

Notices

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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Food Safety and Inspection Service

[Docket No. 99-015N]

Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex): Meeting of the Codex Committee on General Principles

AGENCY: Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of public meeting; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Office of Under Secretary for Food Safety, United States Department of Agriculture; the Food and Drug Administration, United States Department of Health and Human Services; and the Environmental Protection Agency are sponsoring a public meeting on March 17, 1999, to provide information and receive public comments on agenda items that will be discussed at the Fourteenth Session of the General Principles Committee of Codex, which will be held in Paris, France, April 19-23, 1999. Attendees at the March 17 meeting will hear brief descriptions of the issues and will have the opportunity to pose questions and offer comments. The co-sponsors of the March 17 public meeting recognize the importance of providing interested parties the opportunity to obtain background information on the Fourteenth Session of the General Principles Committee of Codex and to address items on the agenda.

DATES: The public meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 17, 1999, from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The public meeting will be held in Room 107-A, Jamie L. Whitten Building, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-3700. If a sign language interpreter or other special accommodation is necessary, contact Ms. Edith Kennard by telephone at (202) 720-5261. Submit

one original and two copies of comments to the FSIS Docket Clerk, Docket No. 99-015N, Room 102, Cotton Annex, 300 12th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20250-3700. All comments submitted in response to this notice will be considered part of the public record and will be available for viewing in the Docket Room between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Patrick J. Clerkin, Associate U.S. Manager for Codex, U.S. Codex Office, Food Safety and Inspection Service, Room 4861, South Building, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-3700, Phone: (202) 205-7760, Fax: (202) 720-3157.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Codex was established in 1962 by two United Nations organizations, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization. Codex is the major international organization for encouraging fair international trade in food and protecting the health and economic interests of consumers. Through adoption of food standards, codes of practice, and other guidelines developed by its committees, and by promoting their adoption and implementation by governments, Codex seeks to ensure that the world's food supply is sound, wholesome, free from adulteration, and correctly labeled.

The Codex Committee on General Principles was established to deal with such procedural and general matters as are referred to by the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Such matters have included the establishment of the general principles which define the purpose and scope of Codex; the nature of Codex standards and the forms of acceptance by countries of Codex standards; and the development of guidelines for Codex committees.

Issues to be discussed at the March 17, 1999, public meeting:

1. Matters referred by the Codex Alimentarius Commission and other Codex Committees (including special treatment of developing countries)
2. Risk analysis
 - a. Definitions
 - b. Working principles for risk analysis
3. Measures intended to facilitate consensus

4. Review of the general principles of Codex (revision of the acceptance procedure)
5. Review of the status of Codex texts
 - a. Framework of the technical barriers to trade agreement
 - b. Discussion paper on the application of Codex advisory texts
6. Review of the statements of principle on the role of science and the extent to which other factors are taken into account
 - a. Role of science and other factors in relation to risk analysis
 - b. Application in the case of bovine somatotropins
7. Revision of the procedural manual
 - a. Draft principles concerning the participation of international non-governmental organizations
 - b. Core functions of Codex contact points
8. Application of Rule VII of the Commission's rules of procedure (attendance of members at sessions of the subsidiary bodies)

Done at Washington, DC, on March 5, 1999.

F. Edward Scarbrough,

U.S. Manager for Codex.

[FR Doc. 99-6128 Filed 3-11-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-DM-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Food Safety and Inspection Service

[Docket No. 99-009N]

Equivalence Evaluation Process for Foreign Meat and Poultry Food Regulatory Systems

AGENCY: Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of public meeting and document availability; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is announcing the availability of a document that describes the Agency's process for evaluating foreign meat and poultry food regulatory systems to determine whether they are equivalent to the United States system. The Agency is soliciting public comments on the document and will hold a public meeting on April 14, 1999, to discuss the equivalence evaluation process.

DATES: The meeting will be held on April 14, 1999, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

To receive full consideration, written comments should be received on or before May 11, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the equivalence evaluation document are available from the FSIS Docket Clerk, Room 102 Cotton Annex, 300 12th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20250-3700. A copy may also be obtained from the FSIS home page at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/>. Written comments on the equivalence evaluation document should refer to Docket #99-009N and be submitted in triplicate to the FSIS Docket Clerk at the address shown above. Facsimile copies of comments may be sent to 202-205-0381. All comments received will be available for public inspection in the FSIS Docket Room from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

The meeting will be held at the Washington Plaza Hotel at 10 Thomas Circle NW (at Massachusetts Avenue and 14th Street), Washington, DC 20009, (202) 842-1300. Attendees requiring sign-language interpreters or other special accommodation should contact Mr. Mark Manis (identified below in **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**) by April 7, 1999. No pre-registration is required. Transcripts of the meeting will be available in the FSIS Docket Room, Room 102, 300 12th Street, SW., Washington, DC 20250-3700. In addition to publishing this **Federal Register** notice, FSIS will alert consumers and industry groups of the meeting through its Constituent Alert before the meeting date.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Mark Manis, Director, International Policy Division; Office of Policy, Program Development, and Evaluation; (202) 720-6400, or by electronic mail to "mark.manis@usda.gov".

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

"Equivalence" is a relatively new international concept that is applied in the evaluation of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures taken by different nations to protect human, animal, or plant life or health. The equivalence concept was introduced in the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the "SPS Agreement"), which appears in the Final Act of the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations signed in Marrakech on April 15, 1994. The SPS Agreement became effective in January 1995, concurrently with

establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which superseded the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) as the umbrella organization for international trade. The United States is a signatory to the SPS Agreement and a member of the WTO.

SPS measures include, among other things, all relevant laws, decrees, regulations, requirements, and procedures—including food regulatory systems—for protecting human or animal life within the territory of a WTO member government from disease, toxins, pests, and food or feed additives or contaminants.

Under Article 4 of the SPS Agreement, an importing member nation must accept an exporting member's SPS measures as equivalent to its own measures if the exporting member has objectively demonstrated that its measure achieves the importing member's appropriate level of sanitary or phytosanitary protection (ALOP). In other words, each member nation of the WTO, including the United States, must accept as equivalent to its own food regulatory system the food regulatory system of another member that has been demonstrated to furnish the same level of public health protection. However, the burden of demonstrating equivalence is on the exporting country.

Equivalent regulatory systems need not be identical. The specific SPS measures applied by an exporting nation may differ from those required by an importing nation. On the other hand, while WTO members are encouraged to adopt international food standards in order to "harmonize" the world's food regulatory systems and facilitate trade, an importing country remains free to set its ALOP at any level it deems appropriate to abate or eliminate risks from a foodborne hazard. An importing country has the right to decide whether a food regulatory system employed by an exporting country is equivalent to its own or is adequate to achieve the importing country's appropriate level of sanitary or phytosanitary protection. The importing country also has the right to decide whether the evidence provided to demonstrate equivalence is adequate.

Request for Comments

FSIS has developed a process for evaluating whether a foreign country's meat and poultry regulatory system and that country's specific sanitary measures are equivalent to the U.S. system and measures. This process is described in a January 1999 document entitled "FSIS Process for Evaluating the Equivalence of Foreign Meat and Poultry Regulatory

Systems," copies of which are available at the location indicated above in **ADDRESSES**. FSIS will use the comments it receives as a basis for further development of its equivalence evaluation process.

Done at Washington, DC on: March 5, 1999.

Thomas J. Billy,

Administrator.

[FR Doc. 99-6127 Filed 3-11-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-DM-M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Southwest Washington Provincial Advisory Committee Meeting Notice

AGENCY: Forestry Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: The Southwest Washington Provincial Advisory Committee will meet on Wednesday, March 24, 1999, in Vancouver, Washington, at the Water Resources Education Center (4600 SE Columbia Way) in their meeting room located upstairs. The meeting will begin at 10 a.m. and continue until 4:30 p.m. The purpose of the meeting is to: (1) Decide on the final priorities of the Jobs-in-the-Woods program for Fiscal Year 2000, and (2) provide a Public open Forum. All Southwest Washington Provincial Advisory Committee meetings are open to the public. Interested citizens are encouraged to attend. The "open forum" provides opportunity for the public to bring issues, concerns, and discussion topics to the Advisory Committee. The "open forum" is scheduled as part of agenda item (2) for this meeting. Interested speakers will need to register prior to the open forum period. The committee welcomes the public's written comments on committee business at any time.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Direct questions regarding this meeting to Linda Turner, Public Affairs Specialist, at (360) 891-5195, or write Forest Headquarters Office, Gifford Pinchot National Forest, 10600 NE. 51st Circle, Vancouver, WA 98682.

Dated: March 5, 1999.

Ted C. Stubblefield,

Forest Supervisor.

[FR Doc. 99-6099 Filed 3-11-99; 8:45 am]

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