

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

CONFIDENTIAL

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INTERNATIONAL MEAT CONSULTATIVE GROUP

Commentary on the Model Questionnaire

Note by the secretariat

Introduction

1. The present note has been prepared at the request of the Group at its meeting on 11 June 1975 in order to provide a summary of the main points made by participants at that meeting with respect to the content and format of the draft model questionnaire contained in document L/4163/Rev.1.

2. In general reference has not been made to points concerning the ability of participants to provide data in compliance with draft tables except where inability to furnish data relates to the main aggregates as distinct from individual subheadings.

Carcass Weight Equivalents

3. Throughout the tables carcass weight or its equivalent has been employed as the common denominator for expressing otherwise disparate data on a homogeneous basis. From the preliminary discussion of this subject it appeared that there were two reasonably distinct aspects. The first would be to select either "carcass weight" or "dressed carcass" as the common basis for reporting and presentation of data. Selection of the basis would depend on matters of convenience. If for example most countries report data on a "dressed carcass weight" basis then it would seem reasonable to adopt that basis. Moreover a common definition of the basis thus selected would be required. This was an essentially technical question, which in the case of "dressed carcass weight" would seem to involve the question whether the weight of the kidneys as well as the "graisses de découpe" should be excluded.

4. The second aspect concerned the actual conversion throughout the tables of data on a product weight basis to, for example, a "dressed carcass weight equivalent" basis. Apart from the construction of meat balance sheets the objective here was to reduce, as far as practicable, the anomalies inherent in comparing data which in the case of imports, for example, would reflect overtime changes in the "mix" of bone-in and boneless product. This aspect appeared to be a technical problem and reference was made by participants to expert studies in this area. Finally in this connection it was noted that it would be for individual reporting countries themselves to decide what were the appropriate conversion factors to employ and how they were to be applied.

Comments on individual tables

Part A. Bovine Cattle Numbers and Herd Structures

5. Table A.1 as regards its nomenclature, or the breakdown sought, follows the format of the FAO questionnaire. Specific points relating to the table were:

- (a) Census Date: this should be modified to read "As at January or July (or closest date thereto - such date to be specified)" to take account of differing seasonal characteristics of Southern and Northern hemisphere producing countries;
- (b) Herd Structure: that data be collected for heifers as well as for cows;
- (c) Forecasts: that footnote "2" (which reads "if available") should apply to the column for "1976" as well as to the column for subsequent years.

Part B. Slaughter Rates and Production, Stocks and Consumption of Bovine Meat

Table B.1 Inspected and Total Slaughtering and Average Carcass Weights (Av.C.W.)

6. In general this table appeared to be acceptable in its present form. Clarification was sought on the distinction between "inspected" and "total" slaughtering. "Inspected" slaughtering relate to slaughtering carried out under some form of central or local government veterinary control and for which statistics are more readily available than would be the case for "total slaughtering" which include slaughtering carried out on farms, etc., and for which statistics or official estimates are not so readily or so regularly available. For many countries the difference between "inspected" and "total" slaughtering may be very small. However in some cases up-to-date statistics may only be readily and regularly available on some less comprehensive basis in which case, according to footnote 2 to the table, the reporting country is requested to supply the information on whatever basis it is readily available and to indicate the estimated ratio of slaughtering as reported to total slaughtering. In either case the objective would be to supply up-to-date information to the Group.

7. In the light of the discussion of this point the secretariat would suggest that the relevant headings be amended to read "inspected or controlled" as opposed to simply "inspected" slaughtering.

8. Another point made was that the present breakdown under the table coincided with that for Table A.1 thus facilitating assessments of changes in cattle cycles.

9. It was pointed out in one case that data could only be supplied for slaughtering of "adult cattle" and "other cattle."

Table B.2 Total Production of Bovine Meat

10. A footnote to read "if available" should be added to the section of the table relating to forecasts for 1975 and 1976. Some participants stated that the reliability of the data they could supply on "Production from slaughter of imported animals" could not be guaranteed. The need to distinguish between production from slaughter of indigenous and imported animals is referred to in the part of this note dealing with Tables C.1.1. and C.3.1. (Paragraph 18 below)

Table B.3. Private and Public Stocks of Bovine Meat

11. The table's description to be amended to indicate that the data relates to "closing stocks". Apart from this it was indicated by some participants that there would be difficulty in supplying data on "private" stocks.

Table B.4. Consumption of Bovine Meat

12. Specific suggestions for amending the table were that there should be a breakdown of total consumption of bovine meat showing consumption of beef and consumption of veal, and that a further column should be added showing the mean population figures employed to calculate per caput consumption.

13. Some participants indicated that data could be supplied (in some cases with qualifications on quarterly reporting) for apparent or derived consumption (i.e. domestic production plus imports less exports) with the further qualification on the part of some of these participants that such data could not be supplied on a full carcass weight basis because they were unable to convert imported meat and cattle to this basis. Other participants indicated that data could be furnished under the table as amended for real consumption i.e. after taking account of changes in stocks.

Section C. TradeGeneral

14. In discussing the individual import tables in the series C.1. and C.2. it was the understanding of the Group that comments made would apply mutatis mutandis to the counterpart tables in the export series C.3. and C.4.

15. One point of general application was that in line with other sections of the questionnaire retrospective data for the years 1971, 1972 and 1973 would be collected on an annual basis and not on a quarterly basis. Another point was that where tables called for forecasts a footnote to read "if available" should be added.

Table C.1.1. (and C.3.1.) Imports/Exports of Cattle by Volume

16. There was first of all agreement that the column in the table relating to the "live weight" of cattle traded should be deleted retaining as the unit of volume thousand head of cattle. It was a distinct question whether, and if so to what extent, carcass weight equivalents of cattle traded should be requested.

17. Secondly, as regards the breakdown to be established, it was agreed that data be collected (thousand head) in respect of cattle and calves. A point on which agreement was not reached was whether there should be a further breakdown as between cattle for slaughter and cattle for fattening. Some participants considered that this latter breakdown introduced a degree of unnecessary sophistication or would involve technical difficulties, which nevertheless could be overcome, in part at least, given a certain degree of co-operation between the importers and exporters concerned.

18. Thirdly, as regards the conversion of cattle traded to carcass weight equivalents, it was considered by some participants either that this was already covered under table B.2. or that it was of little relevance having regard to the various possible end-uses of the cattle traded. Other participants took the view that with a simple breakdown into cattle and calves the conversion of numbers to carcass weight equivalents did not pose significant problems. According to this view the value of the conversion to carcass weight equivalent was that it would facilitate the construction of balance sheets and the analysis of imports in their various forms on a common basis. The information sought in table B.2. on meat produced from the slaughter of imported animals and that sought in table C.1.1. were regarded as quite distinct, the one relating to production and the other to imports.

19. The discussion on this table was concluded on the basis that it was expected to cover cattle and calves only (thousand head) together with a request for carcass weight equivalent.

Table C.1.2 (and C.3.2) Imports/Exports of Beef and Veal by Volume

20. The main difficulty encountered in respect of this table concerned the column for trade in "Other (canned and cooked)" beef and veal and the conversion of this category to carcass weight equivalent. Some participants considered that this category of trade should be retained even if its conversion to a carcass weight basis was not feasible. Other participants considered that the table should relate to identifiable carcass meat and in particular to fresh, chilled and frozen beef and veal. In either case there appeared to be some support for reporting trade on a bone-in and boneless basis. As a comment of general application to this and other relevant tables in Section C, several participants stated that they would have difficulty in reporting separately on "fresh and chilled" and "frozen" meat. Finally reference was made to the availability of expert information on the conversion of product weight and carcass weight.

Table C.1.3 (and C.3.3) Imports/Exports of Cattle, Beef and Veal by Value

21. A number of participants declared themselves in favour of not collecting data on the value of trade and referred to problems in this respect associated with a common unit of account. It was also suggested that if such data were to be collected it should be limited to fresh, chilled and frozen meat. The utility of columns D and E was questioned and it was suggested that they be deleted. Other participants considered that information on the value of trade was readily available and was a standard element of any discussion or analysis of trade. It was agreed that if information on the value of trade were to be collected that a note be added to the table requesting participants to specify the basis for valuation.

Tables C.2.1 to C.2.4 (and C.4.1 to C.4.4) Imports/Exports by Country of Origin/Destination, Quality and Value

22. The format of the tables was considered to be generally acceptable subject to some of the reservations already referred to in the commentary on this Section of the questionnaire, for example, whether data should be supplied on value and whether the tables (C.2.4 and C.4.4) relating to the "Other Category" ought to be refined or excluded altogether.

Part D. Prices

23. The view was expressed by a number of participants that the question of what information was to be collected would require detailed expert examination. Some participants considered that the concept of minimum prices guaranteed to producers, on its own, was of limited value because of the relatively few countries in which such prices were practised, although the evolution of this price in the relevant markets could be a useful indicator. It appeared to be accepted that the concept of a wholesale price for "a representative grade of meat on a representative market" would be a useful criterion for the collection of data. It was suggested that a similar concept might apply to the data to be collected on import prices, although in this case it would be necessary to specify grades which corresponded to the more significant components of the classes of meat traded and their end use.

24. The proposal was made that data should be collected on levy/price mechanisms. A variety of views were expressed on the proposal outlined in the note to Table D.1. A number of participants suggested that the proposal if adopted could be taken up for discussion on an annual basis in a working document instead of forming part of the regular reporting procedures.