



Report on the

EU Workshop "Classifications and standards for data management in food and feed control", Berlin, 10-11 May 2007

Annexes:

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This Workshop was organized by the Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety (BVL) and took place during the German EU Presidency.

The aim was to present and introduce the new German coding system for data management and classifications in the area of food and feed safety, which is currently being developed. In particular, the advantage of internationally harmonized classification for foodstuffs was to be demonstrated.

The system will cover all current reports on feed and food control, monitoring of zoonoses etc. It will ensure reporting of surveillance data '*from farm to fork*', covering the entire food chain. It will also be flexible enough to cope with future demands.

Like the competent authorities in other Member States, the Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety collects and summarizes official data on food control for reports to DG SANCO and EFSA as well as for other purposes.

As several Member States and the European Commission have to cope with similar difficulties, we organized this workshop with the aim to work together. We wanted to present our plans for classifications, codes and procedures of data transfer in food and feed control as an offer to start cooperation on joint classifications, which we believe would make work easier for all stakeholders.

This workshop addressed representatives of the services of the European Commission (DG SANCO, EFSA, EUROSTAT, FVO) and of the supreme authorities of food and feed control in EU Member States and other countries, who are responsible for surveillance of food and feed, veterinary affairs, EU reporting and data management.

The aim of the new system is also to effectively reduce the effort for reporting and necessary data collection and data management at all administrative levels. We wanted to discuss possibilities of cooperation to achieve this target and reach, if possible, relevant agreements.

10 May 2007

Part I: Introduction, aims of the workshop

Status quo in Germany

1 Address of welcome

**Gerd Fricke
BVL**

Dr. Fricke opened the meeting by welcoming the participants and giving an overview over the situation concerning food and feed control and health related consumer protection in Germany. The federal system was explained, as well as the role of the BVL on the interface of federal states and the Federal Government. (All presentations are compiled in annex 3)

2 Data management as a EU-wide task in food and feed control; aims of the workshop

**Michael Winter
BMELV**

Dr. Winter explained the background and importance of data management in feed and food control.

EU bodies and several Member States, e.g. Germany and the UK, have re-organized their food and feed control bodies as a consequence of food and feed crises and incidents some years ago.

The increase of global trade is a second point relevant for food safety and consumer protection and creates special demands for data management.

Dr. Winter confirmed the need for reliable data within the EU, described the spectrum and life cycle of data, outlined some problems of current data management and presented the aims of the workshop.

3 Status quo in Germany: Data collection, storage, and analysis as a basis for reporting – the federal perspective

**Evelyn Breitweg-Lehmann
BVL**

Dr. Breitweg-Lehmann gave an overview over the situation in Germany, where the competence for food and feed control lies with the federal states (Länder). The role of the BVL as a link between the Länder and the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection as well as the EU was explained. Examples for reports within Germany and to the EC were shown as well as advantages and limits of the current system.

4 Status quo in Germany: Data generation, collection, and transfer in the federal states (Guido Schleifer LGL), Gerhard Marx, by proxy

Gerhard Marx described in this presentation, which was prepared by Dr. Schleifer, the special situation in the federal states, here in Bavaria. He addressed the points data sources, responsibilities, verification, transformation from a LIMS to the standardized “AVV-Düb format”, and transmission to the BVL in this data format.

5 Discussion:

HU reported on their new system of official control, where also private laboratories are involved. The delegate confirmed the importance of classification and reliability of data.

DE noted that data transfer from private labs to the BVL database in the harmonized format is not possible for the time being.

BE and AT reported about new developments in their countries regarding central or cross-linked LIMS.

WHO and EFSA complained about partially unknown standardization and weak quality assurance in their data sources, whereas in Germany all official labs are accredited and checked by proficiency tests.

EFSA confirmed its intention to get statistically representative single data. Surveillance data, which often are data from samples checked for suspicion, and aggregated data are of less value for EFSA's work.

Part II: Requirements and demands in Germany, from DG-Sanco's, EUROSTAT's and EFSA's point of view

1 Advantages and disadvantages of the data management in Germany; necessity for a revision and extension of the system Matthias Frost BVL

Dr. Frost reported about the advantages of the current system, which is proven and has ensured standardized data transfer since 2000. About 6 million data sets per year are transmitted by means of this system, and all parties concerned are used to it. The limitations were shown: for example the system is restricted and not extendable for future demands. Disadvantages are a lack in data security, out-dated technical solutions, and the rigid systematics of the catalogues.

**2 Requirements and demands on the data management
from DG SANCO's point of view**

**Herman Brand
DG SANCO**

Dr. Brand gave an overview over the DG SANCO reference database and data transfer system SANREF. SANREF is an IT toolbox to streamline data exchange and information flow for food safety and animal health and welfare notification systems. The objectives are for example to streamline information exchange, the re-use of data, to have a generic toolbox and to summarize all data related to existing legal frameworks. The pilot model is divided in 3 sub-models: an actor oriented sub-model, a zone oriented sub-model and an activity oriented sub-model

**3 Requirements and demands on the data management
from EFSA's point of view**

**Stefan Fabiansson
EFSA**

Dr. Fabiansson described the current system of data evaluation with all problems and difficulties. He talked about what happens if EFSA gets a request from e.g. the Commission, to whom it should deliver evaluated data.

He repeatedly noted the lack of standardized data material within EU. There is a lack of information concerning the questions: Random vs. targeted sampling, entry of results below the limit of detection. There are language problems in food descriptions, there are no standardized food categories and ways of food categorization, re-design of template at local level is one of several further problems.

**4 Requirements and demands on the data management
from EUROSTAT's point of view**

**Ana Martinez Palou
EUROSTAT**

Dr. Martinez Palou talked about Eurostat's project Food Safety Statistics which started in 2002. The aim is to establish European statistics on food and feed safety, to avoid double reporting, and to introduce a common terminology.

The developments of a control database and of classifications for products, establishments, etc. were explained and described.

Discussion

The result of discussion was that the participants of the workshop agreed with the need of standardisation and harmonization in all areas of food and feed control:

For getting comparable and reliable data, it is necessary to ensure harmonized terminology, harmonized sampling (targeted or surveillance sampling), harmonized classification systems, safe data transmission and flexible quality check of data. Communication between the organi-

zations involved is required. The structure of data should allow comparison with data from other programs (e.g. food survey data), which means a high degree of compatibility.

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Part III: Introduction of the new concept of Germany

**1 Concepts and technical issues for data management
in food and feed surveillance**

**Thomas Firley
BVL**

Dr. Firley explained the new plans for data transfer in Germany from the technical point of view. He outlined the status quo, the IT strategy, including aims, drawbacks of the current system, technical aspects, and the project status. The advantages of a portal-based application with use of the data format XML were underlined.

**2 New classifications - Principles and structures
of the classifications**

**Matthias Frost
BVL**

Dr. Frost explained principles of the new classifications and their structures in his presentation.

The principles are: Standardized vocabularies and codes shall be used wherever possible. Only one common set of classifications shall be applied to the whole food chain and to all levels of official controls. The system has to be multilingual and compatible to other classification systems. Concerning structures, the aim is to make the system as detailed as needed and as coarse as possible. It ought to be extendable. Grouping of entries and their hierarchical sorting should be separated from coding in order to allow poly-hierarchical structures.

**3 The thesaurus ‘LanguaL’ – an international framework
for food description**

**Jayne Ireland
AFSSA**

Dr. Ireland described the LanguaL thesaurus, which has been developed since 1970 as a standardized language for describing foods. Any food can be systematically described by a combination of characteristics, so-called facets. Facets are for example product type, food source, part of plant or animal, physical state, shape or form, extent of heat treatment, etc. For each facet there is a list of facet terms. The system allows clear and unambiguous description of food at the data input side and very flexible data queries for output.

4 New concept for the matrix classification

Matthias Frost
Birgit Gebhardt
BVL

The presentation of Dr. Frost and Ms. Gebhardt gave an overview over the principles for the matrix classification which is under development. The expected purposes are that a product is named uniquely, described with its properties and grouped into appropriate classes. The classification comprises product lists for feed, food, commodities, etc. and the facet lists for further characterisation of the products. It makes use of the facets defined by LanguaL. As an example, the classification of beetroot juice, bottled, was shown and illustrated. The new concept is flexible, extendible, compatible with other classifications, user friendly, and unerring in data retrieval.

Discussion:

Participants stressed that with a harmonized system the transmission of data from LIMS and other databases would be possible automatically.

The problem was raised whether loss of information could occur when only parts of the existing data are transferred to a body demanding them. BVL confirmed that this aspect will be taken under consideration, that several checks are planned, and that the access rights and responsibilities will be fixed.

If a unique classification is aimed, this has to be discussed and agreed upon by all interested countries.

The question was raised which codes would be delivered to the EU. BVL answered that as many codes as possible should be transmitted, but the question has to be discussed in detail when the IT solution for the transmission is fixed.

As a requirement for very detailed evaluations it would be important to ensure the indexing of all ingredients of a product. With this all products which contain, e. g., avocado could be retrieved, even if the word avocado does not occur in the name of the product. The “old” German codes will be included in the new classification system as parallel codes.

EFSA pointed out that only standardization and communication would guarantee getting reliably data and ensure correct data evaluation.

Participants were interested in having a database over the whole food chain, including feed-stuffs, too. LanguaL was first created for foods but the extension to feed is currently under development.

Some participants of the workshop noted that one must take care that a new system must be user-friendly.

Part IV: Development of a Memorandum, discussion

Discussion on the need and the options of an EU-wide harmonization

Development of a ‘Memorandum on the harmonization of data structures and classifications’

Moderation: **Christian Grugel**
BVL

The President of BVL, Dr. Grugel explained the results of the workshop and proposed to summarize them in a Memorandum taking into account the vote of all participants of the workshop.

Dr. Grugel noted that he would be happy getting a common consent from all participants. This would make work much easier and could drive the development to a successful end.

The agreed results were the following points (see also annex 4 - Memorandum):

1. The participants of the workshop understand the complexity of data management necessary for Member States` reporting to EU services on feed and food safety. This complexity sometimes causes difficulties which result among other things from non-standardized data structures.
2. The participants recommend strongly improving data management by introducing standardized structures, esp. harmonized classifications.
3. The participants take notice of the developments presented for a standardized data management and consider it as adaptable to the requirements of reporting within the EU.
4. The participants would like to recommend that the EU services initiate appropriate steps towards single standardization over the different areas of control within the EU and take account of the experience presented and the results worked out during this workshop.

Discussion and comments:

France confirmed the urgency of cooperation between the European countries. France is interested in getting all information in electronic form to present them to others. They needed to check definition of terms and reference lists before giving consent to them.

Dr. Grugel agreed with this opinion.

Hungary noted the urgency of a single comprehensive standardized list over the whole food chain in the EU and if possible also in non EU-countries.

EFSA said that it would be very important that the entry of information is easy for users.

DG SANCO invited interested people to take part in its respective working group.

WHO appreciated several difficulties in this area but hoped that an interaction with Codex would be possible because of the importance of global harmonisation.

EUROSTAT confirmed the urgency of harmonisation of terms like sampling strategies, controls and inspections to ensure comparability of data and of control activities within and between Member States.

21 June 2007

Marianne Blattmann-Greschniok