

Current situation on the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza

(11/01) In February, the monthly case numbers of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in wild birds and poultry in Europe increased again compared to previous months. The risk of HPAI H5 viruses entering, spreading and spreading further in waterfowl populations within Germany remains high, the Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut (FLI) currently reports. Based on the usual seasonal HPAI pattern, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) estimates that the epidemic may have peaked, although this will need to be confirmed in the coming months. In **Germany**, four HPAI outbreaks were detected in commercial poultry in February. Two large laying hen farms in Hessen (approx. 14,000 animals) and on the island of Rügen (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, 70,000 animals) were affected, as well as two turkey flocks in the district of Steinburg, Schleswig-Holstein (together approx. 15,000 animals). The last outbreak was confirmed on 7 February. Most HPAI outbreaks in Europe in February were again reported from **Moldova** (27), again mainly affecting small holdings. **Poland** reported an increase in outbreaks compared to the previous month (16). Other individual reports came from various European countries. Germany reported the most cases of wild birds in February, with a significant increase compared to the previous month (62). Once again, the northern parts of the country were mainly affected, particularly the coastal regions, and in terms of species, especially wild geese, gulls (two detections of H5N5), birds of prey and wild ducks. Denmark has also recorded a significant increase in cases (41). In contrast, the Netherlands and Sweden reported slightly lower numbers with seven cases each. Austria (4) also reported a slight decline in the number of cases. Other countries affected in Eastern Europe were Slovenia (11 cases) as well as Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary (five cases each). As in the previous month, Italy reported two cases on the northern Adriatic coast. France recorded one case on the Atlantic coast. Further isolated reports came from Eastern Europe.

On 11 March 2024, the European Commission published Implementing Decision (EU) 2024/852 in the EU Official Journal L concerning emergency measures in relation to outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza in certain Member States following the recent HPAI outbreaks in **Bulgaria** (in Haskovo region), **Poland** (in Greater Poland and Warmian-Masurian voivodeships) and in **Slovakia** (in Bratislava Region).

In addition, **Romania** has notified the Commission of an outbreak of HPAI in an establishment where poultry were kept, located in Botoşani county.

The annex to the decision (EU) 2024/852 contains the updated territorial outlines of the protection and surveillance zones as well as the provisional duration of the protective measures.

Implementing Decision (EU) 2024/852, which has now been published, amends Implementing Decision (EU) 2023/2447 accordingly. Implementing Decision (EU) 2024/852 is available at the following link:

http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2024/852/oj

Current situation on African swine fever

(11/02) On 14 March, Implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/870 laying down specific control measures for African swine fever (ASF) and amending Annex I to Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/594 was published in the Official Journal L. Previously, there had been new outbreaks of ASF in wild porcine animals in Greece. Implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/870 is available at the following link:

http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg_impl/2024/870/oj

Extension of trade facilitation for Ukraine clears first hurdle

(11/03) Agricultural products from Ukraine are expected to benefit from easier access to the European single market for some time to come. The extension of the autonomous trade measures proposed by the European Commission was approved by the European Parliament's Trade Committee on 7 March by 26 votes to ten, with one abstention. The vote in Plenary is due to take place next week during the plenary session in Strasbourg. The formal approval of the Council is then required.

It is envisaged that the trade facilitation will continue to apply for another year after 5 June. The measures came into force for the first time on 5 June 2022; a year later, they were renewed for the first time. A new feature of the current proposal is that duty-free imports of sugar, poultry meat and eggs will be capped. The average quantities of the past two years (2022 and 2023) are to be used as an upper limit. For the poultry sector, a cap of 147,000 tonnes (net weight) is foreseen for imports from Ukraine for 2024. In doing so, the EU Commission wants to consider concerns from the agricultural profession and the Member States.

Based on the feedback received and the discussions in the Executive Committee, EPEGA opposes the amendment to Article 9 of Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/760 proposed by the EU Commission (see EPEGA Circular No. 9 of 29 February 2024). Rather, in the interests of equal treatment of all market participants and to avoid distortions of competition, the existing possibility of cumulation in the three product groups of the poultry sector in accordance with paragraphs 6 and 7 of Article 9 must be maintained in order to prevent discrimination against individual countries and the possibility of establishing an oligopoly. The special arrangements for Ukraine (ATMs) are limited in time; an amendment to Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/760 would have permanent and far-reaching negative consequences. Ukraine should be treated like the UK for the duration of the current ATM measures. This means that imports from Ukraine cannot be used to build up reference quantities.

France expands origin labelling of meat

(11/05) In France, a decree has been in force since 7 March extending the obligation to indicate the origin of beef, pork, poultry and sheep meat in out-of-home catering. This now also includes goods that have been purchased by the company in already processed or cooked form. Until now, these products have been exempted from the meat labelling requirement, which has been in force since March 2022. This only applied to fresh or frozen meat. According to the new requirements, however, the country of rearing and slaughter must also be indicated for processed meat, but the indications "EU" or "non-EU" may be sufficient. The rules on fresh or frozen meat, which have been in place for two years, formally expired at the end of February. The government is expected to extend the regulations in the near future. When it first came into force, the government in Paris had assumed that uniform European legal requirements would already exist by 2024.

Lowest meat production in the EU since the turn of the millennium

(11/06) Since the turn of the millennium, pork and beef production in the EU has not been as low as last year. The decline was particularly pronounced in pigs. According to provisional data from the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat), a total of 219.6 million pigs were slaughtered in Member States' slaughterhouses subject to reporting requirements in 2023; that was 17.2 million or 7.3% less than in 2022. Because it was somewhat more difficult for the animals to be slaughtered, pig meat production "only" fell by 6.6% to 20.60 million tonnes. The slump was particularly drastic in Denmark, where the volume of pork fell by a fifth to 1.29 million tonnes. Spain, the leading EU producer, has recently significantly expanded its production capacities. However, the country recorded a decline in 2023 for the second year in a row; compared to 2022, pork production there fell by 4.2% to 4.85 million tonnes. The second

heavyweight, Germany, produced 6.8% less pork at 4.18 million tonnes. No EU Member State saw an increase in pork production in 2023.

Cattle slaughterers subject to reporting requirements in the EU slaughtered a total of 21.89 million animals in 2023; this was 770,500 or 3.4% less than in the previous year. Beef production fell even more sharply, by 4.0% to 6.38 million tonnes. According to preliminary data, Italy made a significant contribution to this with a sharp decline of 17.0% to 620,000 tonnes. At France, the most important EU producer, beef volume fell by 4.4% to 1.30 million tonnes compared to 2022, and in Spain by 5.0% to 695,000 tonnes. However, there were also countries where production increased. These included Germany, with an increase of 0.6% to 992,900 tonnes, and the Netherlands, with a more significant increase of 3.3% to 435,500 tonnes.

European Supply Chain Directive - current developments

(11/07) The vote on the European Supply Chain Directive (CSDDD) on 8 March 2024 was postponed again in the Permanent Representatives Committee, despite new adjustments. Only Finland was able to be persuaded by the softened proposals. Surprisingly, another vote will now take place on 15 March, the German Wholesale, Foreign Trade and Services Association (BGA) has just informed the office. The Belgian Presidency is now trying to reach an agreement at the last moment. However, the curtain will come down at the beginning of next week. A political agreement must have been reached by then.

Deforestation-free supply chains – EU law to be weakened

(11/08) According to media reports, the European Union wants to weaken its law against deforestation. According to the report, the risk classification of supplier countries as "low", "standard" or "high" is to be abandoned after several governments of Asian, African and Latin American countries complained to the EU. Instead, Brussels wants to assign the "standard risk" category to each country, the newspaper writes, citing three EU officials. This is intended to give the countries concerned more time to prepare for the regulation.

According to the regulation adopted last year, from January 2025, companies must ensure that forests have not been cut down or damaged for products sold in the EU in order to counteract climate change and biodiversity loss. For example, the new regulation lays down mandatory due diligence requirements for all market participants and traders who place palm oil, cattle, timber, coffee, cocoa, rubber and soy on the EU market. The rules also apply to a number of derived products such as chocolate, furniture, printed paper and selected palm oil-based derivatives.

According to reports, the major palm oil producers Malaysia and Indonesia, among others, have complained to the EU Commission and have expressed concern about the regulatory measures in a letter to the Commission. These are too generalised and do not take into account the different local characteristics and capabilities. In addition, companies have threatened to withdraw from "high-risk areas" because the effort seems too great to them. It is expensive to comply with all these transparency and disclosure obligations, and that is why Malaysia needs more time.

Meanwhile, the Brazilian government has presented the "Agro Brasil+Sustentável" platform to representatives of the European Commission, which aims to help Brazil comply with the requirements of the EU Regulation for Deforestation-Free Supply Chains (EUDR) in the future. The platform is currently being developed by the Ministry of Agriculture together with the national agricultural research company Embrapa and the Federal Data Processing Service Serpro, the government explained at the meeting on 6 March. The basis for this was formed by the Prodes and Terraclas systems, which have been contributing to satellite-based monitoring and mapping of deforested areas in the Amazon region for some time. Ac-

According to the government, "Agro Brasil+Sustentável" will provide traceable information on agricultural products in the future, such as the method of production and environmental impact. In this way, the platform will serve to secure access to European and other demanding markets for domestic producers. The system had already been presented to a Chinese delegation in February.

Audit Report Estonia

(11/09) An audit was carried out in Estonia from 16 to 31 October 2023 by Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety to assess the official controls related to slaughter hygiene and meat inspection requirements.

The audit found that the official control system over the production and placing on the market of red meat and poultry meat comprises all the required elements, fulfils the legal requirements of the Official Controls Regulation, and its implementation is well organised. National legislation and documented procedures available to the official staff are in line with EU requirements. Available procedures, training and supervisory mechanisms can provide reasonable level of assurance that controls are carried out uniformly and consistently. However, the supervisory mechanisms could be improved to ensure the effectiveness, appropriateness, quality, and consistency of official controls. Ante-mortem and post-mortem inspection, both for domestic ungulates and poultry, are organised in line with the relevant EU requirements. However, the shortcomings observed regarding post-mortem inspection indicate that it is not always properly implemented. The official controls for general and specific hygiene, including taking official samples, are well organised, risk-based and carried out in line with the EU and national rules. When officials detect non-compliances, enforcement measures are applied.

The report contains recommendations to the central competent authority to address the shortcomings identified and to further enhance the control system. It is available at the following link:

<https://ec.europa.eu/food/audits-analysis/audit-report/details/4733>

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