HUMANE SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL

Conditions for the import of horsemeat to the European Union

Food products of animal origin may only be imported into the EU if they derive from an approved establishment in a third country that has been found to meet EU requirements. The competent authorities in non-EU countries, which are deemed eligible to export meat products to the EU, are obliged to ensure "credible inspection and controls throughout the production chain, which cover all relevant aspects of hygiene, animal health and public health."[1]

Third countries hoping to export horsemeat to the EU are therefore required to implement residue control plans that are at least as strict as those implemented in the Union itself (i.e. Council Directive 96/23/EC).[2] Those countries must submit such plans to the European Commission's Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) for evaluation on an annual basis. The plans required by the EU, and therefore for third countries, must detail:

- National legislation controlling the use of substances listed in Annex I.
- National tolerances for authorised substances with no EU maximum residue limits under Regulation (EEC) 2377/90.[3]
- Information on the relevant regulatory bodies enforcing the plan.
- A list of approved labs and details on their testing capacity.
- Details on sampling procedure (which substances, how frequently, methods, etc.), including compliance with Annex IV: ratio of samples to animals slaughtered
- Measures regarding what is done with animals in which residues have been detected.

In addition to the above, third countries exporting equine meat to the EU are expected to:

- Establish a system for identifying animals intended for food production (e.g. equine passports).
- Ensure that animals treated with anabolic steroids for growth purposes do not enter the EU food stream.

[1] DG SANCO, EU import conditions for fresh meat and meat products. http://ec.europa.eu/food/international/trade/im_cond_meat_en.pdf Accessed 8th September 2010.

[2] Council Directive 96/23/EC. Chapter VI (listing Third Country responsibilities to comply with EU Regulations)

[3] Council Regulation (EEC) No 2377/90 of 26 June 1990 laying down a Community procedure for the establishment of maximum residue limits of veterinary medicinal products in foodstuffs of animal origin

- Keep treatment records for each animal to ensure they are not slaughtered within the withdrawal period, and guarantee EU maximum residue limits are not exceeded.
- When animals are moved to the slaughterhouse, the competent authority in the third country should be able to guarantee that for at least 6 months, the withdrawal periods have been respected.
- Third countries should set up a risk-based programme for controls on use of substances prohibited in the EU. Should conduct regular inspections at collection centres and slaughterhouses to ensure compliance.

Akin to the regulations for horsemeat production in the EU, imports of equine meat containing phenylbutazone are prohibited from entering the EU food supply (to the extent such information is available). EU imports of equine meat are also explicitly excluded if horses have been treated with substances (as listed in the Annex to Commission Regulation (EU) No 37/2010) for which no maximum residue limit has been established, hormonal steroids for growth promotion purposes and certain anabolic or gestagenic steroids (as specified in Council Directive 96/22/EC).[4]

Most crucially, the European Commission explicitly states that, as of 31st July 2010, "only horses with a known medicinal treatment history, and which on the basis of medicinal treatment records can be shown to have satisfied the appropriate veterinary medicine withdrawal periods, should be allowed to be slaughtered for export to the EU."[5]

[4] European Commission, DG SANCO website. Food safety – from the farm to the fork. http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/chemicalsafety/residues/third_countries_en.htm Accessed 8th September 2010.

[5] European Commission, DG SANCO website. Food safety – from the farm to the fork. http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/chemicalsafety/residues/third_countries_en.htm Accessed 8th September 2010.

[5] Dodman, N., Blondeau, N. & Marini, C. (2010) Association of phenylbutazone usage with horses bought slaughter. A public health risk. *Food and Chemical Toxicology.* 48 (2010) 1270-1274.