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European Standards Set Tone in Food Safety Area

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Report Highlights:

The European Committee for Standardization (CEN) is taking initiatives to speed up the development of European standards in the area of food safety, especially in the field of testing and sampling methods and on microbiological criteria. The widely announced EU legislation on general food law, food hygiene and food and feed controls, which form the cornerstone of the new comprehensive approach to food safety in the EU calls for the development of such standards. The full extent of the new legislation will only become obvious after some of these standards are in place. Exports of U.S. products may be negatively impacted if U.S. business practices are not covered by these standards. This would initially affect exports to Europe, but the effect may become more global as EU standards are exported worldwide.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
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[E3]

Why Are New EU Food Standards Needed?

European food standards support EU legislation. Over the past 15 years, European food standards have mainly been created for methods of sampling and analysis. Many of these standards relate directly to specific pieces of EU legislation, including legislation on contaminants, irradiation, materials in contact with food, traceability for fish, GMO's, feed analysis and others.

However, a new impetus to food standardization at European level was given by the EU's new comprehensive approach on food safety covering all sectors of the food and feed chain, which was triggered by a number of food safety scares in the 1990's.

Key elements in the new approach were the establishment of a framework regulation, the establishment of an independent body providing scientific advice to the legislators, the development of specific food and feed safety legislation including a major overhaul of the existing hygiene legislation, and the creation of a framework for harmonized food controls.

- Official Feed and Food Controls:

The new framework regulation for official food and feed controls carried out by the authorities of the European Member States ([European Parliament and Council Regulation 882/2004](#)) calls for the development of new EU standards. The regulation covers the entire range of activities covered by food and feed law and includes a common approach with regard to controls on imports of food and feed from third countries. Official controls will verify compliance of all food and feed (including pet food) with food and feed law, rules on animal health, animal welfare and certain aspects of plant health. The regulation will apply from January 1, 2006.

Explicit reference to the development of European standards was made in article 11 of this regulation:

Article 11.1

Sampling and analysis methods used in the context of official controls shall comply with relevant Community rules or, (a) if no such rules exist, with internationally recognized rules or protocols, for example those that the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) has accepted or those agreed in national legislation;

- Food Hygiene:

The new hygiene legislation directed at food business operators, will also generate the development of additional EU standards. The "hygiene package" of 5 laws adopted in April 2004 is intended to create a single, transparent hygiene policy applicable to all food and all food operators, together with effective instruments to manage food safety and potential future food crises, throughout the food chain. The new hygiene law will be applicable as of 1 January 2006.

General hygiene rules for the production of all food are laid down in [European Parliament and Council Regulation 853/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs \(corrigendum published in Official Journal L 226\)](#) commonly referred to as Hygiene 1. Based on this regulation, food business operators will have to adopt measures to comply with future microbiological criteria. These criteria are currently being developed as announced in the DG SANCO work plan for 2004 (see GAIN 24031). The proposal on the microbiological criteria is still in a draft stage, but reference analytical methods will have to be developed to support and measure the criteria. The actual setting of standards, however, will not be handled by DG SANCO.

Who sets Standards in Europe?

Within Europe, the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) has been active in the process of setting standards. So far, they have set 270 standards in the area of food. CEN is taking a pro-active approach in response to the opportunities offered by the new EU legislation. As part of their strategy on European Food Standardization, they organized an open day on July 8, 2004. The presentations of the speakers of this open day, including from CEN and SANCO representatives is available from the CEN website. (see <http://www.cenorm.be/cenorm/businessdomains/businessdomains/food/openday.asp>)

Through the organization of this open day, CEN essentially invites interested parties having a relationship with CEN to provide input for the development of a standard.

Who Can Provide Input in the CEN process?

'CEN' is a system of formal processes to produce standards, shared principally between 28 National Members, 8 Associate Members and two Counselors and the CEN Management Centre in Brussels. In Europe, CEN also has close relations with European trade and professional organizations, such as the EU Confederation of the Food and Drink Industries. These European organizations may have a liaison status with a CEN technical committee. CEN also has agreements with organizations such as the European Commission's Joint Research Centers who prepare specifications that are consequently processed through CEN as European Standards. Internationally, CEN has an agreement for technical cooperation with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). It is also important to note that CEN is seeking observer status in Codex, reflecting its objective to have European standards recognized internationally.

The full list of food standards which are currently being drafted by CEN is available on their website (<http://www.cenorm.be/cenorm/businessdomains/businessdomains/food/index.asp>). During the draft stage of a CEN norm, all interested parties can provide comments through the American Standards Institute (ANSI). The draft standards can be purchased from ANSI (<http://webstore.ansi.org/ansidocstore/default.asp>). Companies based in the EU can participate in the standard setting process by applying to the national standards organization. They can either participate actively as experts in CEN's Technical Committees or Working Groups, or join the standardization's "mirror committees" at member states level who monitor ongoing European standardization. Industries that are not represented in the EU are strongly encouraged to work with their importers on this issue.

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