

PRIVATE AND COMMERCIAL STANDARDS

Statement at the Meeting of 25-26 February 2009

The following communication, received on 25 February 2009, is being circulated at the request of the Delegation of Belize.

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1. The delegation of Belize would like to thank the Chairman and the informal Working Group for the work that they have been doing in the area of private and commercial standards.
 2. Our delegation would also like to sensitize Members that in the case of Small and Vulnerable Economies, where in certain cases, these countries depend solely on the exportation of one particular product, market access is not determined by compliance with international standards but rather by producers' ability to comply with private and commercial standards.
 3. The effects of having the import requirements being constantly changed for the market access of one single and only product, on an already vulnerable economy, is a very serious one as failure to sell the produce would mean severe economic consequences for such economies.
 4. As a result, my delegation calls on all Members to work collectively towards finding measures that could be taken at the SPS Committee level to address the critical impact that private standards are having on the ability of developing countries, and in particular Small and Vulnerable Economies, to gain and maintain market access.
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**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES
TO ENHANCE NATIONAL SPS CAPACITY IN BELIZE**

Statement at the Meeting of 25-26 February 2009

The following communication, received on 25 February 2009, is being circulated at the request of the Delegation of Belize.

1. Belize submitted a request for technical assistance to the European Communities via the Commonwealth Secretariat based in London in February 2008. The request included specific training needs in addition to equipment needed to enhance national sanitary and phytosanitary capacity.
2. On 21 August 2008, personnel from the TradeCom Project Management Unit indicated that they would only be able to address a few components of the request and as a result advised Belize to prioritize its needs and send a detailed proposal. The proposal was submitted that same day and on 2 September 2008 we were informed that the project had been submitted to the EC-ACP Validation Committee for their consideration and approval. Belize was informed that the EC-ACP Secretariat approved the project on 3 October 2008.
3. The Project entitled "Enhancement of National SPS Capacity" was initiated on 1 February 2009 and has a duration of seven months. Expected results include:
 - Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA) staff trained on prioritized SPS and TBT issues;
 - Technical advice on EC legislative framework;
 - Technical advice on Biosafety legislation for Belize; and
 - Technical advise on modernization and upgrading of laboratory.
4. To ensure that there is sustainability in the delivery of this technical assistance, where specific training is provided it will include:
 - (a) training for trainers; and
 - (b) manuals, protocols and standard operational procedures.
5. We extend our thanks to the European Communities for this particular project and look forward to receiving approval of other project proposals which have been submitted to them for their consideration and support.

NEWCASTLE DISEASE

Statement at the Meeting of 25-26 February 2009

The following communication, received on 25 February 2009, is being circulated at the request of the Delegation of Belize.

1. Belize reported to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) on 21 November 2008 an outbreak of virulent Newcastle disease (vND) in commercial poultry in the Cayo District. The report was initially based on real time reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (RRT-PCR) positive results for vND virus from an OIE reference laboratory, the National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) in the United States. NVSL later confirmed the disease through virus isolation, gene sequencing, and intracerebral pathogenicity index (ICPI). Belize virus isolates showed an amino acid sequence at the fusion protein cleavage site that was consistent with vND virus. Approximately 1000 base pair (bp) piece of the matrix and fusion genes were sequenced and the sequence showed 96.6 per cent similarity to Pet bird/CA/169302/02 and other viruses isolated from California, United States during the 2002/2003 outbreak of vND. The Belize isolate was shown to be a genotype 5 ND virus and the ICPI was 1.6875. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is conducting pathogenesis and transmission studies. All samples submitted to the national and reference laboratories are tested for avian influenza virus with negative results to date.

2. Depopulation and decontamination, along with movement restrictions, were implemented, and the disease was controlled in the commercial poultry sector. However, there was subsequent spread of the vND virus to backyard poultry in the Cayo District and the districts of Belize, Stann Creek and Toledo. The disease has not been reported to date in the northern districts of Corozal and Orange Walk. When the disease was detected in backyard poultry, the disease was considered endemic given the large number of infected communities in the affected districts.

3. While the disease has zoonotic potential, our experience has been the rare occurrence of a mild conjunctivitis in people directly involved with a large number of infected poultry.

4. The source of the virus has not been determined. It is believed that the extensive floods in the Cayo and Belize Districts caused by Tropical Depression 16 may be a causal factor. Flash floods swept through many communities including the index community, killing many birds in their wake. The index farm obtained water from the flooded river and it was observed that only the farms in the affected area that sourced water from the flooded river were initially infected. Subsequently, spread was due to farms being adjacent to one another (thus movement by fomite, mechanical vectors).

5. The control measures include depopulation and decontamination of infected premises, movement restrictions, compulsory vaccination with B1 live virus strains and public awareness campaigns. The Ministry of Agriculture, along with the Belize Agricultural Health Authority, is

conducting a country-wide vaccination campaign in backyard poultry using eye drop applications of a B1 live virus strain. This vaccine is being used in backyard poultry because there are 150 doses per vial. The plan is to control the disease through repeat vaccinations every three months and after being able to show the absence of circulating vND virus, to obtain disease free recognition with vaccination.

6. Belize received valuable support from the international community. The USDA is assisting with the diagnosis of the disease. The International Regional Organization for Agricultural Health (OIRSA) is assisting with the backyard vaccination campaign and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) is bringing a Canadian Food and Inspection Agency (CFIA) consultant to assist in the evaluation and eradication of the disease.
