

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPS AGREEMENT:

Information for the Workshop on 31 March 2006

Communication from Pakistan

The following communication, received on 24 March 2006, is being circulated at the request of the Delegation of Pakistan.

1. In preparation for the Workshop on the Implementation of the SPS Agreement, Members were invited to submit information on their experiences in relation to the issues to be discussed. The following are the responses of Mr. Ahmed I. Aslam.

Question 1

How regularly do representatives of your country participate in meetings of the SPS Committee? Who usually participates from your country (Capital-based experts or Geneva-based trade representatives)? What information do you receive regarding meetings of the SPS Committee and how do you receive this information?

2. Officials from the mission in Geneva usually attend SPS Committee meetings. The mission in Geneva sends reports to the Ministry of Commerce on all the meetings attended at the WTO. These reports usually contain minutes of the meetings attended by various officials. The reports at times are circulated to the relevant federal ministries.

Question 2

Does your country have an SPS national Committee? How do your exporters find out about your trading partners' new SPS requirements? What national mechanisms can be created to ensure the stakeholders in your country are informed in a timely manner of new SPS requirements so that the SPS requirements of trading partners can be evaluated and so that the views of relevant stakeholders can be taken into account when responding to SPS notifications? In establishing such mechanisms, how can Members identify the relevant domestic stakeholders and promote effective interaction among those stakeholders that can be sustained over time? How can information about SPS requirements be transmitted to groups outside of capital?

3. A National Taskforce on SPS has recently been constituted. Its first meeting will be held in the middle of April. The committee consists of representatives of all interest groups ranging from academics to farmers to processors to exporters.

4. There is no national early warning system that informs exporters of the new SPS requirements established by trading partners. Most exporters rely on their own sources for SPS-related information; these can include partners in the importing country, the internet, etc.

5. One of the objectives of creating a national taskforce on SPS is to create a forum for spreading information. The information provided by Pakistan's embassies in leading trading partners may be presented and evaluated in the taskforce meetings. An information centre is currently being developed which would host all the relevant SPS details on major trading partners. The project is faced with serious technical and financial constraints at the moment.

6. The national taskforce is the best forum to ensure continued and sustained interaction amongst key stakeholders.

Question 3

Has there been any national planning on how to implement the SPS Agreement in your country? If so was this planning developed using a particular methodology?

7. There has been little debate in Pakistan about implementing strategies for the SPS Agreement. But it is hoped that the national taskforce will serve as a forum for such debates and approve the strategy for implementation. The national SPS Enquiry Point has developed a national strategy paper on implementation of the SPS Agreement which will be presented in the first meeting of the task force for approval. The strategy is based on four principles:

- (a) Development of a National Animal and Plant Health Inspection System;
- (b) Accreditation of labs;
- (c) Review of all SPS related laws including the food laws, the animal and plant quarantine laws, grading and marketing laws, labeling requirements etc.;
- (d) Encouraging and eventually making mandatory use of standards like HAACP etc.

Question 4

How does your country identify its technical assistance needs? What has been your country's experience in both the request and the supply of SPS-related technical assistance? How can technical assistance supply and demand be most effectively matched, priority areas identified and duplication of donor efforts avoided?

8. Identification of technical assistance needs is a complex process which involves provincial ministries carrying out surveys and sending requests to their federal counterparts, who after evaluating them forward the requests to the National Planning Commission for consideration and comment. The process also invites comments from the Ministries of Economic Affairs and Finance. Once approved by the Planning Commission, they are sent to the Cabinet for approval. It is a lengthy process that takes a lot of time.

9. Pakistan has set up a National Task Force on SPS that will now be the main forum for discussing and identifying technical assistance needs. A single forum with representatives from the federal and provincial governments and other stakeholders appears to be the best way forward without risking wastage or misallocation of resources.
