

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPS AGREEMENT

Information for the Workshop on 31 March 2006

Communication from Paraguay

The following communication, received on 11 April 2006, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of Paraguay.

1. In preparation for the Workshop on the Implementation of the SPS Agreement, participants were invited to provide replies to the following questions.

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

2. In the past, participation in SPS Committee meetings has for the most part involved officials from our Permanent Mission in Geneva, with little or no direct participation by the bodies responsible for the Agreement.

3. Since 2000, under IICA sponsorship a number of meetings (informal in nature, initially), involving experts from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG) and other relevant bodies have been held prior to the meetings of the WTO SPS Committee, for the purpose of exchanging information on commitments under the decisions and recommendations made during SPS meetings.

4. Since June 2002, MAG experts in animal health and plant health have regularly participated in WTO SPS meetings, thanks to the SPS Initiative for the Countries of the Americas (USDA/IICA), the aim of which is to encourage the development of countries capacity to implement the WTO SPS Agreement more effectively.

5. It should be noted that, with the participation in SPS Committee meetings of the experts from MAG together with the representatives of the Permanent Mission in Geneva, there is now an excellent and fluid exchange of information on SPS decisions and commitments. This information is received from the Permanent Mission in Geneva, through the Ministry of External Relations of Paraguay and the WTO web site.

5. 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 that 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?

6. The IICA office in Paraguay has supported and coordinated meetings for information and dialogue purposes between national delegates who have participated in the WTO SPS meetings, to allow an exchange of views on matters addressed in this forum and to contribute to strengthening Paraguay's presence at future events. Thanks to these meetings, an informal SPS working group has been set up to provide support to national delegates prior to WTO meetings.

7. The members of the informal SPS working group recommended that the Government of Paraguay form a **National Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures** as a matter of priority. This Committee comprises representatives of the MAG; Ministry of External Relations (MRE); the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MIC); the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare (MSP and BS); the National Institute of Technology and Standardization (INTN); the National Animal Health Service (SENACSA); the National Plant and Seed Health Service (SENAVE) and representatives of the private agriculture sector, all bodies involved in the various aspects of sanitary and phytosanitary measures.

8. The IICA actively participated in the preparation and follow-up of the different mechanisms involved in this process, which culminated in the enactment of Decree No. 6626/05 establishing the National Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures. The Committee started up on 12 January 2006 and is in the process of preparing its rules of procedure.

9. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, supported by the IICA, which acts as technical secretariat, is responsible for the coordination of the Committee.

10. Exporters and/or importers currently receive information through the bodies responsible for sanitary certification, both for agriculture and for livestock.

11. The creation of the **National Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures** on which public and private sector institutions are represented, will allow wider dissemination of the plant and animal health requirements governing international trade. Moreover, the WTO-Sponsored Standards Trade and Development Facility (STDF) has a project – STDF 19 – involving plans to establish a National Agri-Food Safety Portal, which will give all stakeholders updated and direct access to SPS topics. This project is well under way. Furthermore, there are plans to hold workshops in the sectors concerned, both public and private, to spread awareness and increase understanding of SPS issues, with the participation of national and international experts.

12. Information may be transmitted through:

- The offices of the sanitary and phytosanitary and certification services across the country;
- information meetings with the sectors concerned;
- access to the Agri-Food Safety Portal;
- specific consultation with the stakeholders.

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?

13. The institutions responsible for animal and plant health are in charge at national level of the sanitary standards governing agricultural trade, and of application of international standards, whether regional (MERCOSUR) or global (SPS/WTO).

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?

14. Greater direct participation in meetings of the WTO SPS Committee by the national experts involved in sanitary, phytosanitary and certification issues has led to the need for technical assistance to improve the capacity of the bodies concerned to fulfil the commitments and obligations contained in the SPS Agreement.

15. Participation in meetings of the SPS Committee, as well as in the WTO workshops and training courses (both regional and multilateral) on the SPS Agreement has been very valuable from the point of view of training experts in this process of "continuous improvement" and updating.

16. As recipient countries become aware, through participation and appropriate dissemination, of the assistance on offer, and with the establishment of the National SPS Committee, the country will be able better to exploit opportunities and identify more precisely the areas where technical assistance is required, as well as avoiding duplication of activities.
