed and developing countries. Existing multilateral fora (such as the OIE and the FAO) as well as collaboration between international organisations and global stakeholders could promote a rapid implementation of AW requirements in farming systems at international level.

The COM stressed its commitment to continue working to raise international awareness of animal welfare, as foreseen in the Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2006-2010. In particular the discussion on the issue of animal welfare in international trade could continue as a multi-stakeholders' platform.

In this context stakeholders supported the setting up of a working group of the Advisory Group on the Food Chain, Animal and Plant Health to discuss global trade and animal welfare issues. Moreover, stakeholders expressed their interest in a more direct and coordinated involvement and consultation during the development of international standards.

Conference on Global Trade and Farm Animal Welfare <http://www.animalwelfareandtrade.com/>  
[http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/international/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/international/index_en.htm)

## **5. Conseil National de l'Alimentation (CNA)**

The COM explained that the intention was to regularly invite a national organisation to participate in AG Plenaries to explain how their organisations operate, starting with the French National Food Council. The idea was to see how stakeholders were consulted at national level to ascertain whether lessons could be learned.

The CNA representative gave a short presentation on its composition, role, who can consult it, how it works in practice and its future. Two typical examples, consumption of products from cloned animals and nutritional profiles, were given to demonstrate how it delivers opinions. The Council seeks to align views and obtain consensus on proposals for action. It examines whether there has been a follow-up to its recommendations after three years and if not seeks to understand the reasons.

Questions were asked about the relationship between AFSSA and CNA and whether there was overlap and problems with conflicting opinions. CNA stressed that it aims to give consensual recommendations to government, industry or consumers whilst recording minority opinions. The CNA takes into account scientific opinions from AFSSA but also other issues such as economic factors and consumer viewpoints.

## **6. DG ENV's evaluation of their GMO legislation**

In December 2008, DG ENV launched a technical evaluation of the regulatory framework of the cultivation of GMOs under Directive 2001/18/EC on the deliberate release into the environment of GMOs and Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003 on GM food and feed and the marketing of their other uses under the Directive.

The contractor, GHK, member of the European Policy Evaluation Consortium (EPEC), summarised the main findings of a comprehensive stakeholder consultation, including the Member States' Competent Authorities under the GMO legislation, professional associations, biotech industry and civil society organisations involved in biotechnology issues.

The interim report, together with an executive summary has been published on the DG ENV website:

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/biotechnology/pdf/gmo\\_interim\\_report.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/biotechnology/pdf/gmo_interim_report.pdf)

The COM reassured participants that the transfer of the file from DG ENV to DG SANCO, would not affect the timing of the final report, which is expected to be finalised at the end of February 2010.

## **7. DG SANCO Evaluation of the EU Legislative Framework on GM food and feed and short report on Working Group of 17 July 2009**

The evaluation, carried out by the Food Chain Evaluation Consortium, was presented at the WG on 17 July and contacts between stakeholders and the contractor established. Following the meeting the project evolved quickly: 82 responses to stakeholder questions and 25 responses to the survey addressed to the competent authorities. The data collection phase and the case study visits in different MS were being concluded. Subsequently there would be an analysis phase and the contractor would meet EFSA in January and the different COM departments in February 2010. A draft interim report was expected for end January/beginning February 2010. The draft final report was foreseen for Easter and would be published in June 2010. The COM

intended to hold a one day Conference presenting the conclusions of this evaluation exercise (date to be confirmed). It drew attention to the SANCO website for the evaluation:

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/biotechnology/evaluation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/biotechnology/evaluation/index_en.htm)

#### **8. Information on draft revised guidelines for the implementation of Articles 12, 14, 18 and 19 of Regulation 178/2002**

The COM reminded participants of the background to the guidelines drawn up with MS authorities, operators etc., and approved by the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCFCAH). This Committee had proposed a revision of the guidelines in the light of the experience gained by the full application of the General Food Law main requirements from 1 January 2005. The guidelines are intended to assist actors in the food chain to understand and apply the provisions of the articles in a coherent manner but are not mandatory. The revision proposed was a partial one involving modification to the sections relative to Articles 12, 18 and 19 with a new section devoted to Article 14. The proposal for revision will be submitted to the SCFCAH for discussion and approval early in 2010. There were lots of textual amendments but in the main not much modification on substance as the exercise was intended to simplify and clarify the guidelines. The guidelines for Article 12 specified what food safety rules had to be applied for foodstuffs to be exported to third countries. For Article 18, traceability, the COM had tried to simplify the list of information which an operator had to keep and had reviewed the duration it had to be maintained. The substantial changes to Article 19 guidelines had to be seen in connection with the new section on Article 14. In response to an enquiry about the lack of change to the section on Article 17 the COM responded that MS authorities and experts had not deemed it necessary at this stage. With respect to the problem of recall and withdrawal the COM was conscious of the problems and had tried to clarify and improve the guidelines. Participants were informed that comments should be sent to [Jacques.Humières@ec.europa.eu](mailto:Jacques.Humières@ec.europa.eu) by the end of 2009.

#### **9. Draft proposal for Commission Regulation laying down implementing measures for the Rapid Alert System for Food (RASFF).**

The COM explained the context of the draft proposal, its objectives and outlined the next steps for the draft text which would be discussed in a working group of the AG in 2010. The Regulation would be complemented with guidelines setting out more detailed instructions.

Given the public nature of the system, which meant that it should be fair, industry would like to be consulted by MS prior to notification, enquired about quality checks on the information received and underlined the importance of differentiating between issues of non-compliance and risk or indirect risk. Specific guidelines were required when maximum levels of pesticide residues were exceeded to avoid excessive notification of such substances. Some representatives expressed support for a world-wide RASFF but wondered how this would work in practice.

The COM emphasised the trust it placed in information received from the MS and stressed that it could not wait for consultation with third parties. It underscored that only serious risks were notified as alerts but MS were also sent other information judged to be of interest to control authorities. This allowed the control authorities to ascertain where there were frequent problems and more controls were needed. It was intended that guidance on pesticide notification would also be included in the guidelines document. The COM explained the background to the world-wide RASFF which had started in 2007. Although RASFF notified the rest of the world this was not reciprocated. The idea was to propose similar regional networks in other parts of the world, using the opportunity provided by the Better Training for

Safer Food to share the RASFF experience with third countries. It was noted that the WHO INFOSAN (International Food Safety Authorities Network) plays a coordinating role. Some AG members wished to receive biannual RASFF reports in order to become more rapidly aware of trends. The COM replied that this would be too difficult and time-consuming and underlined that important emerging risks would be communicated through other channels. EFSA reported that it would be producing a trend report on emerging risks in 2010.

#### **10. Stakeholder Dialogue Group of 26 November 2009**

A short report was given on this meeting which will be available under:

[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health\\_consumer/sdg/docs/SDG\\_minutes\\_07052009.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/sdg/docs/SDG_minutes_07052009.pdf)

#### **11. Feedback on Working Groups of the Advisory Group**

- Plant Health, 1 July 2009

Following a summary of the WG which can be found at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/strategy/docs/advisory\\_group\\_cphr\\_evaluation\\_report.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/strategy/docs/advisory_group_cphr_evaluation_report.pdf)

The COM informed participants of a joint meeting of the WG on Plant Health and a Commission Expert Working Group composed of the Chief Officers Plant Health taking place on 23 and 24 February 2010. The title of the meeting is "**Modernising the Common plant health regime in view of globalisation and climate change**"

The objective of the joint meeting is to discuss the interim findings of the evaluation of the Common plant health regime being carried out by the Food Chain Evaluation Consortium (FCEC) for the Commission. The first part of the meeting will highlight the challenges that the EU currently faces in its plant health policies. The second day will be a workshop with stakeholders, NGOs and Member State authorities to discuss preliminary options for addressing these challenges. The outcome will assist the FCEC to develop its advice to the Commission.

- Dietetic Foods, 17 July 2009

A short report on the meeting is available at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/committees/advisory/sum\\_wkg\\_17072010\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/committees/advisory/sum_wkg_17072010_en.pdf)

#### **12. Any Other Business**

- AG members were informed that the link to the revised Comitology Planner would be circulated to AG members early in 2010.

- Members also confirmed that they would like to maintain reporting on working groups at the Plenary and made suggestions for improvement.

**13. Date of next meeting:** (26 March 2010)