

STATE OF ISRAEL

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development,
Veterinary Services and Animal Health, P.O.B 12, Beit-Dagan, 50250.

06/06/2019

Attn:
Central Competent Authority
Trading Parties

Dear Colleagues,

Subject: **shigatoxin-producing *Escherichia coli* in meat**

In response to questions that have arisen based on our notification of the commencement of testing for STEC in imported beef, we would like to clarify some issues.

1. As with all importing countries, Israel expects that countries should export products that are free from pathogens that can be a risk to human health. Therefore, and in accordance with the IVSAH 2014 export requirements, every establishment should have a pathogen reduction program in place. The following is a quote from the requirements:

PATHOGEN REDUCTION

"In order to complement HACCP, it is mandatory to establish food safety performance standards for pathogenic microorganisms on raw meat, for the reduction of *Salmonella*, *E. coli* and Enterobacteriaceae contamination of raw carcasses. Monitoring and record of pathogen reduction activities are performed in order to check the influence/effect of HACCP-SSOP-SPS systems in the final hygiene of bovine/ovine carcasses.

These performance standards would measure whether HACCP systems are working effectively to address food safety hazards. The Israeli veterinary services require that establishments will conduct a daily microbial testing for *Salmonella*, *E. coli* and Enterobacteriaceae to verify achievement of the official program. The exporting country CCA should determine and describe the Pathogen Reduction directives including the number of samples, sampling method, analysis and interpretation method. The CCA, RCA and LCA are responsible for the implementation and follow up of the methods."

We therefore expect that each establishment will incorporate STEC into their pathogen reduction program. However, it is the IVSAH's opinion that the pathogen reduction program and testing to verify the program does not provide a guarantee that the product exported to Israel is STEC-free. Therefore, it is not correct to compare tests that were performed in the originating country and tests performed by the IVSAH.

2. Testing will begin on products that left the exporting country on 1 July 2019.
3. Testing will be performed according to method ISO 13136 in the IVSAH laboratory.
4. The IVSAH laboratory is recognized by both the EU and USDA-FSIS to perform microbiological testing for export to those countries.
5. The material being tested is beef muscle.
6. Currently, all meat imported to Israel is randomly tested for microbiological indicators of process hygiene at the cold storage facility. The tests currently include: aerobic plate count, coliform count, *Escherichia coli*, and *Salmonella spp.* Products are not detained or rejected based on the results. The testing is performed without prior

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knowledge of the importer, cold storage facility, or the regulator. The computer system randomly selects shipments to be tested. The frequency tested is based on each establishment's import volume- 20% of the establishment's shipments are tested. The sample size is one unit of meat in its original packaging. The products are delivered to the IVSAH laboratory in numbered, sealed packaging that is prepared by the LCA of the cold store. The STEC test will simply be added to the list of other microbiological tests when the LCA is directed to sample.

7. The IVSAH will be covering the cost of the test.
8. Because of cost considerations and the desire to provide an uncontaminated sample to the laboratory, the sample size is one package of beef muscle. Importers are welcome to enlarge the sample size by allowing us to send more packages to the laboratory, but one positive test out of the entire sample size will cause the lot to be rejected.
9. Frozen meat will be tested within the standard turnaround time in the laboratory. Testing of fresh meat can be performed under expedited conditions.
10. Meat that is STEC positive will not be released into Israel to be marketed as fresh meat. It can be returned to the originating country or be directed to an establishment for processing into a heat-treated, ready-to-eat product. The choice of establishment and the procedure must be approved by IVSAH before the shipment is released from cold storage.
11. The IVSAH has no objection to the use of substances that have the ability to decrease the bacterial load on carcasses, as long as the substance is approved for that use in the exporting country. It is prudent to confirm with the rabbinic authorities the kosher status of the carcass after its use.

We remain at your disposal for any further questions or clarifications.

Sincerely yours,



Dr. Shlomo Garazi
Chief Import & Export Veterinary Officer

cc:

Dr. T. Goshen, Acting CVO, Israeli Veterinary Services and Animal Health
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