

**PROJECT ON COOPERATION FOR HARMONIZATION OF VETERINARY
AND PHYTOSANITARY STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES, FOOD SAFETY
AND DIFFERENTIATED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION**

Communication from Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay

The following communication, received on 11 June 2009, is being circulated at the request of the delegations of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

I. BACKGROUND - OBJECTIVES

1. On 23 May 2006, the European Commission, on behalf of the European Union, and the Common Market Group (GMC), on behalf of MERCOSUR, signed the Agreement on Cooperation for Harmonization of Veterinary and Phytosanitary Standards and Procedures, Food Safety and Differentiated Agricultural Production with total funding amounting to 7,160,000 euros. This project fits within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding 2000-2006 between the European Union and MERCOSUR, signed in 2001, which establishes the strategy for financial, technical and economic cooperation during this period.

2. The direct beneficiary is the Common Market Group, which delegated the administration to the Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Food Department of the Ministry of Production of the Argentine Republic.

3. The final beneficiaries are the Ministries of Agriculture and Sanitary Services of the MERCOSUR States Parties.

4. The European Union has extensive experience with regional economic integration, since the construction of the Community internal market began in the 1950s. The MERCOSUR integration process is of more recent origin and is currently in the middle of the phase of evolution towards the formation of a Customs Union. Despite the structural differences between the two integration schemes, the experience of the European Union is of great interest for the MERCOSUR States Parties.

5. The Project fits within this framework, the intention being to compare experiences and situations with a view to the incorporation of solutions and mechanisms already implemented by the European Union. The general objective is to identify the mechanisms implemented by the European Union and use them as a benchmark with a view to improving the facilitation of the trade in agricultural products within MERCOSUR, as well as that between the regional block and third countries. It is intended to achieve this objective by taking the specific action necessary to strengthen the MERCOSUR institutional and legal framework in the sanitary and phytosanitary fields, together

with the capacity and infrastructure of the States Parties in terms of laboratories and information networks.

6. The project is of special importance for MERCOSUR not only because it provides an extremely useful tool for consolidating the internal market but also because it favours the integration and coordination of the block's positions in its approach to trade negotiations with third countries.

7. The project envisages four concrete results relating to: (i) institutional strengthening; (ii) the review and improvement of sanitary data information networks; (iii) cooperation for laboratories; and (iv) the coordination of risk assessment activities. To achieve these concrete results various activities have been planned, such as seminars, reports and training trips, as described below.

II. MANAGEMENT REPORT

8. The following brief summary takes the form of a list of the activities already carried out during the period, together with those begun and scheduled to end during 2009:

- (a) Rotation of MERCOSUR officials to European Commission bodies (DG SANCO, FVO, EFSA);
- (b) training of trainers in transfer techniques;
- (c) workshop on the preparation of a technical plan for helping to intensify the current work on the harmonization of standards;
- (d) design of mechanisms for facilitating the free intrazonal movement of products in SPS matters and raising the level of regional integration in these respects;
- (e) training courses for strengthening MERCOSUR regional sanitary and phytosanitary integration and identifying options for institutional strengthening in SPS matters;
- (f) development of systems for promoting good practice at MERCOSUR regional level;
- (g) survey of the current situation in each country in relation to sanitary information systems;
- (h) definition, content and objectives for the implementation of a sanitary and phytosanitary information system for MERCOSUR;
- (i) survey of training needs and preparation of a plan for strengthening the laboratories;
- (j) survey of needs and purchase of equipment for the laboratories of the sanitary services of the beneficiary countries; and
- (k) evaluation of regional needs and capacities for qualitative and quantitative sanitary, phytosanitary and food safety testing for the purpose of developing a risk analysis strategy.

9. To improve the laboratories that support MERCOSUR's sanitary and phytosanitary services, the project activities include the purchase of equipment and inputs. Work has been done with representatives of the laboratories of the sanitary services of the beneficiary countries and, with their approval, a list of requests has been drawn up. Laboratory equipment and inputs have been purchased for the four States Parties.

10. Other supplies purchased within the framework of the project include servers and software for the design and implementation of the Information System. These will be installed in the MERCOSUR Secretariat (SM).

11. The following activities will be undertaken starting from June 2009:

- (a) Development and connection of the Integrated Information System (REDISAM);
 - (b) studies for the risk analysis component;
 - (c) formulation of strategies for the intensification of the MERCOSUR harmonization process that govern SPS disciplines and the development of a system for monitoring compliance with the regulations;
 - (d) dissemination of good practice as a means of strengthening MERCOSUR institutions;
 - (e) training in risk analysis;
 - (f) programme of training in animal health, plant protection, hygiene and food control;
 - (g) strengthening of sanitary and phytosanitary laboratories – training; and
 - (h) training in regional integration.
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