



**EU STATEMENT AT THE SPS COMMITTEE INFORMATION SHARING SESSION  
ON COVID-19**

COMMUNICATION BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

The following communication, received on 1 July 2020, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of the European Union.

1. Five months after the first outbreak of COVID-19, the European Union observes that global agricultural production and agri-food supply chains have overall shown resilience to the health crisis. Agri-food trade has so far broadly continued to flow, overcoming initial logistic and transport bottlenecks.
2. The joint call on 31 March by the WTO, the WHO and the FAO to avoid trade restrictive measures that would disrupt the food supply chain, as well as the commitment by G20 Trade and Agriculture Ministers in March and April and the statement by a number WTO Members submitted to the WTO on 13 May, seem to have borne fruits.
3. We would like to take the opportunity of today's meeting to welcome trade facilitating measures introduced by WTO Members to maintain an open trade of agri-food products and to encourage other Members to follow suit.
4. We would like in particular to thank those Members who have implemented measures similar to the ones adopted by the European Union measures at an early stage of the COVID-19 crisis.
5. To recall, on 1 April 2020, in view of the situation linked to COVID-19, the European Union informed trading partners that the European Union would accept, on a temporary basis, scanned copies of certificates. This measure was communicated to WTO Members directly and via a notification to the WTO SPS Committee (G/SPS/N/EU/380). These measures have recently been extended until 1 August 2020.
6. However, the European Union regrets that the COVID-19 outbreak has also led few countries to adopt trade restrictions for agri-food products that are not science based, not targeted and not proportionate to the risk.
7. Let me recall that according to the assessment of the World Health Organisation, and of the European Food Safety Authority, there is no evidence that food may be a source of virus transmission. There is wide consensus among experts that adherence to general hygiene measures along the food production and transport chain prevent the spreading of the virus through trade.
8. Based on currently available information, and with the support of expert advisory groups, the OIE does not recommend that any COVID-19 related sanitary measures be applied to the international movement of live animals or animal products without a justifying risk analysis.
9. The European Union is thus very concerned about the introduction by some WTO Members of unnecessary additional requirements related to COVID-19, in the form of tests, inspections or certificates, on imported food products.

10. In particular, we would like to share our deepest concern about one very recent development and the request by one WTO Member, which is also one of the largest global trading country for agri-food products, of stringent additional verification measures on all imported food products.

11. Strict adherence to general hygiene measures along the food production and transport chain - as it is the established practice all over the EU in full respect of international standards - prevent the spreading of the virus through trade. Good hygiene practices at all stages of food production, including cleaning and, where appropriate, disinfection of facilities and equipment, personal hygiene and staying at home, away from work whenever feeling ill are the appropriate response.

12. If individual Members insist on additional, unnecessary verification measures, the situation could easily lead to a global spiral towards imposing unjustified import controls in the agri-food chain. This would do nothing to control the current pandemic but will be very harmful to food security, food prices and global trade relations and it will also undermine the trust of the public.

13. In light of developments related to COVID-19, the European Union will continue to work together with trading partners with a view to keep an open trade on agri-food products via trade facilitating measures where possible and urges trading partners to abstain from imposing and to remove any unnecessary and unjustified trade measures linked to COVID-19.

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