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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEX COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR EUROPE

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HARMONIZATION AND COOPERATION IN FOOD LEGISLATION AND FOOD CONTROL ACTIVITIES IN THE REGION (SWEDEN, FINLAND, FRANCE)¹

1) Updated survey of national food control authorities

SWEDEN

Official Agencies

In Sweden, the National Food Administration (NFA), a government agency under the Ministry of Agriculture, is the central administrative authority for matters concerning food.

Sweden is divided into counties (21) and municipalities (289). Food control at the local level is the responsibility of the relevant municipal committee(s), usually the Environment and Health Protection Committee. The County Administrations are responsible for co-ordinating food control within each county.

The National Food Administration

The NFA deals with all types of foodstuff, including drinking water. The veterinary meat inspection organization is part of the NFA.

In the interests of the consumers, the NFA is working towards three goals: safe foods of good quality, fair practices in the food trade and healthy dietary habits. In order to achieve these goals, the NFA

- issues food standards and other food regulations;
- carries out supervision according to the Food Act (SFS 1971:511) and leads and co-ordinates food control;
- provides information on important matters concerning food;
- takes an active part in fulfilling the objectives on diet and health established by Parliament and the Government;
- carries out investigations and applied scientific studies on food and dietary habits and develops methods of analysis for food control.

The NFA's work on food standards, supervision, information and strengthening competence in the food area is based to a large extent on international co-operation, especially within the European Union.

The Board of the NFA, which consists of 13 members with the Director-General of the NFA as chairman, meets about once a month. It makes decisions on regulations issued by the NFA, budget proposals to be submitted to the Government and major policy issues.

The Director General and the Executive Committee are responsible for the day-to-day running of the

¹ Original language

NFA, which has a staff of about 270 at its headquarters in Uppsala. In addition, about 75 veterinarians and 100 meat inspection assistants work in the meat inspection organisation and are stationed at slaughterhouses throughout Sweden. The present organisation of the NFA in Uppsala is shown in the attached diagram.

Expert scientific advice for the NFA's work on food safety is provided by the NFA's own scientific divisions and experts and by external advisors and expert committees. The staff of the scientific divisions (chemistry, biology, toxicology and nutrition) includes a high proportion of graduate scientists, over 35 of whom have doctorates. Two professors on the staff provide expert advice on microbiology and nutrition. Scientific experts from the NFA take an active part in the work of the scientific advisory bodies of the European Commission, the Council of Europe, FAO/WHO and other international organisations.

The NFA's External Scientific Council consists of 45 leading scientists working at universities, university hospitals or research institutes. The NFA has three external scientific advisory committees on diet and health, paediatric nutrition and microbiology and food hygiene, respectively.

Other organizations

Other government agencies with responsibilities in related areas include:

- Board of Agriculture (agriculture, including animal health and welfare, the veterinary services and animal feed);
- National Chemicals Inspectorate (pesticide registration and use);
- Medical Products Agency (registration of drugs for human and veterinary use);
- Environmental Protection Agency (environmental pollution and protection);
- National Board for Consumer Policies (consumer information, marketing);
- National Institute of Public Health (information on alcohol, tobacco, diet and health);
- National Board of Health and Welfare (health statistics and health services);
- Institute of Infectious Disease Control (epidemiology and control of foodborne diseases);
- National Veterinary Institute (animal diseases, feed control, national zoonosis centre);
- National Board of Fisheries;
- Board for Accreditation and Conformity Assessment (laboratory accreditation);
- National Alcohol Board.

Food Control

The National Food Administration (NFA) is responsible at the national level for enforcing the Food Act and regulations issued under the provisions thereof. The County Administrations have responsibility for co-ordinating food control at the regional level and the municipal Environment and Health Protection Committees have responsibility for food control at the local level.

The organisation and financing of food control in Sweden is currently under review. This review includes the question of the division of responsibility for food control between the NFA and the municipalities.

National level

The NFA inspects slaughterhouses, dairies, egg product establishments, export-controlled establishments and other very large food-producing establishments (in all some 500 establishments) and also food premises in railway carriages, air-craft and certain ships. In addition, the NFA provides advice to the regional and local supervisory authorities, the food industry and trade. It also initiates food control projects which are carried out by the local authorities and follows up the results of food control carried out at the municipal level. The municipal authorities supervise about 51 500 establishments (shops, catering establishments, smaller food factories, waterworks, etc.).

The NFA organises the control of pesticide residues in fruit, vegetables and cereals. Samples are collected at ports of entry or wholesale markets. They are analysed at laboratories working under contract to the NFA and the results are transmitted directly to the NFA's computer. The results of the control of pesticide residues are published annually.

The NFA also organises the control of veterinary drug residues in foods of animal origin, mainly meat. Samples are collected at farms, slaughterhouses or ports of entry and are analysed at the NFA or at laboratories working under contract to the NFA.

The NFA has overall responsibility for export control. For food from countries outside the EU, inspection and sampling for microbiological (salmonella, etc.) examination at import control is carried out by the Environment and Health Protection Authorities at Border Inspection Posts.

Regional level

Each of the 21 County Administrations in Sweden is responsible for co-ordinating food control at the regional level, but they do not usually carry out any direct food control.

Municipal level

The municipal Environment and Health Protection Committees carry out food control at all food handling establishments except those under the supervision of the NFA, including food production establishments, wholesalers, retailers, catering establishments, waterworks and importers.

Approximately 1 000 inspectors are involved in food control at the municipal level. However, some of these only work part-time with food control and the personnel involved in food control correspond to about 300-350 full-time inspectors.

Food samples collected by the municipal food control authorities are usually analysed by private laboratories accredited by the Swedish Board for Accreditation and Conformity Assessment (SWEDAC). At present there are 39 such laboratories in Sweden, 26 of which work mainly with analysis of drinking water.

Financing of control, etc

The work of the NFA is financed partly by an annual appropriation from the Government (ca. 106 million Swedish crowns for 1998) and partly by fees paid by the food industry and trade (ca. 159 million SEK in 1998) - in all ca 264 million SEK. The meat inspection service is financed entirely by fees collected from the slaughterhouse operators. Municipal food control is financed partly by local taxes and partly by fees collected from the food industry and trade for sampling and analysis.

All establishments producing or handling foods (except very small operations) are required to pay an annual food control fee to the supervisory authority, i.e. the NFA or the municipal food control authority.

FINLAND

Official Agencies

In Finland the food safety system is organised on four levels, comprising ministries, central administrative level, regional level and local level (461 municipalities).

- The ministries assume overall responsibility for the development of food legislation. The *Ministry of Trade and Industry* directs food control and quality matters related to all foods of non-animal origin as well as market control of all foods. The *Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry* takes overall responsibility for the control of primary production and the hygiene of foodstuffs of animal origin. The *Ministry of Social Affairs and Health* deals mainly with the hygiene of foodstuffs of non-animal origin and the hygiene of all foodstuffs at retail level and catering.

- The central administrative level is occupied by two enforcement authorities; *National Food Administration* (EV), subordinate to the Ministry of Trade and Industry and *National Veterinary and Food Research Institute* (EELA), subordinate to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. They are in charge of co-ordinating national food control services. EELA has enforcement responsibilities for the control of the production, processing and export of foods of animal origin, whereas EV has enforcement responsibilities on all other foods and market control. The National Food Administration and the enforcement unit of the National Veterinary and Food Research Institute will be emerged in early 2001. The new agency will be in charge of the control of all kind of foodstuffs, including meat inspection.

- The practical enforcement is carried out by local municipal authorities under the direction of provincial governments. Local municipal authorities take care of the control of intra-community trade of foodstuffs of animal origin. The regional and local authorities exercise power only on their respective territories, whereas EV and EELA are competent throughout the whole country.

- The analyses needed by the official food control are carried out in laboratories approved either by EV or by EELA.

- The official food control in Finland is complemented by general requirements that food business operators carry out in-house control. The obligation of a food business operator to ensure the safety of the food he produces or puts on the market was regulated in 1995.

Import/Export Matters

The Customs authorities take care of the control of foodstuffs imported from third countries. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is responsible for veterinary border inspections of animals and foodstuffs of animal origin imported to Finland from third countries.

FRANCE

Les dernières évolutions françaises relatives aux activités et systèmes liés à la sécurité des aliments concernent :

- L'EVALUATION DES RISQUES

Un nouveau pôle d'expertise : l'Agence française de sécurité sanitaire des aliments (AFSSA)

En 1998, la loi a créé une structure d'expertise scientifique : l'Agence française de sécurité sanitaire des aliments (AFSSA). Placée sous la triple tutelle des ministères chargés de la Santé, de l'Agriculture et de la Consommation, l'AFSSA est un élément clé du nouveau dispositif d'évaluation et d'expertise des risques sanitaires et nutritionnels des aliments.

Consultée obligatoirement pour tout changement de législation ou de réglementation, lié à la sécurité sanitaire des aliments, l'AFSSA peut proposer aux autorités compétentes toute mesure qu'elle juge opportune pour préserver la santé publique. Elle publie ses avis et recommandations. Cette nouvelle structure constitue dorénavant l'outil national d'évaluation des risques sanitaires et nutritionnels des aliments, en regroupant plusieurs instances d'expertise et d'évaluation. Elle est chargée de contribuer à assurer la sécurité sanitaire dans le domaine de l'alimentation, depuis la production des matières premières jusqu'à la distribution au consommateur final.

L'expertise va s'organiser autour de comités consultatifs d'experts spécialisés notamment en matière d'hygiène des aliments et de l'eau, de nutrition, de produits destinés à une alimentation particulière, d'alimentation animale ou de médicaments vétérinaires.

L'A.F.S.S.A., qui est également centre de recherche et d'appui technique, dispose de 13 laboratoires nationaux, dont trois sont des laboratoires de référence communautaires, et de renommée internationale.

La création de l'Agence française de sécurité sanitaire des aliments s'inscrit dans une logique reconnue internationalement : la séparation de l'évaluation et de la gestion des risques.

- Les sources et les circuits d'alerte

Les sources d'alertes sont variées. Il peut s'agir d'une administration départementale ou centrale, du réseau d'alerte européen, d'une ambassade étrangère ou d'un organisme international. Les scientifiques, les médias, les associations de consommateurs et les professionnels sont aussi des sources d'alerte.

Le dispositif de veille sanitaire mis en place par la loi du 1er juillet 1998 a créé l'Institut de veille sanitaire (IVS) qui s'appuie sur les Cellules interrégionales d'épidémiologie (CIRE) et les directions départementales des affaires sanitaires et sociales (DDASS). L'IVS a 3 missions :

- La veille sanitaire et l'observation de la santé de la population
- L'alerte et recommandation de toutes mesures appropriées aux Pouvoirs publics
- L'identification et cause de modification de l'état de santé de la population, notamment en situation d'urgence

C'est ce dispositif qui permet par exemple d'identifier des cas groupés de listériose humaine et de mettre en œuvre le plus vite possible un dispositif coordonné entre toutes les administrations pour rechercher l'aliment origine de la contamination.

2) Food Legislation

SWEDEN

In Sweden, food legislation is made at three levels:

- the Food Act issued by the Swedish Parliament is a frame law, containing definitions and principles concerning *inter alia* food composition, handling, labelling, offering for sale, personnel hygiene, food premises, supervision/ control, penalties and appeals. It also empowers the Government, or an agency appointed by the Government, to issue regulations on food.

- the Food Decree issued by the Government develops the rules of the Food Act in some greater detail and gives the National Food Administration the power to issue further regulations in the food area and to approve food premises in certain types of establishment. The Decree also appoints supervisory authorities for all kinds of establishments handling food.

- Ordinances issued by the National Food Administration contain detailed regulations on *inter alia* food standards, labelling, food handling, additives, contaminants (pesticide residues, veterinary drug residues, heavy metals, mycotoxins etc.), supervision and in-house control, food premises, personnel hygiene, drinking water, veterinary food control, export control, import control, food control laboratories and material for food contact use. The NFA issues binding regulations and also provides advice concerning the application of such regulations.

Sweden joined the European Union (EU) on 1 January 1995 and has harmonized its food legislation with that of the EU. As a member of the EU, Sweden takes part in the development of new EU legislation in the food area. European Community Regulations apply directly in Sweden.

European Community Directives are transposed into NFA Ordinances.

For foods sold in Sweden, the standards and other regulations which apply are the same or equivalent for domestically-produced and imported foods. If the importing country so demands, special standards or regulations may apply for foods produced in Sweden for export to that country.

FINLAND

The Finnish food legislation is for the most part harmonised with EU legislation. Since joining the European Union in 1995, food legislation has been intensely developed. EU regulations have been transposed into Finland's law and key national food legislation has been reformed. National rules are applied in the absence of Community harmonisation.