



Brussels Rural Development Briefings
A series of meetings on ACP-EU development issues

**Briefing session n° 11: Meeting food safety standards:
Implications for ACP agricultural exports**

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**Trade-related SPS capacity building support:
EU experience on regional integration and harmonization of SPS frameworks:
lessons learnt and implications for future programmes**

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Executive Summary

There is a common perception that "rules" are barriers to trade in food and agricultural products. This is seriously mistaken. Rules are not only desirable but are essential if trade is to take place safely and under safe conditions. The experience of the EU in its own internal trade bears out this experience.

The EU is made up of 27 Member States. There is fierce competition between producers in these Member States. What is unique is how the integration of European markets has allowed this competition to take place under safe, fair and competitive conditions. This has led to very significant trade, employment and efficiency gains for the EU and its Member States.

The rationale for increased integration in the area of standards for food and agricultural products in Europe is evident:

- Member States could not in isolation expect to control and eradicate major animal and foodborne diseases without the co-operation of neighbouring countries.
- Similarly, trade could not be expected to take place unless it was safe.
- Finally, the benefits of increased competition in terms of lower prices, greater choice and more efficient production also require integrated markets.

The challenge was to turn the aspiration of greater integration into a reality. This was achieved by a combination of political ambition, a shared commitment to concrete action to achieve targets and the investment of resources in improved disease surveillance, control and eradication measures. This is overseen in a regulatory framework overseen by the European Commission which ensures that there is full and effective cooperation between Member States in respecting the rules of trade.

It is clear that the system of integration in the EU cannot be replicated overnight in other regions of the world. Nonetheless, there are clear lessons to be learned from the European experience.

- Rules are essential, but they also have to be well-designed. This includes the need to be proportionate, science-based and non-discriminatory.
- Safety cannot be subordinated to trade interests. Safeguards are necessary to ensure that consumer interests are protected and that markets are not distorted by uneven application of safety standards. In the EU this includes full transparency and independent risk assessment by the European Food Safety Authority.

- Ambition, resources and determination are necessary to achieve targets. But the effort is worthwhile and pays a rich dividend.