

REPORT

**Rome, Italy,
1-2 March 2004**

**THIRTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE
EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON
AGRICULTURE (ECA)**

Reports of the European Commission on Agriculture (known as European Committee on Agricultural Technology from 1949 to 1952 and as European Committee on Agriculture until 1956) are as follows:

1. Preparatory Meeting Paris, 27-28 June 1949
2. First Session Rome, 26-30 September 1949
3. Second Session Geneva, 27-30 March 1950
4. Third Session Rome, 25-28 June 1951
5. Fourth Session Rome, 3-6 June 1952
6. Fifth Session Rome, 26-29 May 1953
7. Sixth Session Rome, 14-18 June 1954
8. Seventh Session Rome, 20-24 June 1955
9. Eighth Session Rome, 7-11 May 1956
10. Ninth Session Rome, 17-21 June 1957
11. Tenth Session Rome, 19-23 May 1958
12. Eleventh Session Rome, 25-29 May 1959
13. Twelfth Session Rome, 15-19 May 1961
14. Thirteenth Session Rome, 13-18 May 1963
15. Fourteenth Session Rome, 17-21 May 1965
16. Fifteenth Session Rome, 15-20 May 1967
17. Sixteenth Session Rome, 23-26 October 1968
18. Seventeenth Session Rome, 7-11 September 1970
19. Eighteenth Session Rome, 8-12 May 1972
20. Nineteenth Session Rome, 17-21 June 1974
21. Twentieth Session Rome, 17-23 June 1976
22. Twenty-first Session Rome, 19-23 June 1978
23. Twenty-second Session Rome, 23-27 June 1980
24. Twenty-third Session Rome, 21-25 June 1982
25. Twenty-fourth Session Innsbruck, Austria, 18-22 June 1984
26. Twenty-fifth Session Chania, Greece, 8-12 June 1987
27. Twenty-sixth Session Porto, Portugal, 23-26 May 1989
28. Twenty-seventh Session Herrsching, Germany, 1-5 July 1991
29. Twenty-eighth Session Valletta, Malta, 27 September – 1 October 1993
30. Twenty-ninth Session Bled, Slovenia, 2-6 October 1995
31. Thirtieth Session Nitra, Slovakia, 8-11 October 1997
32. Thirty-first Session Rome, 12-14 October 1999
33. Thirty-second Session Rome, 7-8 March 2002

Report of the

Thirty-third Session of the

European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)

Rome, Italy, 1-2 March 2004

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Rome, 2004

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Thirty-third Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA) was held in FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy from 1 to 2 March 2004 under the Chairmanship of Mr Milan Paksi (Slovakia).
2. The List of Participants is given in Appendix I to this Report.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

3. The Chairperson opened the Session and informed the participants that the Session was taking place within the context of a revised mandate, as adopted by the 119th Session of the FAO Council, and its new role in the framework of the European Regional Conference. The Chairperson in particular drew attention to Item 4 of the provisional agenda and recalled that this item had been placed on the Commission's agenda following the recommendation of the 23rd FAO Regional Conference for Europe with a view that the ECA should undertake the technical preparation and submit results of debate and recommendations to the 24th FAO Regional Conference for Europe.
4. On behalf of the Commission, the Chairperson expressed his condolences on the tragic death of His Excellency Boris Trajkovski, President of the FYR of Macedonia, in a plane crash on 26 February 2004 in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
5. On behalf of FAO, Ms Jutta Krause, Regional Representative for Europe, welcomed the participants, highlighting the important role of FAO's Regional and Sub-regional Offices for policy assistance and field programme support. She underlined that the Commission's discussion of Agenda Items 4, 5, and 6 would need to conclude with recommendations to the forthcoming 24th FAO Regional Conference for Europe.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND TIMETABLE

6. The Commission adopted its Agenda, as given in the Appendix II to this report, and the revised Timetable for the session.

APPOINTMENT OF RAPPORTEUR

7. Mr Francisco Martinez Arroyo (Spain) was appointed Rapporteur of the Session.

FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY IN EUROPE: ASPECTS CONCERNING IN PARTICULAR QUALITY, NUTRITION BALANCE, THE IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND AND CULTURAL HERITAGE ("TERROIRS")

8. The Item was introduced by Mr Jean-Louis Jouvé, Chief, Food Quality and Standards Service (ESNS), by placing it in the context of previous conferences and international meetings on the matter, namely the First Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators in Marrakech 2002, the Pan-European Conference on Food Safety and Quality in Budapest 2002, the 23rd FAO Regional Conference for Europe in Nicosia 2002, as well as the upcoming 2nd Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators in Bangkok.
9. The Commission was provided an overview on the different levels of approach to quality concepts, underlining the importance of consumer information and participation and the role of the public and private sector in the control of quality standards. Reference was made to the importance of sustainability of agricultural production. Special reference was made to the quality

parameters linked to specific production areas and cultural traditions (“terroirs”). The introduction of this concept will contribute to the sustainable use of natural resources, enhance the potential for valorization of local or regional production know-how, assist in the (re-)organization of small producers, and contribute to food safety and better nutritional balance.

10. During the subsequent discussion, Member Nations:
 - a) took note of the document ECA 33/04/2-INF.2 prepared by the Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development(WPW) and provided at short notice to the meeting, but felt unable to comment in detail on the recommendations contained therein. It was suggested to submit ECA 33/04/2-INF.2 to the forthcoming 24th FAO Regional Conference for Europe as part of the background documentation;
 - b) welcomed the report provided under cover of document ECA 33/04/2 and agreed to submit it to the forthcoming 24th FAO Regional Conference for Europe. The Commission noted that “food safety is everybody’s right”, and indeed is a non-negotiable bottom line;
 - c) underlined the need to adopt a holistic approach to food safety encompassing the whole food chain from the producer to the consumer, emphasizing the traceability and principle of responsibility for safe food production;
 - d) highlighted the EC Commission White Paper on Food Safety released in January 2000, which builds the basis of a profound reform of the food and feed legislation under completion in the EC Member States;
 - e) acknowledged that geographical indications promote quality, regional production and cultural heritage, and mention was made of their effects in supporting employment and rural development;
 - f) called for transparency, participation and openness as essential parameters to engage consumers in the process of education and better information.
11. In addition, the Netherlands presented a Country Paper on Food Chain Control and Government Supervision which is attached as Appendix III.
12. Member countries were encouraged to prepare similar country papers for the 24th FAO Regional Conference for Europe.
13. The Commission took note of the intervention by the representative of WHO and welcomed the existing collaboration between FAO and WHO in several areas related to food and nutrition policies.
14. The WHO Regional Office for Europe drew the Commission’s attention to the “First Action Plan for Food and Nutrition Policy” as well as the new publication “Food and Health in Europe: a new basis for action” and invited Ministries of Agriculture and FAO to collaborate with Ministries of Health in assessing the implementation of national food safety and nutrition policies in preparation for the Ministerial Conference in 2006, and the Second Food and Nutrition Action Plan for the European Region for 2006-2010. The text of the WHO intervention is attached as Appendix IV to this report.
15. The Commission received clarification on issues regarding the establishment of Information Centres as a means to enhance consumer education and training. These centres could be established under the responsibility of national governments which could receive assistance from FAO.
16. The Representative of IFOAM underlined the scope of organic agriculture in contributing to food safety and quality, helping rural development, making sustainable use of natural resources and allowing the consumer to be in contact with the producer.

REVIEW OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE EUROPEAN SYSTEM COOPERATIVE RESEARCH NETWORKS IN AGRICULTURE (ESCORENA): PROGRESS REPORT ON ASSESSMENT UNDERTAKEN IN 2003

17. The Item was introduced by the Regional Representative for Europe acknowledging the support received from France and Spain for the review of the ESCORENA networks. Subsequently the Visiting Expert, Mr Michel Larbier, made a PowerPoint presentation on the evaluation of ESCORENA research networks carried out during 2003.
18. The Commission was provided with a review of the activities undertaken by the Visiting Expert as called for by the 23rd FAO Regional Conference for Europe. An estimate of the necessary funding to ensure future activities was presented. Member States were invited to submit their views on the various funding options.
19. The Commission was informed on the methodological approach and the criteria applied in the evaluation. As a result of this it was proposed to retain the networks on Dry Fruits/Nuts, Rice, Flax, Sunflower, Pastures, Sheep and Goats, Buffalo and RAMIRAN. It was further proposed to reactivate the Olive Network and to abolish the networks on soybeans, trace elements and to merge the Cotton Network with the Flax Network.
20. Regarding the proposal to merge the Cotton and Flax Networks, it was noted that the maintenance of a separate Cotton Network would require support of a national institution and additional funding.
21. The Commission received confirmation from CIHEAM to continue to cooperate on the Dry Fruits/Nuts, Pastures, and Sheep and Goats Networks, and noted in particular the interest for the revival of the Olive Network.

REPORT OF THE ECA WORKING PARTY ON WOMEN AND THE FAMILY IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT (WPW)

22. The Commission was briefly addressed by Ms Marcela Villareal, Chief, Gender and Development Service (SD Department), and was informed that under the reduced budget level approved by the 32nd FAO Conference in November 2003, the Gender and Development Division will have to scale-down its support to the FAO/ECA WPW, particularly in the second year of the biennium 2004-2005.
23. The Chairperson of the Working Party, Ms Celia Fernández-Fontanillas (Spain) presented the report on the activities of the FAO/ECA WPW for the biennium 2002-2003.
24. The Commission took note of the valuable role of FAO/ECA WPW in promoting networking, building capacity and continuing to focus on mainstreaming of gender issues.
25. The Commission recognized that gender mainstreaming played a critical role in the achievement of equality and also noted the important aspect of the collection and analysis of gender disaggregated data.
26. The Delegate of Slovakia confirmed its availability to host the 12th FAO/ECA WPW Session in October 2004.
27. The Delegate of Austria confirmed its availability to host the 17th FAO/ECA WPW Expert Meeting on Gender and Rural Development in June 2004.

28. The Delegate of Slovenia offered to host the 13th FAO/ECA WPW Session in her country. The Commission took note that the 13th FAO/ECA WPW Session should preferably be held in early 2006 before the next ECA session and in order to present its recommendations to the 34th Session of the ECA.

ELECTION OF THE CHAIRPERSON, VICE-CHAIRPERSON OF THE ECA AND THE MEMBERS OF THE ECA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

29. In accordance with Rule II of the ECA's rules of procedure adopted at its 29th Session in 1995 and on the basis of nominations received, the Commission unanimously elected Ms Claire Gaudot of France as Chairperson and Mr Zohrab Malek of Armenia as Vice-Chairperson for a term of office of four years.

30. In accordance with Rule III of its rules of procedure, the Commission unanimously elected the following five members of the Executive Committee for a term of office of two years, eligible for re-election for up to two additional two-year terms:

- Mr Pavel Skoda (Czech Republic)
- Mr Søren Skafte (Denmark)
- Mr Paolo Ammassari (Italy)
- Ms Gabriela Dumitriu (Romania)
- Mr Ivan Angelov (TFYR of Macedonia).

OTHER BUSINESS

31. The Commission took note of the information provided by the Delegation of France in connection with the arrangements of the 24th FAO Regional Conference for Europe (Montpellier, France, 5-7 May 2004).

DATE AND PLACE OF THE THIRTY-FOURTH SESSION

32. The Delegation of Ireland proposed that the Executive Committee consider the possibility of shortening the ECA's future sessions so that its duration would be limited to one day and that the secretariat and the Rapporteur be entrusted with drafting the session's report. The Commission unanimously endorsed this proposal.

33. Considering that the dates of the 2006 Regional Conferences were not yet available, the Commission entrusted the Executive Committee to fix the most appropriate date for its next session, which should take place at least two months before the 25th FAO Regional Conference for Europe.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

34. With some amendments introduced by the Rapporteur, the text of the draft report was approved by the Commission.

CLOSURE OF THE SESSION

35. In closing the Session, the Chairperson warmly thanked all the participants for their contribution. In particular, he expressed appreciation for those Member Nations that had sent delegations from their capitals. Furthermore, he thanked on his own behalf and that of the Commission, the outgoing members of the Executive Committee. He also warmly welcomed the newly elected Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson of the Commission and the new members of the Executive Committee and wished them success in guiding the Commission's future activities.

**APPENDIX I
ANNEXE I
APÉNDICE I****LIST OF PARTICIPANTS
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APPENDIX II**AGENDA**

1. Opening of the Session
2. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable
3. Appointment of Rapporteur
4. Food Safety and Quality in Europe: Aspects concerning in particular quality, nutritional balance, the importance of agricultural land and cultural heritage (“terroirs”)
5. Review of the Activities of the European System Cooperative Research Networks in Agriculture (ESCORENA): Progress Report on Assessment undertaken in 2003
6. Report on Activities of the ECA Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development
7. Election of Chairperson and Members of the ECA Executive Committee
8. Other Business
9. Date and Place of the Thirty-fourth Session
10. Adoption of the Report
11. Closing of the Session

APPENDIX III

COUNTRY PAPER
FOOD QUALITY IN THE NETHERLANDS:
FOOD CHAIN CONTROL AND GOVERNMENT SUPERVISION
BY THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, NATURE AND FOOD QUALITY
OF THE NETHERLANDS

1. **Introduction**

This document describes how food control in the Netherlands has evolved in the past decades. It emphasizes the impact of recent concerns in food production and consumption on food quality policies and on the organization of food control systems in the Netherlands. Food quality is subdivided in three themes: food safety, product characteristics and production conditions. Important concerns are related to overweight and to the interaction between food production and the environment.

In the Netherlands food quality control is essentially a responsibility of food producers and traders. The Government tends to withdraw from official inspection activities of products toward supervision of process control systems of the private sector. This development leads to more effective control and reduction of costs. The best results of food quality control are achieved by good management of entire production processes and by cooperation between participants in the food production chain. Some specific examples of food control systems are highlighted and explained.

This document is intended to support the discussion on food safety and quality at the 33rd FAO European Commission for Agriculture in 2004.

2. **Brief historic overview**

After World War II agricultural and food production in the Netherlands increased rapidly and in the 1970ies the country became the third exporter of agro/food products in the world. Farming was traditionally a family business and agricultural products were processed and marketed by a large number of cooperative and private food industries and traders. At that time the country also expanded its import of agricultural commodities for further processing, such as coffee, cocoa, vegetable oils and animal feed. The private sector established **Commodity Boards** (Productschappen) to converge the interests of food producers and to provide regulatory measures to all members. Domestic and imported foodstuffs as well as products destined for export were inspected and supervised by Governmental inspection bodies as regards veterinary/phytosanitary health, safety and quality. The legal basis for safety and fair trade is found in the Dutch **Food and Commodities Act** (Warenwet), and for food quality in the **Agricultural Quality Act** (Landbouwkwaliteitswet), founded in 1920. The **Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sport** (VWS) and the **Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality** (LNV) are responsible for these tasks of inspection and supervision. Research on food quality is performed by the State Institute for **Quality Research in Agriculture** (RIKILT) and a number of other institutes and laboratories. At the same time private food industries, cooperatives and groups of farmers developed their own private quality control systems and quality research to strengthen their position on the consumer markets.

In the past 25 years the number of food processing industries has dropped dramatically and the size of the remaining companies grew likewise. Also the total number of farmers dropped by an average of 3 percent per year, while agricultural production and export continued to grow. This scale enlargement was also accompanied by a further development of **private quality control systems** of farmers, fishermen and food industries. Some of these private quality control systems were adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture and was brought under Governmental

supervision to represent official inspection and control. **Certification** of production processes became an important instrument for the food production sector to guarantee conformity with national and international standards and procedures, such as ISO, HACCP and EU-regulations.

Nowadays the food production companies are entirely responsible for the quality of food on consumer markets including exports. The Government focuses on supervision of inspection bodies and private food control systems, on veterinary and phytosanitary inspection, food inspections at market places and border inspections of imported goods.

The national legal framework is more and more based on regulations and guidelines of the European Union. The new framework for legislation is the **White Paper of Food Safety** followed by the **General Food Law** of the European Union. These two documents have set the starting point for a new system of food control in the European Union and its Member-states. It has led to the establishment of the **European Food Safety Authority** (EFSA), based in Parma, Italy. On the national level the Dutch **Food and Consumer Products Safety Authority** (Voedsel en Waren Autoriteit, VWA) was established in 2002.

3. **Recent developments in food quality policies**

We assume that consumers buy a certain food product mainly because of its quality factors and price. As food quality are considered all those factors that determine the character of a food product that is fit for human consumption. In this document the following three groups of quality factors have been distinguished:

1. **Food safety**: preconditions on microbiology, chemical and physical contaminants (already discussed at 33rd Regional Conference for Europe, Nicosia 2002)
2. **Product characteristics**: composition, nutritional value, structure/texture, shape, colour, taste, smell, packaging, labelling
3. **Production conditions**: animal health, animal welfare, environment, nature and landscape, traditional preparation and origin, labour conditions.

Food safety has received a lot of attention in the past 15 years triggered by high incidence of food-borne diseases and some major food safety emergencies in Europe (i.e. BSE, Salmonella, dioxins). In the Netherlands measures have been taken to achieve the highest possible levels of food safety. Improvement of production techniques and strengthening of public supervision and private control systems have largely contributed to this development. Standards and guidelines of the EU and Codex Alimentarius have been helpful in reaching this goal. Especially the **Integrated Food Chain approach**, covering all participants in a food production process, has strengthened the effect of control measures. This high level of food safety control was necessary to restore the confidence of consumers at both domestic and export markets.

Consumers have become more demanding on other quality factors. Important changes took place in food products, diets and life styles, affecting health and well-being. Unbalanced nutrition combined with a general lack of body exercise now leads to widespread overweight and obesity causing severe health risks.

Societal organizations and politicians have also stressed the need to improve the circumstances how food products have been manufactured. In particular animal health and welfare, environment, landscape, traditional production, geographic origin and labour conditions are key issues in this field. Organic farming, traditional and regional products and rural development projects resulted from this policy.

Consumers are also interested to know who is responsible for the quality of food. The food producers and traders are responsible to control and guarantee the quality of food they provide to the consumer markets. The Government supervises and verifies that this responsibility is carried out in a complete and impeccable way. The integrated food chain approach, process control and certification, traceability and transparency are the modern tools to support food safety, quality and consumer confidence.

4. **Food safety control**

Consumers require safe food and need to be confident of private and public processes of food control. Based on the responsibility of the Government to promote public health and welfare, food producers and traders are obliged to perform adequate food safety controls to the satisfaction of the Government. Consumers have their specific responsibility to store, prepare and consume the food products in an appropriate manner to protect their own health and well-being. Here the Government and the private sector have the task to inform the public about proper treatment of food at home.

In the Netherlands the **Ministry of Public Health** is responsible for safety of food at points of sale, like stores and restaurants. The **Ministry of Agriculture** is responsible to supervise food-manufacturing processes to produce safe and healthy food. Since 2002 the implementation of these ministerial tasks have been brought together in the single **Food and Consumer Products Safety Authority** (Voedsel- en Warenautoriteit, VWA). The key tasks of the Authority in the field of food products are **risk assessment** (research and advice) and the execution of the ministerial tasks regarding **law enforcement** (inspection and control) and **risk communication**. The Authority is an agency of the Ministry of Agriculture. The specific risk management tasks of supervision, inspection and control are carried out under the responsibility of both the Ministry of Health (product inspection) and the Ministry of Agriculture (process control).

The Authority has a central co-ordinating unit responsible for risk assessment/advice, risk communication and general management of the organization. The Authority has two delivery units in the field of supervision, inspection and control, these are:

- **National Inspection Service for Livestock and Meat** (Rijksdienst voor de Keuring van Vee en Vlees, RVV) carries out meat inspections, supervision of food production chains and processes, animal disease and welfare control, meat import inspections under the responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture
- **Inspectorate for Health Protection and Veterinary Public Health** (Keuringsdienst van Waren, KvW) carries out inspection of products (safety, quality, labelling) in the whole distribution chain, regulatory advice and investigation of consumer complaints.

The creation of VWA means that there is now a single independent national Authority responsible for protecting the safety of food and consumer products at all stages of the production chain. To this end, the VWA ensures that legislation and regulations are complied with and that potential threats to safety are addressed.

5. **Control of product characteristics**

Food producers and traders may provide products with any quality characteristics within the limits of national or international legislation. The consumer is free to choose any available food product or diet, but wholesomeness and nutritional value are important parameters to be verified and protected. Specific food components may have positive or negative effects on health and well-being. Due to changing lifestyles there is a general increase of overweight and obesity in the whole Dutch population, combined with higher incidence of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and certain types of cancer. This trend may lead to high societal costs of health care and loss of labour productivity.

The Dutch Government provides independent information on health risks of improper lifestyles and consumption patterns in relation to certain food components. The **Centre for Nutrition** (Voedingscentrum) recommends to the public to take sufficient body exercise, to be modest with food containing saturated fats/transfatty acids and to consume enough fish, vegetables and fruits. In this respect it is important that healthy food products and appropriate diets are sufficiently available and easy to recognize for the consumers.

Based on the responsibility of the Government to protect consumers against inadequate products and fraud, it is the task of the Government to supervise the quality characteristics of food products.

Here again the Food and Consumer Products Safety Authority carries out the Governmental tasks of supervision and control of the two Ministries. The **Agricultural Quality Act**, **The Meat Inspection Act** and the **Food and Commodities Act** form the legal framework for this task. But also the private sector has developed its own **independent control bodies**, that carry out specific inspections and controls.

6. Control of production conditions

Both public and Government show an interest in good and sustainable production conditions, while manufacturing agricultural and food products. These conditions are necessary to safeguard continued food production in a sustainable environment. In this environment important values of animal and plant life and variety are maintained, valuable nature and landscapes are preserved and social, cultural and economic interests of rural populations are respected. Not all the effects of these quality parameters are directly visible in the food product, but they reflect a preferred or necessary condition for appropriate food production. On the other hand certain preferred production methods like open air poultry husbandry can increase the risk of animal disease and contamination of products.

- Good animal health and welfare, by improvement of disease prevention, animal husbandry systems and animal transport, are highly esteemed. EU-regulations in recent years have set standards and guidelines for implementation of this by EU-member states.
- Organic farming, by reducing the use of chemicals in agriculture and protecting the natural environment has gained a vast market share in the Netherlands and beyond. The European Union has harmonized regulations for production conditions of organic foodstuffs.
- Protection of valuable landscapes, flora and fauna and traditional manufacturing processes and products from a particular origin have been highly valued by consumers.
- Products with a specific unique character related to traditional production processes and geographic origin are now protected by European law and supervised by the Dutch Government.
- Social/economic conditions of farmers and food industry workers is a matter of concern especially in developing countries and hence for imported products. Certified fair trade products have found a position at the Dutch food markets.

The **Ministry of Agriculture**, the **Food and Consumer Products Safety Authority** and several **independent inspection organizations** are responsible for supervision and control of these quality parameters.

7. Some examples of food control systems

In this paragraph four examples of food quality control systems in representative food sectors are elaborated: the dairy, meat, vegetables and fruits and the organic products sector. Also other agricultural branches, such as poultry and eggs, fishery, flowers and plants sectors have adapted their quality control systems to their specific situation.

7a. Quality control in the dairy sector

The dairy sector in the Netherlands is very important for both domestic consumption, import and export. There are a large number of dairy farmers and a small number of large-sized dairy processing industries and trading companies operating worldwide. There are also dairy farmers, processing their own produced milk into traditional products such as cheese, butter and yogurt.

The animal health situation at the farms is regularly inspected by the **Animal Health Service** (Gezondheidsdienst voor Dieren, GD). This is an independent foundation carrying out veterinary inspections and laboratory analyses. All farmers with animals are obliged to be a

member and to pay an annual fee. The organization's main task is prevention of animal disease and an optimal health status of the herds. In the case of a dangerous animal disease outbreak, a farm can be officially closed or animals be slaughtered and removed by the **National Inspection Service for Livestock and Meat** (VWA/RVV).

The control on the safety and quality of (raw) milk and dairy products is carried out by the **Controlling Authority for Milk and Milk Products** (Centraal Orgaan voor Kwaliteitsaangelegenheden in de Zuivel, COKZ). This is an independent foundation carrying out activities in the framework of national and European legislation under the supervision of the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture. The organization is accredited by the Accreditation Council. Important activities of the organization are:

- Product control and delivery of the **State Quality Seal** (Rijskmerk) for cheese and butter
- Hygiene inspection of premises in the framework of the EU-Directive 92/46
- Process and product certification, HACCP certification
- Supervision of farm milk regulations
- Export guarantee certificates
- Laboratory research and sampling
- Advice on legislation and regulations

The supervision by the Ministry of Agriculture is carried out with technical assistance of the State Institute of Quality Control in Agriculture (RIKILT), the Food and Consumer Products Safety Authority (VWA) and the General Inspection Service (AID) of the Ministry of Agriculture. In this way the public activities of COKZ can be adequately monitored. COKZ can administer fines to its members in case of non-compliance with the regulations.

Specific quality standards for a number of dairy products are found in the Agricultural Quality Act. Product preparations that comply with these standards may use the name of the product as well as the State Quality Seal EU-recognized Dutch dairy specialties are also supervised by COKZ as regards their regional origin and traditional preparation. At points of sale the **Food and Consumer Products Safety Authority** performs inspections on final products as these are offered to the consumer.

In the past 10 years the Dutch dairy industry has developed a private quality system for farm milk called: **Chain Quality of Milk** (Keten Kwaliteit Melk, KKM). The objective of this system is to improve the quality of farm milk as regards residues of veterinary drugs, status of animal health and welfare, quality of feed and drinking water, milk collection, storage and equipment, hygiene and disinfection. In 2001 this quality system has been adopted by the **Dairy Commodity Board** (Productschap Zuivel) and most dairy farmers participate.

7b. **Quality control in the meat sector**

Modern private quality control systems in the meat sector are based on **Integrated Chain Control** (Integrale Keten Beheersing, IKB) especially in the pig sector. Other meat sectors in the Netherlands have developed similar schemes. This system has been developed from mid 1980s by the private sector to satisfy the demands of consumers and Government regarding assurances for quality and safety of meat. The approach of the program means that all activities in pig meat production are closely linked to one another, from breeders to pig farmers, from traders to slaughterhouses and from processors to retailers and consumers. The work carried out by veterinarians, the requirements for veterinary medicines and the standards for animal feed and animal welfare are also covered within the IKB-system. The National Inspection Service for Livestock and Meat carries out the official meat inspections, while the **Inspectorate for Health Protection and Veterinary Public Health** does checks of products and of hygiene at market places. The participants in the IKB chain enter into agreement with the competent certification body, which then commissions an accredited inspection organization to carry out periodic inspections. The participants undertake to exchange vital information with other participants to whom they are linked in the chain. IKB thus forms an all-embracing, continuous system of information exchange. IKB makes it possible to demonstrate that every link in the chain delivers

according to pre-determined standards. The independent inspection bodies operating within the IKB system are accredited by the Dutch **Accreditation Council** on the basis of international standard EN 45004, while the certification bodies are accredited on the basis of standard EN 45011. This means that the work of the inspection and certification bodies themselves is also periodically checked.

Within IKB detailed written records are kept and accompany the animals. IKB-certified slaughterhouses record details of health inspections and give feedback to the pig farmer, who may implement improvements. Each link in the chain sets down its procedures in a manual. This manual and the way the procedures are carried out in practice form the basis of the independent IKB inspections. The use of accredited inspection bodies also means that the quality and independence of the inspections is assured. The products manufactured under IKB-supervision may carry the special **IKB-quality seal**. The consumer is informed by brochures in supermarkets and butcheries about the impact of the system on quality and safety guarantees.

7c. **Quality control in the vegetable sector**

The Netherlands is an important producer and international trader of vegetables and fruits. Since 1924 the **Office for Quality Control of Vegetables and Fruits** (KCB) supervises domestic fruits and vegetables regarding quality regulations. KCB is an independent private foundation, established by the collective fruit and vegetable sector in the Netherlands. The organization has 1250 members, covering producers, processors, traders and importers/exporters. The Dutch Accreditation Council has accredited KCB as type A in 1997. This type of accreditation implies that the organization has the highest possible level of independence for inspection and supervision. The accreditation covers all inspections and supervision in the framework of EC-regulations 2200/96 (common market organization of vegetables and fruits), 1148/01 (standardization of fresh vegetables and fruits) and of national regulations for mushrooms. The activities of KCB regarding public control cover:

- Random checks of vegetables and fruits of members and non-members of the organization
- Phytosanitary inspections on the request of the State Phytosanitary Service
- Issuing control and phytosanitary certificates for export
- Supervision on the intervention regulation of vegetables and fruits
- Supervision on self-control systems of processing companies of mushrooms

The costs of most services of KCB are charged to the companies, in particular the annual membership fee, quality and phytosanitary inspections, export certificates and trade information. In 1997 KCB has established the private organization **Agro Quality Support** (AQS bv.), for the performance of private control services to the vegetable and fruit sector. These services cover:

- Quality assessments of fresh products regarding trade classification and specifications of buyers.
- Inspections of quality control systems such as HACCP, Hygiene code, EUREPGAP.
- Assistance to certifying organizations (Foodcert, CMI Certification).

7d. **Quality control in the organic sector**

Organic production is a growing sector in Dutch food production including international trade. The sector covers virtually all products such as vegetables, meat, eggs, dairy products, coffee, and wine. Currently less than 5 percent of the agricultural area in the Netherlands is producing organic products. Domestic consumption is even less than 5 percent and a large part of the products are exported, mainly within the European Union.

As in all EU-countries the rules for organic production in the Netherlands are based on the **EU-regulation (EEC) nr. 2092/91**. This regulation came into force in 1992 as far as plant production and processing were concerned. In 2000 also animal husbandry and food processing were included. All EU Member states should at least meet the requirements of this regulation. In the Netherlands the Ministry of Agriculture has assigned in 1992 the organization **SKAL** as

inspection body for organic production. It has been accredited by the Dutch **Accreditation Council** for certification of organic production systems. SKAL is a non-profit and independent foundation that surveys the organic production in the Netherlands in accordance with the appropriate regulations. SKAL performs this task by means of inspections finally leading toward certification. Inspections can be farm visits, taking samples of soil, crops or products and administrative assessments. When all the requirements of the production process are met, certification of the production process can take place. In most cases products from a certified production process are allowed to use the EKO seal to indicate the compliance with the European rules for organic production.

EU-regulation (EC) Nr. 1804/1999 includes the consideration that genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and products derived there from are not compatible with organic production methods. In order to maintain consumer confidence in organic production, GMOs should not be used in products labelled as from organic production.

8. **Conclusions**

Food producers and traders are entirely responsible for the safety and quality of food that is brought to the consumer markets. It is the Government's sole task to supervise that this responsibility is fully implemented. Consumers are free to choose any product or diet that is available on the market, but they should be well informed about the impact of food on health and well-being by comprehensive labelling, education and extension.

Main food quality concerns comprise food safety, nutritional balance and sustainability of production. Food safety is best covered by process control in an integrated food chain approach based on Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points (HACCP). The ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality are responsible for food control policies. The central pivot of Dutch food control is the Food and Consumer Products Safety Authority (VWA). Additionally the Dutch Government uses certified independent control bodies with specific expertise for the execution of certain inspection and control activities. Also certification under the supervision of the independent Accreditation Council is an effective and cost-efficient way of private control of food production processes.

Changing lifestyles and unbalanced nutrition causes higher incidence of chronic diseases in the Netherlands and beyond. Nutritional balance can be improved by availability of healthy products and targeted communication with consumers about lifestyles and consumption habits.

Sustainability of food production in rural areas is supported by targeted policies promoting environmental protection, organic production and special products.

APPENDIX IV**WHO INTERVENTION REGARDING AGENDA ITEM 4:
FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY IN EUROPE**

On behalf of the Regional Director for the WHO Regional Office for Europe we welcome this opportunity to address European Ministries of Agriculture on this important issue (paper ECA 33/04/2 "Food Safety and Quality in Europe: aspects concerning quality, nutritional balance, importance of agricultural land and cultural heritage"). ECA: 33/04/2 highlights the vital role that food has with regard to public health and rural development. This vital role was also recognised by Ministries of Health when, at their Regional Committee in 2000 all 51 Ministries of Health unanimously supported the need for a Food and Nutrition Action Plan for the European Region. They endorsed the Resolution and confirmed that there would be a Food and Nutrition Conference where the implementation of a Food and Nutrition Action Plan would be assessed.

Copies of this Action Plan are available here in English, French, German and Russian on the secretariat table. FAO provided input into the development of this Action Plan and participated at the WHO European Regional Committee in 2000. Furthermore FAO was involved in the subsequent workshops where Ministries of Agriculture and Health worked together to develop comprehensive national food and nutrition policies. A total of 8 workshops in Southern Eastern Europe (SEE), Nordic and Baltic countries, and Southern Europe involving 30 Member States were carried out in collaboration with FAO.

Several other areas of collaboration exist between FAO and WHO which are in line with agenda item ECA: 33/04/2. For example the World Health Assembly resolution in 2001 (WHA53.15) urged Member States to integrate food safety as one of their essential public health functions and the Director-General was requested to give greater emphasis to food safety, in collaboration and coordination with other organizations, notably FAO. Moreover the recommendations from the FAO/WHO Pan-European Conference on Food Safety & Quality in Budapest in 2002 were endorsed by the WHO Regional Committee in September 2002 (EUR/RC52/R3). As a follow up several workshops to strengthen food safety national systems have been organized at the sub-regional level in collaboration with FAO, in South Eastern Europe and Central Asian Republics. The supply of nutritious and safe food is a prerequisite for health and access to this as a fundamental human right, was stressed during the joint WHO/FAO International Conference on Nutrition (ICN) in 1992 and by the FAO World Food Summit in 1996.

However in spite of these commitments made at international level there is, more than ever, a need for the implementation of policies in Europe that reduce the burden of food-related ill health and its cost to society. It is estimated that each year around 130 million Europeans are affected by episodes of food-borne diseases. Diarrhoea, a major cause of death and growth retardation in young children especially in former Soviet countries (CIS), is one of the most common symptoms of food-borne illness. Re-emerging food borne diseases such as Botulism or Brucellosis are frequently associated with traditional ways of processing foods (home canning, smoking, curing, non-pasteurized dairy produce, etc) and are related with the economic hardship in the CIS. In addition new hazards are emerging in the food chain following food production changes, such as the agent of bovine spongiform encephalopathy or food contaminants such as dioxins. The use of antibiotics as growth promoters in animal husbandry and the possible transfer of antibiotic resistance to human pathogens is a major public concern, as is the misuse of pesticides. All this calls for improved Agricultural and Manufacturing Practices along with better consumer education.

Iodine deficiency disorders affect around 16 percent of the European population and are a major cause of mental retardation. Iron deficiency anaemia affects thousands and impairs cognitive development in children and increases the risk to women. The prevalence of obesity is up to 20-30 percent in adults, with escalating rates in children, increasing the risk of cardiovascular diseases, certain cancers and diabetes. Poor feeding practices result in disorders such as growth retardation, poor cognitive development, and digestive and respiratory infections in young children. Childhood and adolescence is a critical period for learning healthy eating habits and cooking skills that can help people to be healthy and prevent premature death from cardiovascular disease, the main cause of premature death in the European Region.

These statistics reinforce the need for policies which reduce the burden of food-related ill-health and at same time stimulate socioeconomic development and sustainable rural environments. Similar to agenda item ECA: 33/04/2 the WHO European Action Plan provides a framework which seeks to explore all dimensions of food safety and quality. The WHO framework consists of three policy areas: a food safety strategy; a nutrition strategy and thirdly a sustainable food supply (food security) strategy seeks to ensure enough safe food of good quality, while helping to stimulate rural economies and promote the social and environmental aspects of sustainable development.

The WHO Action Plan states that the need for coordination between sectors, especially health and agriculture, is vital. In order to highlight this, the scientific evidence has been gathered by WHO in a new publication "Food and Health in Europe: a new basis for action". This publication helps governments to consider which mechanisms best facilitate coordination.

The impact on food policy following the reform of the Common Agriculture Policy and new Rural development policies are extremely important for the health and socio-economic well being of European populations. Ministries of Agriculture and Health have a common goal to restore producer linkages that have become extended by the globalization of the market. A coordinated approach by the health and agriculture sectors to products of geographical origin could strengthen the nutritional benefits and safety of European food production. Special efforts could be agreed between the two ministries to cultivate the modern form of consumerism, discussed in ECA: 33/04/2, to reduce the level of social discrimination and to preserve culinary traditions and cooking skills while protecting health through education, promotion and training.

Finally, distinguished delegates, we welcome the opportunity to collaborate. The Regional Director, Dr Marc Danzon, invites Ministries of Agriculture and FAO to: firstly, collaborate with Ministries of Health in assessing the implementation of national food safety and nutrition policies in the run up to a Ministerial Conference in 2006; and secondly, to participate in the preparation of a second Food and Nutrition Action Plan for the European Region for 2006 to 2010.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving us the opportunity to speak on this important item during your meeting.