STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE FOOD CHAIN AND ANIMAL HEALTH
HELD ON 19 FEBRUARY 2008 IN BRUSSELS
(Section Biological Safety of the Food Chain)

Chairman: Eric Poudélet
All the Member States were present.

1. Presentation from Cyprus of the results of the 2nd year of the pilot project concerning the investigation of PrP gene of Cyprus goats and its association with natural scrapie (JOV)

This item was postponed because of the unavailability of the Cypriot expert.

2. Exchange of views on possible baseline studies as regards microbiological criteria in foodstuffs (KDS)

Baseline studies on *Salmonella* carried out in different poultry populations and slaughter pigs give comparable information as regards the prevalence of *Salmonella*, reference values for setting targets for reduction in animal populations, harmonisation of monitoring within control programmes and increase awareness.

Similar baseline studies through sampling in foodstuffs would be interesting in order to collect comparable and statistically significant prevalence data. They could be used by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) for EU-level risk-assessments. Resulting data would be compared with data collected from food business operators in order to verify at national level correct implementation of Regulation (EC) No 2073/2005. Similarly to previous baseline studies, the technical specifications would be based on technical specifications prepared by EFSA, for a 12 months period, with electronic reporting to the Commission and data analysis and summary report by EFSA.

The idea of such baseline studies was well received by a number of Member States (MS) during the working group on microbiological criteria on 1 February 2008. Two candidates for a baseline survey have been retained:

- *Salmonella* in fresh broiler meat and meat preparations. Technical specifications for such surveys have already been prepared by EFSA and are available at: [http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa_locale-1178620753812_1178620762049.htm](http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa_locale-1178620753812_1178620762049.htm)
- *Listeria* in 1 or 2 selected ready-to-eat food

The Commission further collected the views of MS on carrying out such baseline studies and on possible pathogen/foodstuff combination that should be considered. If the Member States were in favour of such baseline studies, EFSA would be requested to develop technical specifications, if not done yet, and the possibility of co-financing would be considered.
Most MS expressed their broad support on the presented objectives for carrying out such baseline studies. The majority of MS considered it more interesting to start with *listeria* since previous studies already focused on *salmonella*. The question of a possible co-financing was essential to many MS. Some MS wished to deal with no more than one program a year. For France, histamine in fish products should be studied as well, with respect to the current consumer trend for these products. The surveys should also include products imported from third countries.

The Commission took note of the MS's general support. Working groups meetings will be organised where priorities will be further discussed and defined. In reply to Spain, the Commission clarified the final objective of such studies: obtaining harmonised data so as to verify correct implementation of Regulation 2073/2005. Combining different criteria in the same products could be considered to facilitate the MS's work. Plant-based products and composite products might be considered because of their potential for contamination. As for co-financing, the Commission will investigate the possibilities with its budget colleagues.


The Commission presented the request from FERCO\(^1\) for the development of a Community Guide to Good Practices for Hygiene in the Contract Catering sector. This federation is highly representative of the contract catering European sector (96%). It intends to update its 1994 Code to Good Practices in accordance with the new EU hygiene and HACCP rules and to finalise the first draft by September 2008. The committee expressed its general support on such a guide. Some Member States stressed the real importance of integrating HACCP rules. Moreover they suggested extending the scope to cover the 'self-managed' catering sector as well. The Commission explained that the initiative for developing guides stems from the sector itself. For the moment, no harmonised guide exists for both Contract and Self-managed Catering sectors. The Commission will pass on the MS's comments to FERCO.

4. **Guide to good practice on wholesale activities: Possible limitation of the scope (BJ/TC)**

The Commission started to look at the request from the WUWM\(^2\) to develop a guide to good practice. The committee was briefly informed about the discussions held. The use of the term "Authorities" to designate Managers of such wholesale markets was considered to be confusing. Furthermore the organisation intended to restrict the scope of the guide to cover the implementation of the provisions of Regulation (EC) N° 852/2004, and not anymore of Regulation (EC) N° 853/2004. Further to discussions in working groups Member States agreed with the Commission to ask the WUWM not to use the term "authorities" and to come back to its initial proposal covering both Regulations. Further to these comments the organisation could decide to withdraw its initiative.

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\(^1\) European Federation of Contract Catering Organisations – Fédération européenne de la Restauration Collective Concédée (http://www.ferco-catering.org/)

5. Information on the Member States' reporting obligation in relation to mechanically separated meat (TEG/TC)

Regulation (EC) No 1923/2006 amending Regulation (EC) No 999/2001 provides for the submission by the Member States by 1 July 2008 of a report to the Commission on the use and the production method of MSM in their territory. This report should include all kinds of mechanically separated meat, not only from ruminants. The Commission requested MS to send their report by May 2008 so as to be able to prepare its general report to be communicated to the European Parliament and to the Council.

6. Information to the Commission on the use of slaughterhouse staff in official controls (TEG/TC)

Regulation (EC) No 854/2004 allows in certain cases for the use of slaughterhouse staff to carry out official control duties, subject to a proper training. The Commission reminded the Member States of their reporting obligation if they decide to use that provision. Sweden, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands confirmed the use of slaughterhouse staff, which they signalled having reported to the Commission. Belgium also confirmed the use of slaughterhouse staff in official controls.

In reply to the suggestion from UK and FR to extend the scope of the provision to other species, the Commission indicated that such an amendment can only be done through co-decision.

With regard to fees related to official controls in the Member States, the Commission intends to have a survey carried out by an external consultant in order to assess their charging. It is expected to be available in October 2008. On the basis of the survey the Commission will prepare a report to be presented in 2009 to the European Parliament and the Council.


This proposal aims at modifying the list of rapid tests set out in Annex X to Regulation (EC) No 999/2001 which are approved for the monitoring of TSE in bovine, ovine and caprine animals. The "IDEXX Laboratories" company has indeed informed the Commission of its decision to withdraw from the market one of its EU-approved BSE tests called "Institut Pourquier Speed’it BSE".

The French delegate pointed out that the next amendment should take into consideration the fact that some tests included in the list are not sensitive to atypical scrapie. In this respect the Commission has asked the Community Reference Laboratories to clarify that fact.

Austria inquired about the status of its request to include two further tests for the monitoring of TSE in sheep and goats. The Commission is still receiving applications for tests to be evaluated under the new call for expression of interest published in

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October 2007. The deadline for submission is 1 March 2008. The evaluation of tests will then be the responsibility of the European Food Safety Authority.

Vote: in favour at unanimity


Under Article 6(1b) of Regulation (EC) No 999/2001, Member States which can demonstrate the improvement of their BSE epidemiological situation according to certain criteria to be laid down in accordance with a Committee procedure may apply for revision of their annual BSE monitoring programmes. Several MS in which a positive trend in the epidemiological situation is observed have expressed interest in having their annual BSE monitoring programmes revised according that procedure. In order to allow these MS to submit a formal request to the Commission to revise their programmes, it is necessary to establish the criteria for demonstrating the improvement of the epidemiological situation, which is the purpose of this draft Regulation.

The Commission described the types of information to be included in the MS' applications, as well as the epidemiological criteria to be respected.

With regard to Finland's request for clarification on the use of the term "analysis" instead of "assessment" in point 7.1(e), the Commission explained that the legal service has required the term be consistent with what is used in Article 6 of Regulation (EC) No 999/2001.

France proposed to broaden the scope of point 7.1(e) to all risk-reduction measures. The Commission presented an amended paragraph, to which Germany did not agree.

France also stressed the importance of involving the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in the evaluation of the submitted dossiers. The Commission reminded the committee of the independence between the EFSA and itself, the former being responsible for risk assessment, the latter for risk management. Possible amendment to monitoring programmes is a management responsibility. France sent the following statement for inclusion in the minutes of the meeting:

Déclaration de la délégation française

Les autorités françaises considèrent que toute proposition d’assouplissement de la surveillance de l’ESB devrait faire l’objet d’une évaluation scientifique préalable et complète de la part de l’AESA. Elles observent que, si la Commission a d’ores et déjà confié à l’Autorité européenne l’évaluation du surrisque lié à certaines modalités d’allègement, tel n’est pas le cas du volet qui correspond aux critères d’éligibilité définis par le projet SANCO/156/2008. Cela est d’autant plus regrettable que ces critères définiront la population cible potentiellement concernée par les mesures d’assouplissement. L’engagement de la Commission à ressaisir l’AESA chaque fois que cette population sera susceptible d’être modifiée permettra cependant d’y remédier.
Par ailleurs, les autorités françaises considèrent qu’il est préférable que l’évaluation scientifique des dossiers qui seront présentés par les États membres éligibles soit confiée à l’AESA et non à un groupe d’experts ad hoc réuni directement par la Commission.

The proposed Regulation is expected to be adopted formally by the Commission in June 2008. The reason for the delay is the regulatory procedure with scrutiny under which the proposal falls, given the European Commission Parliament and the Council scrutiny right of 3 months. The Commission advised the Member States to already prepare their dossiers for submission in the summer 2008. An ad hoc expert group will then be convened in September to examine the submitted dossiers. Their comments will be brought forward at working group meetings. After all discussions, the Commission will present a proposal covering several dossiers.

Vote: in favour at the qualified majority (316 votes in favour, 29 votes abstention)

Miscellaneous / Divers

- Luxembourg, supported by Sweden, pleaded for joining together the two sections of the SCFCAH, Animal Health and Animal Welfare, and Biological Safety of the Food Chain. The Commission replied that discussions are still being held on that possibility, notably on the administrative aspects that would have to be solved.

(signed)
Eric Poudelet
Acting Director

N.B. The proposals on which the Committee expressed an opinion are subject to a defined procedure in relation to the formal adoption by the Commission.