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Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

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INFORMATION FROM THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION (AUC)

The following communication, received on 6 October 2014, is being circulated at the request of the African Union Commission (AUC).

1 AU-DREA SPS-RELATED ACTIVITIES

1.1. The African Union Commission (AUC) and the European Commission (EC) have established a "contact group on agriculture" following the AUC-EC College-to-College (C2C) meeting of April 2013. The group met in this reporting period to discuss the implementation of its work programme. The group is expected to strengthen the technical dialogue between the two institutions and provide input for the political dialogue to be held at every C2C. The contact group would facilitate a fluid communication at official level in order to better understand the shared interests, respective concerns and ambitions of each of the departments represented in the contact group from both Commissions. It will also ensure follow up and impetus for the roadmap 2014-2017 which constitute the first action plan under the new Joint Africa-EU Strategy where agriculture, food security and food safety have a more prominent visibility. The thematic areas addressed by the group within the broader SPS context are working towards the coordination of harmonization in the area of food hygiene, strengthening the Plant Health Management System, guidance to the process leading to an African Food Safety Coordination Mechanism and pan-African Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) within the context of Better Training for Safer Foods.

1.2. The AUC SPS Cluster in its consultative meeting of August 2014 deliberated on the implementation of AU SPS programmes and recommended that the DREA coordinate the development of an AU SPS strategy and programme to enhance SPS compliance through a value-chain approach. The proposed strategy would also facilitate continental consultations for building common positions on SPS standards and support governance of SPS structures at continental, regional and national levels. It was therefore proposed that the AUC develop a framework document that will help guide countries to address SPS issues by specifically elaborating what should be obtained in the National Agriculture Investment Plans and the Regional Agriculture Investment Plans. The AUC will consult the relevant stakeholders to provide input into the SPS strategy during the development process.

1.3. The African Union organized the inaugural meeting of the Continental SPS Committee in August 2014. The meeting was convened to launch and operationalize the Committee. The Committee was formed after the 7th Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development (CAADP) Program Partnership Platform (PP) meeting held in Yaoundé, Cameroun in March 2011, recommended that the African Union Commission (AUC) and New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) form a Continental SPS Working Group to mainstream SPS matters in the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) framework. The Committee (full members and observers) is constituted of relevant partners and institutions active in area of sanitary and phytosanitary matters.

1.4. The meeting reflected on how SPS issues are captured in the CAADP Framework and agreed to take the lead in the process of mainstreaming SPS issues into the CAADP Framework by reviewing the regional and national agriculture investment plans.

1.5. The members of the Committee provided a brief on the SPS-related activities they are implementing in the various institutions to explore areas of SPS synergy. This is expected to inform the harmonisation of SPS-related activities across Africa and facilitate identification of areas of support required by the various institutions.

1.6. The meeting also agreed on the pivotal role that the Continental SPS Committee should play in shaping the development of the post Malabo roadmap, particularly with regard to commitment on "boosting intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services". The Committee members have accepted to participate in the trade consultation meeting to be organized by the AUC to provide input into the post Malabo roadmap.

1.7. The AUC is developing the Africa commodities strategy. The commodities strategy will review the state of play of agriculture, mining and energy commodities in Africa and will identify and articulate areas of national, regional and continental policy. The strategy will discuss complementary international support measures, which might enhance the efficacy of domestic policies with regard to commodities trade.

1.8. The AUC organized training workshops on organic agriculture for the SADC region in Zambia and Botswana. The focus of the training was on marketing and compliance of organic agricultural products to international standards.

2 AU-IAPSC SPS-RELATED ACTIVITIES

2.1. AU-IAPSC (African Union Interafrican Phytosanitary Council) organized two continental meetings to enhance the capacity of African NPPOs to build common positions. The first one was held in Tunisia to review the draft CPM-9 agenda for common positions on key issues of concern for the continent. Twelve countries participated in the meeting. The common positions arrived at were shared with all CPM-9 African participants.

2.2. The second Continental Meeting reviewed the 2014 draft International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures and Specifications of IPPC. It aimed at helping focal points from African NPPOs to understand the drafts of international standards and harmonize the comments to be uploaded to the IPPC Online Comment System and identified phytosanitary topics for regional standardization to address phytosanitary challenges on the continent. A call for topics was made and responses were received from SADC and The Gambia. IAPSC will send the selected and prioritized topic(s) to AU-IBAR under the PANSPSO programme for further advancement into development of a draft regional phytosanitary standard.
