



EU MARKET ACCESS FLASH NOTE

Export of meat and cheese to Japan getting easier

By the end of 2014, Japan changed its standard for *Listeria monocytogenes*. The Japanese requirement now reflects the current international standard applied also in the EU. The decision will make the €1 billion-worth European exports of processed meat and cheese to Japan much easier.

Listeria monocytogenes is a pathogenic bacterium widespread in the environment. Codex Alimentarius – the international standard-setting body – defined in 2009 microbiological criteria for *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat foods. The Codex Alimentarius gave also a possibility for competent authorities to establish and implement other limits than the zero-tolerance provided certain associated conditions guarantee the safety of the food products (so called "alternative approach").

The EU legislation allows the presence of *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat food as long as the producer can demonstrate that the EU-set limit will not be exceeded throughout the product's shelf-life. This is in line with the international standard. *Listeria* is controlled through preventive measures and careful monitoring during food production. The competent authorities in Member States are responsible to ensure that the food companies implement the legislation correctly.

Japan did not previously recognise the EU approach and banned all foods containing *Listeria monocytogenes*. The zero tolerance policy for all products exposed EU traders to uncertainties and delays. Some consignments of safe products from Europe could not enter the Japanese market.

The EU had asked Japanese authorities to reconsider the standard. The decision taken by Japan in December follows detailed discussions between the EU and the competent Japanese authorities, a study visit to the EU and a thorough risk assessment in Japan.

The European Commission welcomes the decision taken by Japan. It significantly improves access to the Japanese market for European exporters of processed meat products and soft- and semi-hard cheeses and confirms the high level of safety of EU food.

The European Commission is now following closely the implementation of the new Japanese standard to ensure it does not cause any other hindrance to trade. The European Commission and the EU Delegation in Tokyo will continue working together with the Japanese authorities to eliminate any outstanding barriers in EU-Japan food trade. In the process the Commission will engage also closely with all EU Member States and industry.

For further information: trade-SPS@ec.europa.eu

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