

AN EXAMPLE OF EQUIVALENCE

Statement by Australia at the Meeting of 14-15 March 2001

1. While the example given is not one of equivalence reached with a developing country, it is a useful example of equivalence agreed at the micro level.
2. The Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) received an application on 24 March 1998 from the Swiss Federal Veterinary Office to amend the Australian *Food Standards Code* Standard for Cheese and Cheese Products to permit the use of raw milk in the making of some speciality cheeses for export to Australia.
3. Current process criteria, as set out in the regulation, are in the form of microbiological endpoints to provide a check for the efficacy of permitted heat treatment processes and associated manufacturing methods for cheese. In Australia, the required heat treatment of milk for cheese production is either pasteurisation or thermisation, the latter when combined with a 90-day cheese storage period.
4. Although the Australian appropriate level of protection for food safety has not been articulated in a detailed statement, a recognised long history of safe food use associated with consumption of cheese in Australia is a well accepted community standard. The use of pasteurisation or thermisation plus storage has contributed to assuring this level of protection to date.
5. The Swiss application sought to demonstrate the equivalence of applied risk management measures in achieving a level of safety in its cheese products comparable to the current Australian domestic standard. In the absence of a Codex standard for the determination of equivalence, the application was addressed through the use of risk assessment.
6. ANZFA took into account information from the Federal Dairy Research Institute of Switzerland, documents from the Central Federation of Swiss Milk Producers and Swiss Government-accepted manufacturing protocols authorising the naming of the cheeses Gruyere, Sbrinz etc.
7. The risk assessment concluded that when made according to the manufacturing process in the Swiss application, the hard cheeses attained at least the same level of pathogen destruction as for pasteurisation, while the semi-hard cheeses did not. On this basis, the Emmental, Sbrinz and Gruyere cheeses were recognised as being as safe as those cheeses produced using pasteurised or thermised milk.
8. Similar permissions could be applied to any manufacturer of raw milk cheeses, domestic or international, if they are able to demonstrate a system that provides an equivalent level of food safety.