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Page: 1/2

Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

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ACTIONS REGARDING SPS-RELATED PRIVATE STANDARDS

COMMUNICATION FROM BELIZE

The following communication, received on 17 October 2014, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of Belize.

1 ACTIONS 6-12

1.1. Belize encourages Members to see the merits that lie in the discussing actions six (6) to twelve (12) from document G/SPS/W/256.

1.2. Members are reminded that the working group that proposed these actions did not prepare the actions in a chronological order; and secondly, at no point was there any additional work conducted to determine the specific linkages between the proposed actions.

1.3. In previous submissions from Belize, awareness was raised on how some of the actions can be linked inclusive of how others could be further enhanced if merged.

1.4. Actions 6-12 should not be overlooked given the critical role they would play in helping not only in understanding this agenda item better but also in gaining information on some practical approaches that could be taken in addressing the impact that SPS-related private standards are having on international trade. Belize continues to support the idea of the establishment of a working group that could further work on these proposed actions.

2 ANY OTHER INFORMATION ON SPS-RELATED PRIVATE STANDARDS

2.1. In our document G/SPS/GEN/1240 circulated on 27 March 2013, Belize drew Members' attention to the impact of the proliferation of SPS-related private standards. In addition we noted that the requirements applied by these SPS-related private standard setting entities go beyond those prescribed by governments and the international standard setting bodies. We reiterated that in so doing, they call into question the relevance of both competent authorities and the international standard setting bodies particularly as it is their requirements that determine market access.

2.2. The Food Safety Department in Belize conducted a workshop from 11 to 15 August 2014 on good agricultural practices. The objective was to bring in personnel from both the public and private sector to participate in the train-the-trainers activities. It was implemented under the current Agricultural Services Project funded by the Inter-American Development Bank and conducted in collaboration with a team of experts from the Joint Institute of Food Security and Nutrition of the United States of America. During the five-day workshop, a special session was dedicated to the sharing of experiences in market access and some challenges faced by the private sector.

2.3. All expressed their concern on the increasing costs associated with certification; the difficulties with different schemes having conflicting requirements, the increasing number of audits since each buyer conducts his own verification in addition to the third party certifying entity and the competent authority of the importing country. Many indicated that at this rate, the viability of their business is questionable.

2.4. Amidst these discussions, the private sector also questioned the relevance of the national competent authority with responsibility for food safety at their facilities, since, according to them, the certification issued by government played no role whatsoever, in several markets, on whether their product was to gain market access. Specific examples were then provided and for the purposes of this report the names of the trading partners will not be included; rather only a reflection of the critical concerns associated with the certification processes associated with SPS-related private standards.

2.5. One company exporting to a particular trading partner indicated that for their product to gain access into the next country, they only need to comply with the buyer's requirements for food safety. Another exporter explained that he is audited by both the buyers and competent authority. The buyer does not specifically request an attestation from the competent authority, however, because the importing country's competent authority will not allow the consignment unless the commodity is certified by the competent authority of the exporting country, then in addition to certification by the competent authority in the exporting country, the company also needs to comply with certification requirements of buyer.

2.6. The third scenario that was shared had to do with certain commodities which fall solely under the jurisdiction of the private sector. The importing country's competent authority does not require any attestation from the competent authority of the exporting country. In those countries, the only certification that is recognized is the one issued by the third party certification entities and the buyers.

2.7. Belize views this evolution in certification requirements for products, particularly those which fall under the category of food safety, with grave concern, since governments are the ones responsible for setting SPS measures. Members are encouraged to be guided by the standards set by the international standard setting bodies, in this case, given that it has to do with food safety, standards set by Codex, where these exist.

2.8. It is the responsibility of governments to set sanitary and phytosanitary measures and we do not agree that the private sector should be charged with the responsibility of setting a country's appropriate level of protection. Given this, we believe that the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Committee has a vital role to play in addressing the issues related to the impact of SPS-related private standards and their impact on international trade and efforts should be taken to advance work on this agenda item.
