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Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

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## RELEVANT CLARIFICATIONS REGARDING THE NEW PHYTOSANITARY CERTIFICATE

### COMMUNICATION FROM COSTA RICA

The following communication, received on 19 December 2018, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of Costa Rica.

1. By means of communication G/SPS/GEN/1665 of 22 November 2018, the State Phytosanitary Service (SFE) informed WTO Member States about the modification of the format of the existing phytosanitary certificate.

2. One of the most important improvements to this certificate is the use of a digitized signature, introduced in an effort to establish trade facilitation mechanisms and improve the security of the phytosanitary certificates by checking the signatures of officials authorized by the National Plant Protection Organization (NPPO).

3. As a result of introducing the new modality for signing the certificates, we have received enquiries in that regard from our trading partners and, for this reason as well as to avoid disruptions to the trade in plant products and other regulated Costa Rican items, it has been deemed appropriate to make the following clarifications:

- a. The phytosanitary certificate issued by the State Phytosanitary Service (the NPPO of Costa Rica) meets the requirements laid down in the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC).
- b. The phytosanitary certificate uses a printed signature.
- c. The signature printed on the phytosanitary certificate does not entail the adoption of an electronic data transmission system.
- d. The Costa Rican phytosanitary certificate that accompanies Costa Rican exports will continue to be issued in hard copy to all countries, as before.
- e. The only variation is that they will be authorized by means of the printed signature, which is identical and equivalent to the handwritten signature of the inspector authorized by the SFE to issue phytosanitary certificates.
- f. The SFE has full confidence in the security systems that have been adopted to ensure that the printed signatures faithfully reflect the image of the authorized inspector's signature.
- g. The signature is printed on the document only upon completion of the authentication controls by the inspector authorized to access the internal computer system.
- h. The SFE guarantees the traceability and authenticity of the phytosanitary certificates bearing this form of signature.
- i. The user and/or the authorities of the country of destination may verify the authenticity of the signature that appears on the phytosanitary certificate, as well as the certificate number and the data it contains, via the following electronic address [http://app.sfe.go.cr/Certificado/firm\\_machote.aspx](http://app.sfe.go.cr/Certificado/firm_machote.aspx), where it is possible to verify:
  - the list of inspectors authorized to sign phytosanitary export certificates and the image of their signatures;
  - the authenticity of the phytosanitary certificate, by means of the number shown on the document.
- j. The phytosanitary certificate is printed on white bond paper. The security mechanisms of these certificates are those indicated in subparagraph i.

- k. By means of communication G/SPS/GEN/1489/Add.1 of 5 September 2016, the SFE informed Member States that the phytosanitary certificate would henceforth be issued on white bond paper and would not bear any kind of stamp or colour, as it is printed with the institution's logo and in black ink.
  - l. Furthermore, countries that so request may receive the phytosanitary certificate with the digitized signature and the handwritten signature of the authorized official, but they must submit their request via the contact point or to the email address given below.
  - m. The SFE is available in a fully open manner to clarify any doubts that the phytosanitary authorities of Member States may have regarding this certificate. To that end the following contact point has been set up to deal with queries and concerns regarding the phytosanitary certificate, including over the Christmas, year-end and New Year holiday season: [consultascertificados@sfe.go.cr](mailto:consultascertificados@sfe.go.cr).
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