



**EU STATEMENT ON COVID-19 AT THE SPS COMMITTEE INFORMAL MEETING,
4 NOVEMBER 2020**

SUBMISSION BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

The following document, received on 4 November 2020, is being circulated at the request of the Delegation of the European Union.

1. The European Union would like to refer to its earlier made statement under document with reference [G/SPS/GEN/1799](#) on COVID-19-related measures impacting on the agri-food supply chains which remains still valid.
2. The European Union welcomes WTO Members' efforts to maintain an open trade of agri-food products and to avoid unnecessary barriers to trade in times of COVID-19. In this regard, the European Union appreciates the extensions by several WTO Members of trade facilitating measures as well as the removal of trade restrictions applied on grounds of COVID-19.
3. The European Union would like to inform that the European Union has also further extended until 1 February 2021 its trade facilitating measures¹ to accept on a temporary basis, scanned copies of certificates. The European Union will further consider a prolongation in the light of developments seen with regard to COVID-19.
4. The European Union would like to 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 prevents the spreading of the virus through trade. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is currently no evidence of transmission to humans of COVID-19 from food.
5. 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.
6. With regard to packaging materials for trade of animal products, the OIE states that "*precautions for packaging materials are unnecessary over and above the observation of basic hygiene, such as ensuring it is clean and free of visible contamination*".
7. Unfortunately, the European Union regrets that the COVID-19 outbreak has also led a few countries to adopt trade restrictions for agri-food products that are not science based, not targeted and not proportionate to the risk.
8. 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.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02020R0466-20201002>.

9. It is regrettable that the People's Republic of China, as announced with [G/SPS/N/CHN/1173](#), is imposing COVID-19 related measures on imported cold-chain foods without providing a risk assessment based on science to justify these measures. Herewith, the People's Republic of China is deviating from the recommendations made by the international organisations.

10. The European Union would like to recall the G20 Leaders' commitment at the Extraordinary G20 Leaders' Summit on 26 March 2020 that "*Emergency measures aimed at protecting health will be targeted, proportionate, transparent, and temporary*".

11. In the interest of all trading partners, as the People's Republic of China indicates to base its measures on Art. 5.7 of the WTO SPS Agreement, the European Union would like to invite the People's Republic of China to share its risk assessment based on science, which justifies its emergency measures on imported food and to explain why these measures are considered to be proportionate. Moreover, the European Union would like to invite China to inform WTO Members on the expected date when these emergency measures will be terminated.

12. Strict adherence to general hygiene measures along the food production and transport chain – as it is the established practice all over the European Union in full respect of international standards – prevents 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.

13. If individual Members insist on additional, unnecessary verification and testing 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.

14. 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.
