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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	AOB item for the meeting of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council of 17 November 2025: International standard setting in the food chain area <i>- Information by the Commission</i>

The three main international standard-setting bodies in the food chain area are the Codex Alimentarius, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). They serve as the official standard-setting bodies recognised by the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement.

The Codex Alimentarius is in charge of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme. Its main objective is to develop standards ensuring consumer protection and fair practices in food trade. EU and Member States are active participants, negotiating standards either of horizontal nature (e.g. related to labelling, contaminants, additives, residues (MRLs) for pesticides and veterinary medicines, nutrition or analytical methods) or related to commodities (e.g. oils or spices). The EU became a full member of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) in 2003. Active participation in Codex standard-setting is crucial, with EU experts contributing from the outset and Member States coordinating their efforts. The 2022 Council Conclusions¹ recognised the critical role of Codex for the development of international food standards and reiterated the strong commitment of the EU and its Member States to contribute to these standards with the view to promote EU priorities, including the strengthening of a One Health approach.

WOAH focuses on improving global animal health. The EU, while not a member, contributes significantly through technical expertise and considerable financial support to WOAH's initiatives, and aligns its animal health legislation² with WOAH standards to ensure sanitary safety in international trade and human health protection. Active participation in WOAH standard-setting involves collaboration among EU Member States and the Commission, presenting unified positions during the annual General Session.

¹ Council Conclusions "The EU's commitment to an ambitious Codex Alimentarius fit for challenges of today and tomorrow" (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6298-2022-INIT/en/pdf>)

² Regulation (EU) 2016/429 "Animal Health Law" and tertiary acts based on it.

On the wake of the pandemic and on the occasion of WOAHA's centenary in 2024, a reflection was launched by WOAHA on the future of the organisation. The EU contributed to the debate through Council Conclusions under the Belgian Presidency³, and the WOAHA World Assembly decided through a resolution to set up a Governance Review Committee (GRC) to carry out further work to revise the WOAHA Basic Texts. The GRC embarked on its work in January 2025 and presented its holistic, two-phased work programme to the WOAHA World Assembly in May 2025. The GRC will present its assessment of prospective governance changes to the WOAHA World Assembly in May 2026 (phase 1) and prepare concrete revisions to the WOAHA Basic Texts by May 2027 (phase 2).

In August 2025, the Commission submitted to the Council a Recommendation for a Council Decision⁴ to authorise the opening of negotiations on this revision of the WOAHA Basic Texts. That Recommendation designates the negotiator that is to negotiate on behalf of the Union in consultation with the Council Working Party on Animals and Veterinary Questions (Chief Veterinary Officers) and provides for the negotiating directives. The Council adopted the Decision on 27 October 2025⁵.

The EU's role in promoting a high level of plant health standards is evident through its involvement in the IPPC, which establishes International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs) to facilitate safe trade of plants and protect plant health. As a contracting party, the EU presents unified positions in the IPPC's Commission on Phytosanitary Measures. EU experts engage in the IPPC's Standards Committee, shaping the standard-setting process. The EU supports the work of IPPC through specific projects financed from the Single Market Programme. Additionally, the EU has an observer status in the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO, the regional plant protection organization of IPPC), which works on harmonizing regional phytosanitary measures and setting regional standards. The Commission plays a crucial role in ensuring the EU speaks with one voice in the IPPC and EPPO bodies.

³ Council Conclusions on the future of WOAHA from the perspective of the EU Member States (ST-11685-2024-INIT/en)

⁴ Recommendation for a Council Decision authorising the opening of negotiations, in the interest of the European Union, on a revision of the International Agreement and Organic Statutes, the Organic Rules, the Financial Rules and the General Rules and other texts of the World Organisation for Animal Health (COM(2025)460)

⁵ Council Decision (EU) 2025/2227 (OJ L, 2025/2227, 31.10.2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2025/2227/oj>)

The EU actively engages in the WTO SPS Committee to advocate for science-based SPS measures, contributing to declarations addressing modern challenges. By organizing side events and thematic sessions, the EU advances its priorities on the global stage. In case of a dispute on trade with SPS commodities with a third country the Commission is central in the dispute settlement process at the WTO, and it is the Commission that represents the EU in the relevant panels.

The above highlights the importance of setting standards already at international level and promote EU standards at international level. These standards can then be used when preparing and refining EU legislation. For this reason, the Commission and Member States invest significant resources as a way to influence policymaking at global level and set appropriate standards which facilitate EU exports and trade, in line with the global cooperation commitments set out in the Vision for Agriculture and Food. The Commission encourages Member States to continue to work positively and constructively to achieve these goals.
