

DATES: The meeting will be held on April 14, 1999, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

To receive full consideration, written comments should be received on or before May 11, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the equivalence evaluation document are available from the FSIS Docket Clerk, Room 102 Cotton Annex, 300 12th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20250-3700. A copy may also be obtained from the FSIS home page at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/>. Written comments on the equivalence evaluation document should refer to Docket #99-009N and be submitted in triplicate to the FSIS Docket Clerk at the address shown above. Facsimile copies of comments may be sent to 202-205-0381. All comments received will be available for public inspection in the FSIS Docket Room from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

The meeting will be held at the Washington Plaza Hotel at 10 Thomas Circle NW (at Massachusetts Avenue and 14th Street), Washington, DC 20009, (202) 842-1300. Attendees requiring sign-language interpreters or other special accommodation should contact Mr. Mark Manis (identified below in **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**) by April 7, 1999. No pre-registration is required. Transcripts of the meeting will be available in the FSIS Docket Room, Room 102, 300 12th Street, SW., Washington, DC 20250-3700. In addition to publishing this **Federal Register** notice, FSIS will alert consumers and industry groups of the meeting through its Constituent Alert before the meeting date.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Mark Manis, Director, International Policy Division; Office of Policy, Program Development, and Evaluation; (202) 720-6400, or by electronic mail to "mark.manis@usda.gov".

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

"Equivalence" is a relatively new international concept that is applied in the evaluation of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures taken by different nations to protect human, animal, or plant life or health. The equivalence concept was introduced in the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the "SPS Agreement"), which appears in the Final Act of the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations signed in Marrakech on April 15, 1994. The SPS Agreement became effective in January 1995, concurrently with

establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which superseded the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) as the umbrella organization for international trade. The United States is a signatory to the SPS Agreement and a member of the WTO.

SPS measures include, among other things, all relevant laws, decrees, regulations, requirements, and procedures—including food regulatory systems—for protecting human or animal life within the territory of a WTO member government from disease, toxins, pests, and food or feed additives or contaminants.

Under Article 4 of the SPS Agreement, an importing member nation must accept an exporting member's SPS measures as equivalent to its own measures if the exporting member has objectively demonstrated that its measure achieves the importing member's appropriate level of sanitary or phytosanitary protection (ALOP). In other words, each member nation of the WTO, including the United States, must accept as equivalent to its own food regulatory system the food regulatory system of another member that has been demonstrated to furnish the same level of public health protection. However, the burden of demonstrating equivalence is on the exporting country.

Equivalent regulatory systems need not be identical. The specific SPS measures applied by an exporting nation may differ from those required by an importing nation. On the other hand, while WTO members are encouraged to adopt international food standards in order to "harmonize" the world's food regulatory systems and facilitate trade, an importing country remains free to set its ALOP at any level it deems appropriate to abate or eliminate risks from a foodborne hazard. An importing country has the right to decide whether a food regulatory system employed by an exporting country is equivalent to its own or is adequate to achieve the importing country's appropriate level of sanitary or phytosanitary protection. The importing country also has the right to decide whether the evidence provided to demonstrate equivalence is adequate.

Request for Comments

FSIS has developed a process for evaluating whether a foreign country's meat and poultry regulatory system and that country's specific sanitary measures are equivalent to the U.S. system and measures. This process is described in a January 1999 document entitled "FSIS Process for Evaluating the Equivalence of Foreign Meat and Poultry Regulatory

Systems," copies of which are available at the location indicated above in **ADDRESSES**. FSIS will use the comments it receives as a basis for further development of its equivalence evaluation process.

Done at Washington, DC on: March 5, 1999.

Thomas J. Billy,

Administrator.

[FR Doc. 99-6127 Filed 3-11-99; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Southwest Washington Provincial Advisory Committee Meeting Notice

AGENCY: Forestry Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: The Southwest Washington Provincial Advisory Committee will meet on Wednesday, March 24, 1999, in Vancouver, Washington, at the Water Resources Education Center (4600 SE Columbia Way) in their meeting room located upstairs. The meeting will begin at 10 a.m. and continue until 4:30 p.m. The purpose of the meeting is to: (1) Decide on the final priorities of the Jobs-in-the-Woods program for Fiscal Year 2000, and (2) provide a Public open Forum. All Southwest Washington Provincial Advisory Committee meetings are open to the public. Interested citizens are encouraged to attend. The "open forum" provides opportunity for the public to bring issues, concerns, and discussion topics to the Advisory Committee. The "open forum" is scheduled as part of agenda item (2) for this meeting. Interested speakers will need to register prior to the open forum period. The committee welcomes the public's written comments on committee business at any time.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Direct questions regarding this meeting to Linda Turner, Public Affairs Specialist, at (360) 891-5195, or write Forest Headquarters Office, Gifford Pinchot National Forest, 10600 NE. 51st Circle, Vancouver, WA 98682.

Dated: March 5, 1999.

Ted C. Stubblefield,

Forest Supervisor.

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