

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPS AGREEMENT

Information for the Workshop on 31 March 2006

Communication from Guatemala

The following communication, received on 30 March 2006, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of Guatemala.

1. In preparation for the workshop on the implementation of the SPS Agreement, participants were asked to provide replies to the following questions.

1. How regularly do representatives of your country participate in meetings of the SPS Committee?

2. Since the SPS initiative for countries of the Americas sponsored by the IICA, the USDA and the Steering Committee group, Guatemala has participated in almost all of the meetings. Before this, its participation was sporadic.

2. Who usually participates from your country (capital-based experts? Geneva-based trade representatives?)?

3. Under the above-mentioned initiative, Guatemala was able to ensure the participation of capital-based experts, sometimes accompanied by Geneva-based trade representatives.

3. What information do you receive regarding meetings of the SPS Committee and how do you receive this information?

4. In most cases, Guatemala receives its information through the IICA, and sometimes through the Ministry of the Economy.

4. Does your country have an SPS national committee?

5. Yes, it has an informal committee, with a legal basis in certain free trade agreements which, in the chapter on SPS, stipulate that the committee shall be in charge of all SPS-related matters.

5. How do your exporters find out about your trading partners' new SPS requirements?

6. The Standards and Regulations Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food, is responsible for communicating all notifications to the sectors affected by SPS measures from the WTO.

6. 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?

7. Notifications are sent for information to all organized groups through the Standards and Regulations Unit. There is also the National Codex Committee, which examines all notifications on food safety. This committee is composed of representatives of the Ministries of Agriculture, Health, and Economy, and of private sector representatives from the food industry. In the case of plant and animal health there is no formally established group, but if there is a topic of interest and producers and exporters might be affected, a meeting is called with the group concerned.

7. 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?

8. We have managed to maintain this procedure since the creation of the Standards and Regulations Unit in 1998 by remaining in permanent contact with the sectors involved.

8. How can information about SPS requirements be transmitted to groups outside of the capital?

9. The majority of producers are outside of the capital, but since they are organized groups, the Standards and Regulations Unit stays in permanent contact with them and keeps them informed on matters of interest.

9. 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?

10. We have an institutional strengthening plan to help with the implementation of SPS measures. Furthermore, the agricultural policy programme for 2004-2007 includes the Agricultural Development Policy, aimed at providing support for domestic producers and exporters in connection with SPS measures.

10. How does your country identify its technical assistance needs?

11. Repeated diagnoses - through strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats analyses ("FODAS" analyses) - of the three components of plant health, animal health and food safety; assessment of Guatemala's phytosanitary capacity with the support of the FAO; assessment of the Veterinary Services with the support of IICA; and assessment of the Sanitary/Hygienic Services with the support of OIRSA. In each case, we have been able to rely on official staff, on the private initiative of the country's productive sectors, and on national, regional and international consultants.

11. What has been your country's experience in both the request and the supply of SPS-related technical assistance?

12. We have had a fair amount of technical assistance with respect to human resources capacity-building, with professionals who have master's degrees in SPS measures, to laboratory infrastructure, training in diagnosis etc. The problem has been that the trained staff has moved into other areas. As for the laboratories, they have been closed by authorities who are not aware of the importance of diagnosis, not to mention other problems. Consequently, there is now a need to build up the capacity of the professional staff in this area and to train them in the new identification techniques in connection with laboratories, biotechnology and other cutting edge issues.

12. How can technical assistance supply and demand be most effectively matched, priority areas identified and duplication of donor efforts avoided?

13. We are currently intending to hold a meeting with the national and international donor and cooperation agencies to focus assistance at the level of agricultural chains towards solving specific problems, not only as concerns the government but also as regards the sector involved in the chain. We are doing this because on numerous occasions there has been duplication of cooperation or we have been offered cooperation and assistance on matters that are of interest to the support country or institution rather than to us. We believe that through this mechanism, we will be able to profit more fully from the assistance provided. There are also specific weaknesses that have been identified in the FODAS analyses and that take priority when it comes to strengthening the Standards and Regulations Unit. They do not require further analysis since they are everyday problems that stand in the way of compliance with the SPS requirements. For example, our border inspection is weak, techniques and expertise are lacking and diagnosis is inadequate. There is no way of detecting maximum limits of certain pesticide residues in export products, etc.
