

Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

APPLICANTS FOR OBSERVER STATUS

Note by the Secretariat¹

Revision

1. A renewed application² for observer status in the SPS Committee was received on 2 January 2012 from the Gulf Cooperation Council Standardization Organization (GSO). Furthermore, the GSO indicated that Yemen had joined the organization as full member with effect from January 2010. Information provided by the GSO is summarized below.

1. Membership (7)

Bahrain, Kingdom of	Kuwait	Oman
Qatar	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	United Arab Emirates
Yemen		

2. Mandate, Scope and Area of Work

2. GSO is a regional standardization organization mainly concerned with the issuing of regional standard specifications, technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures. GSO has a mandate to facilitate the operation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Customs Union and the single entry point through the elimination of trade barriers between GCC members themselves and between GCC members and their trading partners. This is made possible through the harmonization of the Gulf standards specifications, technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures with their international equivalents.

3. Contribution to the Work of the SPS Committee

3. GSO wishes to establish a close relationship with the SPS Committee. GSO believes that taking part in the SPS Committee meetings will enable it to better coordinate with its members to meet the obligations of the SPS Agreement, with the eventual aim of assuming the role of central notification authority on behalf of its members.

4. The work of GSO is directly relevant to the objectives of the SPS Agreement since GSO has issued a large number of GCC standards and technical regulations that have direct bearing on food safety, covering issues such as pesticide residues, hormones, aflatoxins, microbiological limits, food additives, shelf life, labelling of pre-packaged foods, and Halal food products.

¹ This document has been prepared under the Secretariat's own responsibility and is without prejudice to the positions of Members or to their rights or obligations under the WTO.

² First application received on 6 May 2007.

5. GSO has no affiliation with the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) or the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), but is willing to adopt their standards where applicable and incorporate them into the framework of the GSO Technical Standards Committee for Food and Food Products. GSO also participates regularly in International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) meetings as well as in the meetings of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

6. GSO has been actively promoting awareness of food safety issues among its member States, including topics such as HACCP. In conjunction with ISO, it has organized five separate courses on ISO 22000 to encourage food industries to adopt these standards. Furthermore, it has also organized several training courses on the TBT and SPS Agreements, including, among other things, the notification process and the creation of enquiry points.

7. GSO helped developed a program with the Joint Accreditation Service for Australia and New Zealand (JAS-ANZ) to create a GCC regional scheme for conformity assessment to facilitate international trade through mutual recognition of testing, inspection and certification practices, and the creation of a GCC Accreditation Board. It has also worked closely with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) on developing a GCC standards strategy as well as standardization capacity building.

4. Reciprocity

8. GSO has cordially invited the WTO Secretariat to participate in the proceedings of the Board Member Meetings (comprised by the GCC Ministers of Commerce and Industry) as well as the meetings of the GSO Technical Council (comprised by the Directors General of the GCC National Standards Bodies).
