

Parma, 17th May 2011

**Subject: technical hearing on meat inspection of small ruminants
(EFSA-Q-2012-00277)**

**Minutes of the technical hearing on meat inspection of small ruminants, Parma,
17th April 2012**

PARTICIPANTS:

Hearing experts from stakeholder organisations:

Copa-Cogeca (Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations – General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives) represented by Emmanuel Coste

UECBV (European Livestock and Meat Trading Union) represented by Christian Font and Gavin Morris

FVE (Federation of Veterinarians of Europe) represented by Frank O’Sullivan

EFSA experts from the working group (WG) on public health hazards to be covered by inspection of meat in small ruminants:

BIOHAZ WG:

John Griffin (Chair of the WG)

Geneviève Benard

Rina Mazzette

Declan Murray

Miguel Prieto Maradona

Tine Hald

CONTAM WG:

Michael O’Keeffe

EFSA staff:

BIOHAZ Unit: Marta Hugas (chair)

Ernesto Liebana Criado (co-chair)

Michaela Hempen

Pablo Romero Barrios

Luis Vivas-Alegre

CONTAM Unit: Silvia Nicolau Solano

BIOMO Unit: Elena Mazzolini

Agenda

1. Welcome and apologies, round the table introductions
2. Adoption of agenda
3. Declarations of interest
4. Purpose of meeting and background to the mandate
5. Summary presentations on responses to questionnaire
 1. Copa-Cogeca
 2. FVE
 3. UECVB
6. Coffee break
7. Questions and answers on the information provided by stakeholders
8. Closing of the meeting

1. Welcome and apologies, round the table introduction.

EFSA chaired the technical hearing and welcomed the participants. A round the table introductions took place. No apologies were received.

2. Adoption of the Agenda.

The agenda was adopted without modifications.

3. Declaration of Interest.

No new declarations of interest were made apart from those already declared in the Annual Declaration.

4. Purpose of meeting and background to the mandate

EFSA briefly presented the background to the meat inspection mandate and described the main objectives of the technical hearing i.e. to provide WG experts with an opportunity to seek information from stakeholder representatives about slaughtering practices and meat inspection in small ruminants, based on the answers to a previously distributed questionnaire. The chair explained that the information that the stakeholder organisations provided as a reply to a questionnaire sent will be included in an event report. This report would be published alongside the opinion on the public health hazards to be covered by inspection of meat in small ruminants and might be used as reference, especially for information that was not available elsewhere.

5. Summary presentations on responses to questionnaire previously sent by EFSA to stakeholders

Representatives of the three stakeholder organisations presented the main issues to be considered in the context of meat inspection of small ruminants, as follows

- Copa-Cogeca's main points were:

The importance of optimizing the information flow throughout the food chain from the farmer to the slaughterhouse and vice versa was stressed. A better use of the information already available at farm level is possible, including investigating the potential that voluntary quality systems offer. These quality systems are preferred to HACCP systems at primary production.

Ante mortem inspection should remain at the slaughterhouse, as this allows for an assessment of health and welfare of animals after transport. Slaughtering processes for sheep and goats in EU differ according to size of the slaughterhouse, but are the same for young sheep and goats, except very young kids that, in France, can also be slaughtered in abattoirs for rabbits.

No evidence was found to suggest that if all dressing operations are carried out by the same person, there could be increased microbiological risks. Although the performance of seasonal workers should not compromise the productivity of the line, hygiene problems may arise in peak demand times (e.g. Eid ul-Fitr), usually related to skinning and evisceration.

- FVE's main points were:

An overview of the slaughtering and inspection processes was presented, stressing the importance of clean incoming animals. Some conditions detected at meat inspection were reviewed, and suggestions to improve feedback to producers were given, as at the moment there is little communication of relevant findings to farmers.

The importance of flock health programmes and the potential links with food chain information (FCI) were stressed. An improved system of FCI would be beneficial in many aspects eg public health, animal health and welfare, and by helping producers to control certain conditions and thus decreasing the costs of production.

- UECBV's main points were:

The importance of correctly identifying the relevant hazards for meat inspection of small ruminants was stressed, especially through the use of source attribution. Carcass contamination originating from dirty incoming animals was seen as the main problem, while decontamination treatments were mentioned as a potential solution to be considered, as long as they are not a substitute for good hygiene practices.

The current importance of FCI is unclear, as the information that is recorded in at least parts of the EU is very general. There is occasional feedback to producers specific to certain conditions found during slaughter, but this is not considered as part of FCI.

In addition, there is a need to look at risks to public health arising from handling of the meat beyond the chiller, as this can have an impact on the consumer e.g. poor hygiene during transport of carcasses or handling of meat at retail.

It was also considered necessary to understand the balance between food safety, animal health, animal welfare and livestock production issues with regards to meat inspection, as this would impact the responsibility for cost attribution.

6. Discussion

The presentations were followed by a session of questions and answers, where the experts had the opportunity to seek clarification about a number of issues in the areas of biological and chemical hazards. Some of the issues discussed included the use of process hygiene criteria at abattoirs, potential improvements, and whether there is any feedback to farmers on results of testing. A long discussion about how to better implement FCI also took place, which revealed a range of different interpretations of this concept. In addition, questions about residues, targeted sampling and illicit substance use were also asked.

7. Any other Business.

None.