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FINAL REPORT OF AN AUDIT

CARRIED OUT IN

ARGENTINA

FROM 30 MAY TO 11 JUNE 2012

IN ORDER TO EVALUATE THE OPERATION OF CONTROLS OVER THE PRODUCTION OF BOVINE MEAT AND MEAT OF RABBITS AND HARES FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION DESTINED FOR EXPORT TO THE EUROPEAN UNION, AS WELL AS CERTIFICATION PROCEDURES

Executive Summary

The report describes the outcome of an audit carried out by the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) in Argentina from 30 May to 11 June 2012. The objectives of the audit were to evaluate the operation of controls over the production of bovine meat and meat of rabbits and hares for human consumption destined for export to the European Union (EU), as well as certification procedures.

The Argentinian Competent Authorities (CAs) have partly addressed certain recommendations of previous FVO reports by training their staff, updating documented procedures and performing supervision of the activities of the other levels of the CA, but the supervision and documented control procedures remain unsatisfactory, thus reducing the effectiveness of official controls. In particular, in relation to listing of establishments for export to the EU, the re-evaluation performed was inefficient to address the relevant recommendation. Deficiencies identified by the FVO audit team in the establishments visited, and in two establishments in particular, indicate that the re-evaluation performed was incomplete and, in some cases, inadequate. The system in place failed to provide the guarantees that establishments are listed for export to the EU only if they meet the relevant EU requirements. Despite having updated the relevant instructions concerning the testing of carcasses for microbiological criteria, the official controls failed to identify that testing of carcasses and the methods used for certain analysis are still not in line with Regulation (EC) No 2073/2005. In addition, the testing of chemical parameters in water is still not fully in line with the requirements of Council Directive 98/83/EC.

Official controls in relation to ante- and post-mortem, foot-and-mouth (FMD) controls, traceability, separation of EU/non EU eligible animals and products, Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP)-based procedures were overall adequate. However, official controls were not always adequate and did not ensure that some establishments with serious structural and operational deficiencies were prevented from exporting meat to the EU.

The system for holding registration and cattle identification in place in Argentina provides sufficient guarantees to support the statements of Point II.2 of the model certificate in Part 2 of Annex II to Regulation (EU) No 206/2010. However, some weaknesses identified in the official controls over the registration and movement of bovine animals could undermine their reliability.

A general improvement has been noticed in the official controls over the production of hare meat although deficiencies were observed, mainly in relation to maintenance of establishments and operational hygiene.

Certification procedures in place, although generally adequate, do not always ensure that the rules and principles applied to the third country certifying officers offer guarantees at least equivalent to those laid down in Council Directive 96/93/EC, in particular regarding the attestation to support the issuing of the final certificate.

A number of recommendations have been made to the CA with a view to addressing the deficiencies identified during this audit.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

Abbreviation	Explanation
CA(s)	Competent Authority(ies)
CCA(s)	Central Competent Authority(ies)
DG(SANCO)	Health & Consumers Directorate General
EC	European Community(ies)
EU	European Union
FBO(s)	Food Business Operator(s)
FVO	Food and Veterinary Office
HACCP	Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points
Hygiene Package	Regulations (EC) No 852/2004, No 853/2004 and No 854/2004
SENASA	The National Service for Agriculture and Food Quality (<i>Servicio Nacional de Sanidad Y Calidad Agroalimentaria</i>)
<i>SAGPyA</i>	Argentinean Department of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Food (<i>Secretaria de Agricultura, Ganaderia Pecuaria y Alimentacion</i>)
Lagomorphs	Rabbits, hares and rodents (as defined in point 1.4 of Annex I to Regulation (EC) No 853/2004)
Small wild game	Wild game birds and lagomorphs (as defined in point 1.7 of Annex I to Regulation (EC) No 853/2004)
Wild <i>leporidae</i>	Wild rabbits and hares (as defined in Article 2 of Regulation (EC) No 119/2009)
FMD	Foot-and-Mouth Disease
RASFF	Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (Regulation (EC) No 178/2002)

1 INTRODUCTION

The audit took place in Argentina from 30 May to 11 June 2012 as part of the planned audit programme of the FVO. The audit team comprised four auditors from the FVO.

The FVO audit team was accompanied by representatives from the CCA, the National Service for Agriculture and Food Quality (*Servicio Nacional de Sanidad Y Calidad Agroalimentaria - SENASA*) from the Argentinean Department of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Food - *Secretaria de Agricultura, Ganaderia Pecuaria y Alimentacion, (SAGPyA)*.

The opening meeting was held on 30 May 2012 with the CCA in Buenos Aires. At this meeting the FVO audit team confirmed the objectives of, and itinerary for the audit, and additional information required for the satisfactory completion of the audit was requested.

2 OBJECTIVES

The objective of the audit was to evaluate the operation of controls over the production of bovine meat and meat of rabbits and hares for human consumption destined for export to the European Union (EU), as well as certification procedures with regard to:

- CA organisation and operation,
- official controls over food business operators' (FBO) compliance with general and specific rules on the hygiene of food of animal origin,
- the correct implementation of the chain of certification, and
- the follow-up actions taken by the CA in response to recommendations relevant to the scope of this audit and of reports DG(SANCO)/2010-8504 (hereafter referred to as report 2010-8504), DG(SANCO)/2011-6143 (hereafter referred to as report 2011-6143) and DG(SANCO)/2009-8227 (hereafter referred to as report 2009-8227).

In particular, controls over meat of bovine animals, rabbits and hares intended for human consumption in the framework of Regulations (EC) No 178/2002, No 852/2004, No 853/2004, No 854/2004, No 119/2009 and No 206/2010 were subject to this evaluation. In pursuit of these objectives, the audit itinerary included the following:

COMPETENT AUTHORITIES			Comments
Competent Authorities	Central	√	Opening and closing meetings at the SENASA Headquarters. Visit to the central office responsible for certification. Visit to the central office responsible for the approval of exporting facilities. Representatives from the relevant Regional and Local CAs were met in the establishments and holdings visited.
	Regional		
	Local		
FOOD PRODUCTION / PROCESSING / DISTRIBUTION – ACTIVITIES			
Slaughterhouses		6	5 slaughterhouses for bovine animals with annexed

COMPETENT AUTHORITIES		Comments
		cutting plant and cold store. One of these was not operational at the time of the visit. 1 slaughterhouse for farmed rabbits with annexed cutting plant and cold store, also approved as a game handling establishment. At the time of the visit this establishment was operating only for the processing of wild hare.
Cutting premises	3	Independent cutting plants with annexed cold stores. One of these was not operational at the time of the visit.
Cold stores	2	Independent cold stores.
Game handling establishments	3	Processing meat from wild <i>leporidae</i> .
Rabbit holdings	1	Providing animals to the slaughterhouse visited.
Game collection centres	2	Providing hares to game handling establishments.

3 LEGAL BASIS

The audit was carried out under the general provisions of EU legislation and, in particular Article 46 of Regulation (EC) No 882/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council on official controls performed to ensure the verification of compliance with feed and food law, animal health and animal welfare rules.

N.B. Full EU legal references are provided in Annex 1. Legal acts quoted in this report refer, where applicable, to the latest amended version.

4 BACKGROUND

The animal health status of Argentina has not changed since the previous FVO audit with the same subject (report 2010-8504). Argentina is a member of the World organisation of Animal Health (OIE) and is recognised by the OIE as free of FMD with vaccination. EU Member States are authorised to import bovine meat from the Argentinian territories listed in Annex II part 1 to Regulation (EC) No 206/2010 if the requirements of Model “BOV” certificate of part 2 of Annex II to the same Regulation are satisfied.

The animal health situation regarding lagomorphs (farmed rabbits and wild hares) remains as described in report 2009-8227. The SENASA confirmed that the animal health situation is favourable. Viral Haemorrhagic disease, mixomatosis and turalaemia, all notifiable in Argentina, have not been reported. EU Member States are authorised to import meat of farmed rabbits and wild *leporidae* from the whole Argentinean territory if the requirements of Model certificates “RM” and “WL” certificates respectively, of Annex II to Regulation (EC) No 119/2009 are satisfied.

The SENASA provided the following statistics concerning the export of fresh meat from bovine and lagomorphs to the EU (metric tonnes):

Commodities	2010	2011
Bovine fresh meat		
chilled	42 059	39 464
frozen	7 203	6 462
Farmed rabbit fresh meat	150	102
Wild <i>leporidae</i> fresh meat	3 225	2 469

The previous audit concerning the safety of food of animal origin in Argentina was carried out from 29 March to 8 April 2011 (fresh ovine meat, horse meat and casings), the results of which are described in report 2011-6143. Report 2010-8504 describes the results of an audit concerning in particular the production of bovine and equine meat and meat products, and report 2009-8227 describes the results of an audit concerning in particular the production of fresh meat of farmed game (rabbits) and wild game (hares).

The above reports are accessible at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fvo/ir_search_en.cfm

The action plans received from the Argentinian authorities in response to all of the above reports recommendations provided satisfactory guarantees.

5 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 LEGISLATION AND COMPETENT AUTHORITIES

5.1.1 Legal basis

Article 46.1 of Regulation (EC) No 882/2004 stipulates that official controls by Commission experts in third countries shall verify compliance or equivalence of third country legislation and systems with EU feed and food law, and EU animal health legislation. These controls shall have particular regard to points (a) to (e) and (g) of the aforementioned Article.

5.1.2 Findings

5.1.2.1 Legislation

No major changes have been introduced in Argentinean legislation since the last audits on the same subjects.

5.1.2.2 Competent Authorities

5.1.2.2.1 Organisation of Competent Authorities

The organisation of the SENASA remains as described in report 2011-6143. As indicated in the CA response to recommendation No 1 of report 2011-6143, the annual re-evaluation of establishments is now delegated to the Regional level, although the CCA still performs some inspections in co-operation with the Regional level. See also section 5.3 of this report for further details on the re-

evaluation of establishments.

5.1.2.2.2 Competent Authorities' powers, independence and authority for enforcement

Powers, independence and authority for enforcement remain as described in report 2011-6143.

5.1.2.2.3 Supervision

The system for supervision remains as described in report 2011-6143. In response to recommendation No 3 of report 2011-6143 to improve supervision, the CCA indicated that training would be provided (see section 5.1.2.2.4 of this report). In addition, in response to recommendation No 1 of report 2011-6143, the CCA indicated that random verification of the re-validation activities carried out by the Regional CA would be implemented.

Observations:

- In most establishments visited neither the re-evaluation reports carried out by the Regional and Central CA nor the monthly reports from the Regional Supervisors pointed out the deficiencies noticed by the FVO audit team. Little evidence of follow-up of non-compliances was present.
- The FVO audit team saw only one report of a supervisory inspection carried out by the central level in one establishment visited. This report highlighted several deficiencies of this establishment, which were not reported in the monthly reports from the Regional Supervisor.

5.1.2.2.4 Training of staff in the performance of official controls

In response to recommendation No 1 of report 2009-8227 concerning correction of the deficiencies in the establishments visited, and recommendation No 3 of the same report to ensure the reliability of the statements contained in the certificate of Annex II to Regulation (EC) No 119/2009, the CA indicated that training had been provided to the official veterinarians (OVs) in October 2009. This training covered amongst other issues certification, diseases, ante- and post-mortem inspections of farmed lagomorphs and wild game.

In response to recommendation No 1 of report 2011-6143 concerning microbiological testing of carcasses (repeated from recommendation No 2 of report 2010-8504) and to recommendation No 3 of report 2011-6143 to improve supervision, the CCA stated that training had been provided in one out of seven regions.

Observations:

- Evidence and material of the 2009 training on lagomorphs was provided. Additional specific training on lagomorphs was planned in 2010 but did not take place.
- The more general training planned in response to the recommendations of reports 2011-6143 and 2010-8504 is still not complete. The CCA stated that this training should be completed by the end of 2012.
- Although the SENASA have issued instructions for the re-evaluation of the establishments

(see section 5.1.2.2.6 of this report), the officials responsible for the re-evaluation of the establishments did not receive specific training on how to use the check-lists and how to evaluate the findings.

- The list of the training courses attended by the OVs and auxiliaries, were assessed by the FVO audit team in the establishments visited. It showed that training courses had been attended every year.

5.1.2.2.5 Organisation of control systems

The organisation of control systems in Argentina remains as described in previous FVO reports.

5.1.2.2.6 Documented control procedures

In response to recommendation No 1 of report 2009-8227 concerning the correction of deficiencies in the game handling establishments, the SENASA indicated that the relevant instruction (Circular No 3844-A) was updated.

Observations:

- Circular 3844-A has been replaced by Circular No 3904 of 31.03.2010. The new instruction requires that the date and time of ending of the hunt and date and time of arrival at the collection centre have to be recorded. However, this information is insufficient to guarantee the statement of point II.2.1(b) of the certificate for wild *leporidae* laid down in Annex II to Regulation (EC) No 119/2009 that no more than 12 hours have passed from killing to refrigeration.
- The same instruction requires an OV to perform regular inspections during the seasonal activities. Apart from the pre-operational visit performed by the Regional Supervisors, at the collection centres visited, there were no records of regular inspections during the operational season.
- Other guidance and instructions have been issued by the SENASA, such as: a Manual of post mortem inspection for lagomorphs, provided to the participants of the training in 2009 and available on line and to the staff operating in the processing plants. It also includes a description of diseases of hares and of domestic rabbits; a Manual for diagnosis of diseases of poultry and lagomorphs in the establishments of primary production; a Manual for animal welfare in slaughter plants for poultry and lagomorphs.

As part of their response to recommendation No 1 of report 2011-6143 (repeated from recommendation No 1 of report 2010-8504) and recommendation No 2 of report 2011-6143, concerning the re-evaluation of establishments, the SENASA issued and reviewed instructions for their staff. Note No 40 of 6 September 2010 has been replaced respectively by Circulars No 3942 of 30 May 2011 and No 3962 of 16 December 2011. The SENASA stated that these instructions are also applicable for the sectors of meat and meat products and wild game. Further details are provided in section 5.3 of this report.

Observations:

- The recent instructions request the SENASA staff to perform the re-evaluation of EU

approved establishments in order to evaluate compliance with relevant EU requirements and with the SENASA resolution No 108/2010. The same instructions are applicable for the approval of establishments for export to the EU. A guidance note on the evaluation is attached to these instructions. The instructions contain the following chapters: general information on the approved establishment, building and facilities, operational hygiene, processing of products, processing of products for pet food and feed, quality of water, maintenance and calibration of equipment, training of FBO staff, pest control, documentation, controls and record keeping and animal welfare.

- The check-lists used for the re-evaluation of the establishments do not cover all of the relevant EU requirements for export. Microbiological criteria of fresh meat and meat products, controls of procedures based on HACCP principles, controls on water quality in line with the microbiological and physical-chemical parameters as laid down in Council Directive 98/83/EC, controls on traceability systems in place, *Trichinella* testing (if applicable), were not included.
- Although Regulation (EC) No 206/2010 is included amongst the references of the relevant EU legislation, the EU legislation concerning export requirements for other commodities such as meat products, minced meat, meat preparations and lagomorphs' meat were not included.

5.1.2.2.7 *Official controls on imports*

Procedures for official controls on imports are described in report 2011-6143. In the establishments visited meat and/or animals within the scope of this audit from other countries were not imported.

5.1.3 *Conclusions*

The Argentinean CAs are well defined and are in general able to ensure an official control system that altogether provides equivalent measures to those in EU legislation. The Argentinean CAs have partly addressed certain recommendations of previous FVO reports by training their staff, updating documented procedures and performing supervision of the activities of the other levels of the CA but the supervision and documented control procedures remain unsatisfactory, thus reducing the effectiveness of official controls. Shortcomings were observed during the re-evaluation process.

In addition, although the CA have modified the records to be kept at game collection centres, this is insufficient and the statement of point II.2.1(b) of the certificate for wild *leporidae* (Annex II to Regulation (EC) No 119/2009) that no more than 12 hours have passed from killing to refrigeration, cannot be guaranteed.

5.2 **HOLDING REGISTRATION AND ANIMAL IDENTIFICATION**

5.2.1 *Legal Requirements*

The veterinary certification requirements for the introduction into the EU of fresh meat are laid down in Regulation (EU) No 206/2010. the Regulation, sets out the animal health requirements to be met, including for bovine animals the requirement for the CA to have system(s) in place for holding registration and animal identification.

5.2.2 Findings

The system for holding registration and animal identification in Argentina remains as described in report 2010-8504.

Observations:

- Shortcomings were noticed by the FVO audit team in the registration and identification of EU eligible bovine animals in one feedlot and in one holding visited. 12 animals out of 36 checked were not recorded in the SENASA database as being present in the feedlot and all 12 were recorded in the database as already slaughtered for the domestic market. Furthermore, 2 out of 40 other animals checked were recorded as still present at the previous holding. This feedlot had not sent any bovine animal for EU slaughter in 2011 and 2012. In the other holding visited two EU eligible animals were not recorded in the SENASA database.
- The operator of the feedlot did not comply with its obligation to notify the district veterinary office of the arrival of the animals and to complete the replacement ear-tag cards. Neither the FBO nor the OV had checked the correct identification of the animals at the time of loading and unloading.

5.2.3 Conclusions

The system for holding registration and cattle identification in place in Argentina can provide sufficient guarantees to support the statements of Point II.2 of the model certificate in Part 2 of Annex II to Regulation (EU) No 206/2010. However, weaknesses were identified in the official controls over the registration and movements of bovine animals, which questions the reliability of the system.

5.3 LISTING OF ESTABLISHMENTS

5.3.1 Legal requirements

Article 12 of Regulation (EC) No 854/2004 requires that products of animal origin may be imported into the EU only if they have been dispatched from, and obtained or prepared in, establishments that appear on lists drawn up, kept up-to-date and communicated to the Commission.

5.3.2 Findings

In response to recommendation No 1 of report 2011-6143 (repeated from recommendation No 1 of report 2010-8504) and No 2 of report 2011-6143, concerning listing of establishments for export to the EU, the CCA indicated that a new system for the verification of the establishments compliant with Article 12 of Regulation (EC) No 854/2004 before its listing was put in place (Resolution 108/2010). In addition, the Regional CAs were charged with re-evaluating all establishments (Note AUE 22/2011).

In an update to their follow-up action, on 21 May 2012, the SENASA informed the FVO that the inspection of 76 establishments listed for export of fresh meat of domestic ungulates had been carried out. Moreover, eight establishments processing lagomorphs and eleven poultry establishments had also been re-evaluated. A new re-evaluation from the SENASA will be

scheduled and executed during the period 2012/2013, which shall include all establishments listed for export to the EU.

The SENASA informed the FVO audit team that a similar re-evaluation of establishments took place in the dairy sector, for which Service order No 38/2010 has been issued. The SENASA informed the FVO audit team that the review in the dairy sector resulted in the de-listing of 14 establishments. Eight establishments are listed of which two are active by exporting dairy products to the EU. The SENASA did not review the supply of raw material in the six establishments as no exports take place.

The FVO audit team reviewed all reports available for the listed establishments of ungulates and eight establishments processing lagomorphs.

Observations:

- The SENASA could not demonstrate that all establishments listed for export to the EU of fresh meat of domestic ungulates (84 establishments at the time of this audit) had been re-evaluated. Reports were not available for six establishments.
- The SENASA had no overview on the number of establishments which had been de-listed or suspended for export certification as a result of their re-evaluation.
- The SENASA at central level had no information of any corrective actions to the observations made in the reports, where applicable.
- Neither the reports nor the guidance note provide information on the significance of the findings, i.e. which finding should lead to a suspension of certification or which one should lead to de-listing.
- Only one re-evaluation report concluded that the relevant establishment did not meet the EU requirements. In addition this establishment has not exported since 2007. No action had been taken at central level to obtain information if the establishment had remedied the non-compliances, neither had de-listing been initiated.
- In December 2011 the SENASA requested the de-listing of another establishment for which the report indicated non-compliances although none of these was indicated as significant for de-listing. The establishment was de-listed due to lack of export activities since 2010.
- For another establishment for which the SENASA requested de-listing of one activity, the documentation available contained conflicting information: on the one hand the Regional CA requested the Central SENASA to de-list and on the other hand the Regional CA had informed the Central SENASA that the establishment was compliant. In the meanwhile the de-listing procedure continued.
- Several re-evaluation reports with conclusions not supported by findings, or with recommendations without supporting findings, were seen.
- None of the SENASA requests for de-listing by the Commission Services of April and May 2012 concerning nine ungulate establishments was based on the results of the re-evaluation of the establishments. All were de-listed for commercial reasons.

- As described in section 5.1.2.2.6 of this report, the re-evaluation of establishments did not cover all the relevant EU requirements for export. In addition, not all activities for which the establishments were approved were included in the reports, e.g. cold store activity was missing in several cases. In a few cases, the activities were not mentioned.
- In one establishment visited by the FVO audit team, where the activities had stopped since November 2011, the re-evaluation report and the supervisory reports stated that the establishment continued to be in compliance with the EU requirements. However, the overhead structure and rails were rusty and with flaking paint. There were several cracks in the floors and in the walls, in several places there was leakage of water or water was not properly conducted. There was a leakage of ammoniac in the plate freezers and the floors and ceilings of the offal rooms were not smooth and were not easy to clean.
- In one cold store visited, one room which was not in compliance with the relevant EU requirements concerning facilities and equipment was excluded by the FBO for the storage of EU eligible products. However, this was not reflected in the re-evaluation report and in the supervisory reports, neither was it indicated in the blue-print of the establishment.
- Another cold store visited had been proposed by the SENASA for listing by the Commission Services in January 2011. The SENASA had granted an approval for export to the EU in March 2011, i.e. two months after the request to the Commission Services. The inspection report prior to approval was not available. In addition, the CA stated that this cold store only stored packed meat for third parties. However, this was not indicated in the approval document or in the EU list.

5.3.3 *Conclusions*

The actions taken by the CCA in response to the recommendations No 1 (repeated from report 2010-8504) and 2 of report 2011-6143, concerning listing of establishments for export to the EU, failed to address these recommendation. Several deficiencies identified by the FVO audit team in the establishments visited indicate that the re-evaluation performed was inefficient. The system in place failed to provide the guarantees requested in Article 12(2)(a) of Regulation (EC) No 854/2004 that establishments are listed for export to the EU only if they meet the relevant EU requirements and, in particular, those of Regulation (EC) No 853/2004.

5.4 OFFICIAL CONTROLS AT ESTABLISHMENT LEVEL

5.4.1 *Legal requirements*

Article 12 of Regulation (EC) No 854/2004 lays down that the CA of a third country of origin has to guarantee that establishments placed on the list of establishments from which imports of specified products of animal origin to the EU are permitted, together with any establishments handling raw material of animal origin used in the manufacture of the products of animal origin concerned, complies with relevant EU requirements, in particular those of Regulation (EC) No 853/2004, or with requirements that were determined to be equivalent. It also lays down that an official inspection service supervises the establishments and has real powers to stop the establishments from exporting to the EU in the event that the establishments fail to meet the relevant requirements.

The animal and public health and veterinary certification requirements for the introduction into the EU of products of animal origin intended for human consumption are laid down in the product

specific Commission Regulations covered by the scope of the audit, i.e. Regulations (EC) No 119/2009 and No 206/2010.

5.4.2 Findings

5.4.2.1 Ante-mortem inspection

Results of ante-mortem inspections were well documented. Records showed that animals had been inspected by the OV shortly after arrival and again before slaughter. Findings regarding animal health were recorded. The ante-mortem inspection of bovine animals included the check of a minimum 10% of the animals' ear tags.

The records of the ante-mortem inspections showed that the animals for which the ear tags did not match with the movement documents, had been diverted to the domestic market. These animals had been identified by the FBO whilst carrying out their 100% check and/or detected during the ante-mortem inspection by the OV.

5.4.2.2 Post-mortem inspection

The post-mortem inspections observed in the bovine slaughterhouses visited were carried out satisfactorily. Records were properly kept. The post-mortem inspection included the controls of feet and mouth. However, in one establishment the dewclaws were not included in the inspection.

Post-mortem inspection of hares was generally satisfactory, with the exception of one establishment where the red offal was not inspected due to the speed of the line.

5.4.2.3 General and specific hygiene

In response to recommendation No 1 of report 2009-8227 to correct deficiencies in the establishments, and in response to recommendation No 3 of report 2011-6143 to improve supervision and official controls carried out at establishment level to better detect deficiencies in relation to general and specific hygiene requirements, the SENASA stated that training courses had been organised for officials and the relevant guidance updated.

Observations

- In all establishments visited reports of the official controls carried out by all levels of the CA were available. Where reports contained observations and recommendations for their correction, a deadline was not imposed.
- In one game handling establishment there were several deficiencies concerning the general state of maintenance of the infrastructure and in particular of the freezer, walls, floors, ceiling; presence of rust and condensation; flaking paint; accumulation of dirt on the overhead structures; inadequate layout (the freezer for storage of EU meat could be reached only through the animal by products storage); insufficient space in the working area; presence of gaps under the external doors. The operational hygiene was insufficient due to water temperature of the sterilisers lower than 82°C; inadequate sterilisation of the wipers used to remove the excess of water and blood from the tables; in-rolling of the skin at de-hiding; lack of cleaning and disinfection of the knife used to remove the perianal area. The monthly reports from the Regional CA contained some observations regarding the state of

maintenance, the non-pest proof doors, cross contamination during de-hiding. The report of the supervisory inspection performed by the central level four weeks before the FVO visit contained many more observations, which were generally in line with those made by the FVO audit team. Nevertheless the corrective actions taken by the FBO were insufficient.

- In the other two game handling establishments visited the layout, state of maintenance and of cleanliness were generally adequate. However, some deficiencies were noticed concerning the state of maintenance (some flaking paint, damaged parts of floor, walls and ceilings), the layout and the operational hygiene at de-hiding (in-rolling of the skin). In one of these two establishments the meat was above the required 4°C. Gaps under external doors were also noticed in both establishments. Most of these observations had not been detected by the Regional CA in their monthly reports nor by the central level of the SENASA in their supervisory reports.
- Concerning bovine meat establishments, the layout, state of maintenance, structures and equipment were generally adequate. Implementation of general and specific hygiene requirements was generally acceptable in most establishments visited. However, some deficiencies were identified regarding the layout, the structure, the state of maintenance and cleaning, such as non-smooth surfaces of some parts of floors, some corroded overhead structures, leakage of water and presence of dirt on ventilators. Some cold store rooms and chillers were insufficiently maintained. The sanitary facilities in three establishments were leaking.
- Several deficiencies concerning operational hygiene in the bovine meat establishments were observed. In particular, washing of carcasses was performed in a way that increases the risk of cross contamination: in two slaughterhouses the perianal area of the animals was washed with a hose immediately after stunning thus increasing the risk of cross-contamination from the dirty water dripping down on the carcass during de-hiding.
- In one cattle slaughterhouse serious maintenance deficiencies were identified in particular in the slaughter area. Huge cracks in the ceiling, walls, floors and junctions were present, with water pooling in some floor cracks. Flaking paint on the ceiling as well as on the overhead rails and structures were noticed. There were gaps in the mosquito net protecting the open windows. Several water leakages were also noticed and waste water was not properly ducted. Some equipment was corroded and insufficiently cleaned. The de-hiding procedure was inadequate and was a potential source of cross contamination at several places on the line. The most recent inspection reports from the Regional Supervisor and from the OV did not mention the non-compliances seen by the FVO audit team in the slaughter area.

5.4.2.4 Training for hunters

Training for hunters is organised by the association of producers and processors of wild game and by the FBO of game meat establishments, and lectures are given by veterinarians. The SENASA is not directly involved in the organisation of the training for hunters, and generally its efficiency is not assessed.

In response to recommendation No 2 of report 2009-8227 to ensure that training is provided before the start of the hunting season to all hunters involved, the SENASA included this requirement in their updated instruction Circular 3844-A.

Observations:

- In one district visited the OV of one game meat establishment had attended one of the training courses in 2012 and one OV had assessed the knowledge of some hunters after the training.
- The FVO audit team reviewed the material of some training organised in 2010 and 2012 for the hunters in some districts and noticed that it included the subjects listed in Annex III, Section IV, chapter I, point 4 to Regulation (EC) No 853/2004. However, the duration varied between one hour and one morning session, which raise doubts about its efficiency.
- In all game handling establishments and game collection centres copies of the training certificates for hunters and for the person responsible for the collection centres were available and were up to date.

5.4.2.5 HACCP-based systems

HACCP-based procedures were in place in all establishments visited.

Observations:

- The FBO own-checks were generally satisfactory and properly documented.
- In one cutting plant the HACCP-based procedures were not updated and the plan was not validated. The FVO audit team identified that the monitoring of the critical control points and the corrective actions were not in line with the written procedures.
- In one establishment, the FBO could not demonstrate the basis on which the expiring date of the meat produced was determined.
- Where evaluated, the establishments visited had procedures in place to test water for microbiological and physical-chemical parameters. Microbiological parameters, in line with the requirements of Council Directive 98/83/EC, were tested fortnightly. Physical and chemical parameters were tested every six months. However, not all the chemical parameters listed in this Directive were monitored.
- In all establishments visited water was chlorinated and daily tests on the free chlorine content were performed and recorded. In one establishment the testing kits used had expired since 2009.
- In addition to the FBO sampling, the SENASA had its own programme in place to control the quality of water in establishments.

5.4.2.6 Microbiological testing

In response to recommendation No 1 of report 2011-6143 (repeated from recommendation No 2 of report 2010-8504) to ensure that microbiological testing of carcasses is carried out in line with Regulation (EC) No 2073/2005, the CCA amended and updated the relevant instruction (Annex 2 of Circular 3579) and issued a memorandum to enforce the provisions of Regulation (EC) No 2073/2005.

Observations:

- Despite the fact that the SENASA had urged the carrying out of microbiological sampling in line with Regulation (EC) No 2073/2005, in three out of five bovine slaughterhouses visited the sampling procedures of carcasses were based on the repealed Commission Decision 2001/471/EC, i.e. from four defined areas instead of from those most likely contaminated.
- In one slaughterhouse visited, the results of the microbiological sampling of beef carcasses and their interpretation were not in line with the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 2073/2005. The results for the enterobacteriaceae and for the Aerobic Mesophylic Count were expressed in CFU/400 cm² rather than CFU/cm². In addition the logarithm was wrongly calculated. As a consequence the results could not be taken into account.
- In another slaughterhouse, the FBO did not take corrective action when the trend analysis showed an increase in the results for the microbiological criteria of the carcass sampling. The FBO stated that corrective action would be taken only when the results exceed the maximum limits.
- The methods used for Aerobic Mesophylic Count and for enterobacteriaceae were not in line with those of Regulation (EC) No 2073/2005. Neither the FBO nor the SENASA could demonstrate their equivalence, except in one establishment.
- The official controls performed by the central and the regional levels of the SENASA had not identified the non-compliances related the microbiological sampling.
- Sampling of hare meat for microbiological testing was performed both by the FBO and the CA on the basis of Service Order 03/2009. The tests include total Aerobic Mesophilic Count, enterobacteriaceae and *Salmonella* sp. The SENASA is drafting a Resolution to set the relevant limits.

5.4.2.7 Separation of EU/non EU eligible animals and products

In all establishments visited procedures were in place to ensure separation of EU and non-EU eligible animals and products.

Observations:

- In the bovine holdings visited, animals were kept in separated pens, with a clear sign of their destination.
- The slaughterhouses had separated lairages and slaughtering of EU and non-EU animals was separated in time.
- Separation of production and stored meat was in general adequate in the establishments visited.

5.4.2.8 FMD controls

In all slaughterhouses visited records were available on the controls made by the FBO and by the CA on the duration of the maturation and temperature of the chillers, and on the pH controls of the

meat at the end of the process. The records showed that in the case of non-conformities carcasses were excluded from EU production.

5.4.2.9 Traceability, identification marking and labelling

In all the establishments visited traceability systems were in place and records were properly kept. Health marking was generally correctly applied.

Observations:

- No discrepancies were identified during the traceability exercises carried out by the FVO audit team, with the following exceptions in two cold stores.
- In one cold store, the slaughter dates of the meat exported could not be ascertained.
- In another cold store, the traceability system was not comprehensive enough to ensure a link between the incoming certificate and the consignment. The OV could not provide the certificates for some of the products present in the cold store. In addition, for three selected cartons of beef, the reference to the group of animals of origin on the box label did not correspond with those of the individually packed beef pieces. The FBO stated that this error had been remedied six weeks earlier. The SENASA had not identified this error during official controls.
- No shortcomings were noticed concerning labelling, except in one game handling establishment where the lot number was unreadable on some packed meat.

5.4.2.10 Animal welfare at the time of slaughter or killing

Handling and stunning of bovine animals was satisfactory in all the slaughterhouses visited, but one. In this establishment restraining was inadequate, resulting in poor stunning which had to be repeated on several animals.

5.4.2.11 Actions in case of non-compliance

The CA actions in the case of non-compliance were weak. Little evidence was presented of the verification by the CA on the corrective actions taken by the FBO. Non-compliances which were not rectified were repeated in the next reports.

There was little evidence of follow-up action of the SENASA's observations and recommendations made in the SENASA re-evaluation reports.

5.4.2.12 Documentation of official controls

In all cases documentation of the official controls carried out was available. A copy of the report is provided to the FBO. Nevertheless, as described in section 5.4, the evaluation of the FVO audit team in the establishments visited differed in some cases from the results of the CA official controls, in that certain deficiencies had not been noticed or reported.

5.4.3 Conclusions

Official controls in relation to ante- and post-mortem, FMD controls, traceability, separation of EU/non EU eligible animals and products and HACCP-based procedures were overall adequate. However, official controls were not always adequate and did not ensure that establishments with serious structural and operational deficiencies were prevented from exporting meat to the EU.

Despite having updated the relevant instructions concerning testing of carcasses for microbiological criteria in response to the recommendations of reports 2011-6143 and 2010-8504, the official controls failed to identify that testing of carcasses and the methods used for certain analysis were not in line with Regulation (EC) No 2073/2005.

In addition, testing of chemical parameters in water is not fully in line with the requirements of Council Directive 98/83/EC.

5.5 OFFICIAL CERTIFICATION

5.5.1 Legal requirements

Council Directive 96/93/EC states that during inspections or audits the Commission shall ensure that the rules and principles applied by the third country certifying officers offer guarantees at least equivalent to those laid down in this Directive.

The specific animal health, public health and veterinary certification requirements for the introduction into the EU of products of animal origin intended for human consumption, are laid down in the product specific Commission Regulations.

5.5.2 Findings

The procedures for certification for export to the EU remains as described in previous reports. The certificates for export are issued at the SENASA central level, based on pre-certificates issued at the establishments of origin.

In response to recommendation No 3 of report 2009-8227, in order to continue the ongoing efforts to provide guarantees that the control system can ensure the reliability of the statements of the certification for wild game, the SENASA organised training for their officials.

Observations:

- In general, all the certificates and pre-certificates reviewed by the FVO audit team were properly supported by the relevant documentation, allowing the tracing back to the holding of origin for the rabbits and to animals for the bovine meat. For hare meat the supporting documentation allowing the tracing back to the hunting area and the date of killing. Nevertheless, certain deficiencies were noticed, as detailed below.
- Certificates, in particular for consignments sent by ship, were issued after their departure. One animal health attestation referring to three consignments was signed at the establishment of origin 12 days after the consignment had been loaded for export. In another case, the certificate for a consignment which had been dispatched one week earlier had not yet been signed.

- In a few certificates, point II.2.1 indicating the code of the territory “AR-1”, could not be supported by the pre-certificates, where this had not been filled in.
- A few certificates in the German language indicated “minced meat” instead of “boneless meat”. The SENASA stated that this error is being corrected.
- In one cold store the traceability system was based on the production date and the slaughter date mentioned in the pre-certificate could not be ascertained.
- At one establishment the OV had signed pre-certificates indicating that the meat concerned was “Hilton¹”, although this OV was not fully aware of the “Hilton” requirements.
- In one cutting plant a number of pre-certificates indicated the dates of freezing although the consignments were of chilled meat intended to be frozen in another establishment.
- The statement in point of point II.2.1(b) of the certificate for wild *leporidae* laid down in Annex II to Regulation (EC) No 119/2009 that no more than 12 hours have passed from killing to refrigeration of *leporidae* cannot be properly supported (see also section 5.2.2.8 of this report).
- The wrong template had been used for two out of five pre-certificates issued for consignments of rabbit meat sent to the EU in 2011 and 2012, i.e. the model certificate WL (meat of wild *leporidae*) instead of RM (meat of farmed rabbits) of Annex II to Regulation (EC) No 119/2009. Nevertheless, the correct template was used for the certificates issued at central level.
- One consignment of bovine meat, rejected at an EU Border Inspection Post, returned to Argentina. However, the original certificate as well as the two replacement certificates issued afterwards had not been returned. The original certificate has been replaced by an EU transit certificate for beef and a certificate for another export market.

5.5.3 Conclusions

Certification procedures in place, although generally adequate, do not always ensure that the rules and principles applied to the third country certifying officers offer guarantees at least equivalent to those laid down in Council Directive 96/93/EC, in particular regarding the attestation to support the issuing of the final certificate.

5.6 FOLLOW-UP OF RASFF NOTIFICATIONS AND ALERTS

The FVO audit team followed-up on one Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) notification and one RASFF alert recently issued concerning the same establishment.

Regarding the first notification concerning the high amount of *E. coli* in beef meat, the SENASA only forwarded the notification to the FBO. The FBO evaluated their procedures and proposed actions to the SENASA, which included decreasing the slaughter line speed and sampling the stock with the same production dates for microbiological testing. The SENASA did not evaluate the FBO's proposal and did not carry out any evaluation on the spot.

¹ The Hilton Quota is the informal name of the Tariff Quota regulated by the Commission Regulation (EC) No 936/97 of 27 May 1997

The SENASA stated that they were not yet aware of the second notification regarding Shigatoxin-producing *E. coli* found in beef meat.

The FVO audit team identified significant deficiencies regarding the de-hiding and non-maintenance of the facilities at this point of the slaughter line, as described in section 5.4.2.3. Neither of these had been identified by the SENASA or the FBO. The FVO audit team requested the SENASA to carry out corrective action regarding this establishment in order to rectify the deficiencies identified. The SENASA suspended the certification amongst other actions.

6 OVERALL CONCLUSION

The Argentinean CAs have partly addressed recommendations relevant to the scope of this audit of previous FVO reports by training their staff, updating documented procedures and performing supervision of the activities of the other levels of the CA. However, given the weaknesses observed in the official controls, these actions were not effective. In particular, in relation to listing of establishments for export to the EU, the re-evaluation performed was inefficient to address the relevant recommendation. Deficiencies identified by the FVO audit team in the establishments visited, and in two establishments in particular, indicate that the re-evaluation performed was incomplete and in some cases inadequate. The system in place failed to provide the guarantees that establishments are listed for export to the EU only if they meet the relevant EU requirements.

Despite having updated the relevant instructions concerning testing of carcasses for microbiological criteria, the official controls failed to identify that the testing of carcasses and the methods used for certain analysis are still not in line with Regulation (EC) No 2073/2005. In addition, that testing of chemical parameters in water is still not fully in line with the requirements of Council Directive 98/83/EC.

Official controls in relation to ante- and post-mortem, FMD controls, traceability, separation of EU/non EU eligible animals and products, HACCP-based procedures were overall adequate. However, official controls were not always adequate and did not ensure that some establishments with serious structural and operational deficiencies were prevented from exporting meat to the EU.

The system for holding registration and cattle identification in place in Argentina can provide sufficient guarantees to support the statements of Point II.2 of the model certificate in Part 2 of Annex II to Regulation (EU) No 206/2010. However, weaknesses identified in the official controls over the registration and movement of bovine animals undermine their reliability.

A general improvement has been noticed in the official controls over the production of hare meat although deficiencies were observed, mainly in relation to maintenance of establishments and operational hygiene.

Certification procedures in place, although generally adequate, do not always ensure that the rules and principles applied to the third country certifying officers offer guarantees at least equivalent to those laid down in Council Directive 96/93/EC, in particular regarding the attestation to support the issuing of the final certificate.

7 CLOSING MEETING

A closing meeting was held on 11 June 2012 with the CCA, the SENASA. At this meeting the FVO audit team presented the findings and preliminary conclusions of the audit and advised the CCA of the relevant time limits for production of the report and their response.

The representatives of the CCA acknowledged the findings and conclusions presented by the FVO audit team. In addition, information on actions already taken and planned, in order to address particular findings in the establishments visited, was provided. In particular, the SENASA provided an action plan for the two establishments where serious deficiencies were identified, including the suspension of the cattle slaughterhouse from certification to the EU. The SENASA also committed to perform a thorough identification check of all the animals present in the feed lot visited, which had been in the meantime suspended from EU export.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

An action plan, describing the action(s) taken or planned in response to the recommendations of this report and setting out a timetable to correct the deficiencies found, should be presented to the Commission within 25 working days of receipt of the report.

Nº.	Recommendation
1.	To improve the official control system to guarantee that the products of animal origin exported to the EU are only dispatched from, and obtained or prepared in, establishments that meet the relevant EU requirements, as laid down in Article 12(2)(a) of Regulation (EC) No 854/2004.
2.	To review all EU listed establishments in the fresh meat sector in light of the outcome of this audit and to ensure that currently listed establishments meet all the relevant EU requirements, as laid down in Article 12(2)(a) of Regulation (EC) No 854/2004.
3.	To ensure that microbiological testing of carcasses is performed in line with the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 2073/2005.
4.	To ensure that water testing is performed in line with the requirements of Council Directive 98/83/EC.
5.	To ensure that the statement of point II.2.1(b) of the certificate for wild leporidae laid down in Annex II to Regulation (EC) No 119/2009 that no more than 12 hours have passed from killing to refrigeration, is properly supported.
6.	To ensure that when certifying meat from bovine animals and from lagomorphs to be exported to the EU rules and principles of certification equivalent to those laid down in

N°.	Recommendation
	Council Directive 96/93/EC are followed.

The competent authority's response to the recommendations can be found at:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/rep_details_en.cfm?rep_inspection_ref=2012-6347

ANNEX 1 - LEGAL REFERENCES

Legal Reference	Official Journal	Title
Reg. 178/2002	OJ L 31, 1.2.2002, p. 1-24	Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 January 2002 laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Safety Authority and laying down procedures in matters of food safety
Reg. 852/2004	OJ L 139, 30.4.2004, p. 1, Corrected and re-published in OJ L 226, 25.6.2004, p. 3	Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs
Reg. 853/2004	OJ L 139, 30.4.2004, p. 55, Corrected and re-published in OJ L 226, 25.6.2004, p. 22	Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin
Reg. 854/2004	OJ L 139, 30.4.2004, p. 206, Corrected and re-published in OJ L 226, 25.6.2004, p. 83	Regulation (EC) No 854/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 laying down specific rules for the organisation of official controls on products of animal origin intended for human consumption
Reg. 882/2004	OJ L 165, 30.4.2004, p. 1, Corrected and re-published in OJ L 191, 28.5.2004, p. 1	Regulation (EC) No 882/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on official controls performed to ensure the verification of compliance with feed and food law, animal health and animal welfare rules
Reg. 2073/2005	OJ L 338, 22.12.2005, p. 1-26	Commission Regulation (EC) No 2073/2005 of 15 November 2005 on microbiological criteria for foodstuffs
Reg. 1162/2009	OJ L 314, 1.12.2009, p. 10–12	Commission Regulation (EC) No 1162/2009 of 30 November 2009 laying down transitional measures for the implementation of Regulations (EC) No 853/2004, (EC) No 854/2004 and (EC) No 882/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council

Legal Reference	Official Journal	Title
Reg. 2074/2005	OJ L 338, 22.12.2005, p. 27-59	Commission Regulation (EC) No 2074/2005 of 5 December 2005 laying down implementing measures for certain products under Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council and for the organisation of official controls under Regulation (EC) No 854/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Regulation (EC) No 882/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council, derogating from Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council and amending Regulations (EC) No 853/2004 and (EC) No 854/2004
Dir. 93/119/EC	OJ L 340, 31.12.1993, p. 21-34	Council Directive 93/119/EC of 22 December 1993 on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing
Dir. 96/22/EC	OJ L 125, 23.5.1996, p. 3-9	Council Directive 96/22/EC of 29 April 1996 concerning the prohibition on the use in stockfarming of certain substances having a hormonal or thyrostatic action and of β -agonists, and repealing Directives 81/602/EEC, 88/146/EEC and 88/299/EEC
Dir. 96/23/EC	OJ L 125, 23.5.1996, p. 10-32	Council Directive 96/23/EC of 29 April 1996 on measures to monitor certain substances and residues thereof in live animals and animal products and repealing Directives 85/358/EEC and 86/469/EEC and Decisions 89/187/EEC and 91/664/EEC
Dir. 96/93/EC	OJ L 13, 16.1.1997, p. 28-30	Council Directive 96/93/EC of 17 December 1996 on the certification of animals and animal products
Dir. 98/83/EC	OJ L 330, 5.12.1998, p. 32-54	Council Directive 98/83/EC of 3 November 1998 on the quality of water intended for human consumption

Legal Reference	Official Journal	Title
Reg. 119/2009	OJ L 39, 10.2.2009, p. 12-28	Commission Regulation (EC) No 119/2009 of 9 February 2009 laying down a list of third countries or parts thereof, for imports into, or transit through, the Community of meat of wild leporidae, of certain wild land mammals and of farmed rabbits and the veterinary certification requirements
Reg. 1760/2000	OJ L 204, 11.8.2000, p. 1-10	Regulation (EC) No 1760/2000 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 July 2000 establishing a system for the identification and registration of bovine animals and regarding the labelling of beef and beef products and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 820/97
Reg. 1825/2000	OJ L 216, 26.8.2000, p. 8-12	Commission Regulation (EC) No 1825/2000 of 25 August 2000 laying down detailed rules for the application of Regulation (EC) No 1760/2000 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the labelling of beef and beef products
Reg. 206/2010	OJ L 73, 20.3.2010, p. 1-121	Commission Regulation (EU) No 206/2010 of 12 March 2010 laying down lists of third countries, territories or parts thereof authorised for the introduction into the European Union of certain animals and fresh meat and the veterinary certification requirements
Dir. 2002/99/EC	OJ L 18, 23.1.2003, p. 11-20	Council Directive 2002/99/EC of 16 December 2002 laying down the animal health rules governing the production, processing, distribution and introduction of products of animal origin for human consumption