

KOREAN RESTRICTION ON IMPORTS OF THAI POULTRY

Statement by Thailand at the Meeting of 10-11 June 1998

You will recall that the Thai delegation has raised its concern about the Korean restriction on imports of poultry meat from Thailand at the 9th and 10th meetings of this Committee. At today's meeting we do not intend to repeat all of the details of the problem in spite of the fact that the Korean import restriction on poultry meat was not notified, and as we understand it, is still maintained, and despite our requests no explanation of its reason has yet been received by us. However, there has been some progress on this issue as a result of our bilateral consultation prior to this meeting, which will be elaborated on later.

Meanwhile, the Republic of Korea has submitted a proposal to amend its Food Code as detailed in notification G/SPS/N/KOR/44. According to the notification, the Ministry of Health and Welfare of the Republic of Korea is proposing amendment of its Food Code with an objective to improve food safety and to harmonize its safety requirements with international standards, guidelines and recommendations. In principle, we welcome this initiative.

However, according to our understanding, the recently proposed amendment of the Food Code requires that all meat (including poultry meat) entering the Korean market will have to be free from a number of micro-organisms including "Listeria monocytogenes". The reason of "having found Listeria monocytogenes" was also cited by the Korean import authority for the rejection of at least two consignments of frozen poultry meat from Thailand so far (the latest incidence being in February 1998). We are, therefore, led to believe that the proposed amendment of the Korean Food Code is in fact only to retroactively cover the measure to restrict meat imports.

We believe that the above measure is constraining our exports and is not based on the relevant international norms, particularly the recommendation of the International Commission on Microbiological Specification for Foods (ICMSF). Therefore, we have expressed the above concern in our correspondence to the Korean authority responsible for the proposal.

The response from the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the Korean Food and Drug Administration indicated only that the amendment of the Food Code concerning safety of animal food products, which is now under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the Korean Food and Drug Administration, will soon be transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. So it has not yet shed any light on our query.

Prior to the formal meeting of the Committee, the delegation of Thailand had an ongoing bilateral consultation with the delegation of the Republic of Korea. At the consultation, the delegation of Korea informed us of the following:

- The reason for amending the existing Food Code has been based on the recognition that the requirement under the existing Code might not be in line with the international standards, guidelines and recommendations.
- In view of the restructuring of the competent authority responsible for this matter, work related to the amendment of the existing Food Code concerning animal food products safety would be handed over to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Korean delegation believed that the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry would consider the comments made by Thailand in a favourable manner.

We also requested the Republic of Korea, through its delegation, to avoid enforcement of the existing Food Code based on the results of "Listeria monocytogenes" testing requirements during the process of amendment of the Food Code.

Thailand would like to express its appreciation on the progress made by the Republic of Korea in this matter and hope to settle this matter in the very near future.

We also reserve our rights under the WTO to pursue this matter further.
