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COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

COM(79) 622 final

Brussels, 12 November 1979

Report on experience gained from cattle production
surveys and forward estimates by the Member States
in the period 1976-1978

(second report submitted by the Commission to the
Council and the European Parliament in implementation
of Article 10 of Council Directive 73/132/EEC of
15 May 1973)



COM(79) 622 final

Abstract

This report follows up a discussion between the delegates from the Member States and the Commission departments concerned under the aegis of the Working Group on "Animal Products Statistics". In this report the Commission mainly stresses its interest in:

- 1) maintaining the quality of the samples selected for the livestock survey;
- 2) adhering to the time limits laid down in Directive 73/132/EEC particularly for the monthly production statistics;
- 3) improving the breakdown into calves and adult cattle in the production estimates and extending the forecast period;
- 4) harmonizing regional statistics.

* * *

Article 10 of the Council Directive of 15 May 1973 (73/132/EEC)¹⁾, supplemented by Directive 78/53/EEC of 19 December 1977²⁾, states that:

"the Commission shall submit to the European Parliament and to the Council every three years and for the first time in 1976 a report on the experience gained from the surveys and the forward estimates provided for in this Directive".

This report on experience gained in the period 1976-1978 is the second report on this subject since the first Community survey on cattle production was carried out by the Member States in December 1973³⁾. In it the Commission stresses the main points in the working document, drawn up by its own departments as a basis for an exchange of views among the Member States which was held in June 1979 as part of the work of the Agricultural Statistics Committee.

I. Experience gained.

II. Commission's proposals.

1) O.J. L 153 of 9.6.1973, page 25
2) O.J. L 16 of 20.1.1978, page 20
3) Initial report COM (76) - 502 final of 29.9.1976

I. EXPERIENCE GAINED

1. Reference date for livestock surveys

As from 1973 "the Member States shall carry out a statistical survey of total cattle numbers, using as the reference date any day in December" (73/132/EEC, Art. 1).

As from 1978, they also carry out each year "an intermediate survey of the bovine livestock, using any day in May or June as the reference date" (78/53/EEC, Art. 2 (1)).

The reference dates for these surveys differ from country to country, due to national differences in survey programmes. Very little experience has been gained as yet with the May/June surveys, but in future the reference period for the intermediate survey should be reduced.

2. Quality of the surveys

Exhaustive surveys are carried out in Belgium and the Federal Republic of Germany in December; in the Netherlands, in Belgium, Luxembourg, the United Kingdom, in Ireland (once every 5 years) and in Denmark in May/June. Of those Member States which use random sampling only the Federal Republic of Germany regularly informs EUROSTAT of its calculations of sampling errors. Thus the Commission is unable to check whether Article 4 (3) of Directive 73/132/EEC is being implemented although the reliability of the results, which are essential as a basis for forward estimates and for managing the markets, depends on how representative the samples are.

Under Article 1 (2) of Directive 73/53/EEC, the Member States must, if necessary, take appropriate measures to assess errors of observation. In practice only two countries, viz. Belgium and the Federal Republic of Germany, carry out a regular check on errors of observation.

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3. Derogations provided for in Directive 78/53/EEC

Italy has not requested further extension beyond 1980 of the derogation provided for in Article 1 (1) of Directive 78/53/EEC, which states that sampling errors of up to 1.5% of the total number of livestock and up to 2.5% of the total number of cows are acceptable for this Member State.

Since the experience gained from the intermediate May/June surveys is still very limited, since the first was conducted in 1978, the Commission cannot yet make a judgement on whether the derogation provided for in Article 2 (3) of Directive 78/53/EEC is justified. This allows the numbers for certain categories of cattle to be estimated on the basis of the data from national surveys.

4. Time limits for notification of forward estimates and survey data

Forward estimates for production and provisional livestock survey data are available for the meetings of the Working Group, which are always held in February and October. Thus the time limits laid down in the Directive are generally met as regards the December survey. They were also met for the 1978 intermediate survey. On the other hand, the final data, broken down by region and size classes of the livestock, are generally notified very late.

The Member States must forward to the Commission the monthly statistical data "not later than 6 weeks after the month to which they refer". During the period 1976-1978 the time taken to notify monthly statistics was regularly longer than 2 months for France and Italy. The Netherlands took considerably less time, and so did Denmark, which forwarded provisional data which were very close to the final data. It is exceptional for the other Member States to take longer than 2 months.

5. Harmonized definition of production

During the period 1976-78 considerable progress was made on harmonizing the monthly statistics for cattle production, largely because of a precise "definition of production", adapted to the NIMEXE nomenclature and published in Directive 78/53/EEC.

External trade in live animals at present covers all animals, including breeding animals and pure-bred animals, although the Member States continue to provide additional data on external trade in animals for slaughter.

As regards slaughterings, the possibility should be studied of breaking down adult male cattle into "young cattle" and "adult cattle", rather than into "bulls" and "bullocks" in accordance with the categories laid down in Article 6 (2) of Directive 73/132/EEC.

6. Forecast deviations

Since the Member States did not give a systematic breakdown of production forecasts into categories and half-year periods before 1978, EUROSTAT can calculate forecast deviations only for the whole year's production of calves and all adult cattle. The forecasts made in the February of those years on the basis of the December surveys deviated by less than 1% from the actual figures for total cattle production in the Community as a whole. The breakdown into calves and adult cattle is much less reliable. In 1976 and 1977 the October forecasts did not improve the February forecasts, but in 1978 (perhaps reflecting the first beneficial effects of the Community survey in May/June!?) the October forecasts for the current year turned out to be very good.

In conclusion,

- a) it would appear that the deviations between the forecast and actual figures for total cattle production are becoming smaller both for the Community as a whole and in most cases for each of the Member States;
- b) it is still too soon to assess the quality of the forecasts based on the May/June surveys, but the initial results are very encouraging;
- c) a special effort should be made to improve the breakdown of production into the various categories, which in particular will give better forecasts for calves.

7. Financing animal population surveys

The expenses incurred by the Member States when conducting the December cattle survey were covered during the period 1973-1978 by the payment of a standard amount from the budget of the European Communities.

Financial assistance with the costs of the intermediate surveys should be provided by the European Communities for the period 1978-1980 only.

II. COMMISSION'S PROPOSALS

1. Subdivision of animals of less than 12 months into age groups

To obtain a better idea of the significance of calves in production forecasts the Commission suggests that the category "cattle of less than 12 months" in Article 3 (1) of Directive 73/132/EEC should be replaced by "cattle of less than six months" and "cattle under one year but not under six months".

2. Extension of the forecast period

The Commission departments responsible for managing the market must have the production forecasts for the following calendar year by autumn so that they can prepare price proposals and the annual report on the agricultural situation in the Community, and draw up annual estimated balance sheets of young male cattle for fattening and of frozen beef and veal for processing.

3. Breakdown of livestock by breed or intended use

A breakdown of bovine livestock according to the main uses for which they have been bred could be useful for following the incidence of milk/meat substitution and for improving medium-term forecasts.

This breakdown could be calculated every two years either from the data from one of the Community cattle surveys or on the basis of non-harmonized national data.

4. In order to continue with the work of harmonizing regional statistics, which has begun in the milk sector under Directive 78/320/EEC, the Commission would like the cattle in the United Kingdom to be subdivided by "standard regions".

5. The derogation provided for in Article 2 (3) of Directive 78/53/EEC could be extended until 1983, i.e. after the next report on experience gained from statistical surveys on cattle had been submitted to the European Parliament and the Council.

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With benefit of the experience gained during the period 1976-1978 the Commission will embody the main points of the above proposals 1, 3, 4 and 5 in a new definition of the categories given in Article 3 (1) of Directive 73/132/EEC, which it will submit as a proposal to the Standing Committee for Agricultural Statistics, and will also forward to the European Parliament and the Council a proposal for an additional Directive specifying a breakdown of cattle by breed or intended use, amendment of the regional subdivisions provided for in Article 5 (2) of Directive 73/132/EEC, and an extension of the derogation provided for in Article 2 (3) of Directive 78/53/EEC. Lastly, through the Working Group "Animal Products Statistics", the Commission will try to bring the Member States round gradually to providing production forecasts for the calendar year following the latest survey.

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