

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

RESTRICTED
DPC/W/78
18 March 1988
Special Distribution

International Dairy Arrangement

IMPROVEMENT OF WORKING METHODS

Note by the Chairman of the Protocol Committees

The present note has been prepared in order to facilitate discussions on improvement of working methods at the regular meetings of the Protocol Committees and the International Dairy Products Council in March 1988. The note reflects some views expressed during informal discussions on the subject following suggestions made at a series of meetings held in September 1988 (DPC/28, paragraphs 34 and 69(8)). The note also contains an annex discussing some aspects of handling and preparing information in a computer system.

General remarks

1. It was pointed out that this exercise would be purely procedural, focusing on working methods that would result in the Arrangement working more effectively and productively.

Information required by the Council and the Committees

2. General observations made suggested that although statistics were important for the discussions, policy issues were equally important.

(a) Coverage of the documentation made available to meetings

It was generally felt that the coverage of the documentation was adequate, and appreciation was expressed for the information compiled by the secretariat concerning non-participants. It was, nevertheless, suggested that it might be useful to gather more information on the USSR. It was noted that some information on Austria was available from national sources. Whenever available, information concerning non-participants could be included in the summary tables.

With regard to information that should be submitted according to Article 4 of each of the Protocols and according to Rule 26 of the Rules of Procedure, it was recognized that this was a very complex matter and that the submission of information as required by Article 4 and Rule 26 had not been adequately made in the past. It appeared that it was for the Committee itself to decide that international market prices were approaching their minimum levels and then to ask for information on those elements which it considered necessary in the evaluation of the market situation. Member countries could withhold certain information on grounds of confidentiality which the Committee would have to accept. This matter might be a subject for further discussions.

It was suggested that more forecasts should be provided under Section F of Questionnaires 1 to 3.

It was also suggested that forecasts of production and utilization of milk should also be provided under Questionnaire 4 on a short-term and long-term basis. Some uniformity was, however, essential in the span of projections, e.g. a 1 year, a 5 year or a 10 year period to make them comparable with each other. It was also proposed that information on cow numbers and yield per cow should also be furnished under paragraph 1(b) of Questionnaire 4.

It was further suggested that more data on consumption of milk and fresh milk products might usefully be included in replies to Questionnaire 4.

(b) Methods of collection of data, use of sources other than replies to questionnaires

It was felt that the present form of the questionnaires and the use by the secretariat of other services were adequate, and that there was no need for a revision or change of practices on this respect. One delegation had, however, a residual problem on the form of the questionnaire. A quarterly submission of replies to Questionnaires 1 to 3 and half-yearly submissions of replies to Questionnaire 4 seemed to be appropriate. Information under Questionnaire 4 should preferably be given in metric tons (and not in litres).

Computerized collection of information, including replies to questionnaires, would be useful, but some problems and possibilities would have to be examined further.

(c) Circulation of documentation - computerization

A secretariat note on computerization annexed to the present note, discusses the problems and possibilities related to a computerized preparation and dissemination of data. Summary tables and the statistical annex to the annual report would soon be prepared by using the computer.

(d) Presentation of the data and related analysis

The summary tables presented and circulated by the secretariat seemed to meet the needs of the Council and the Committees. It was suggested that more price information should be included in the summary tables, for instance showing the price information submitted by participants in Section D of Questionnaires 1 to 3. However, it was recognized that further discussions on this matter would be necessary. In view of the volatility of the exchange rates and some technical difficulties, it was felt that price information in Section D had to be calculated by experts from the capital. Any such price information had to be accompanied by information on the exchange rates for conversion. Participants would further explore the possibility of providing more details in Section D.

It was pointed out that it would be important that the material was presented in a way that would facilitate meaningful debates in the Council and the Committees. To the extent the secretariat had to make use of information from sources other than notifications, delegations concerned would be invited to verify and complete such information.

(e) Ways to improve the discipline regarding the submission of notifications, completeness of the replies and timing of circulation of the data

It was felt that there was some room for improvement in this area, and further attempts should be made to identify the problems persisting.

Frequency and timing of meetings - Participation in meetings and level of information

3. The present frequency and timing of regular meetings was considered to be adequate and therefore no changes were necessary. While the usual participation at the meetings held in June and December appeared to be adequate, it was noted that more complete series of meetings held in March and September might warrant greater participation of experts from the capitals. Such participation should therefore be encouraged and the presence of officials responsible for the implementation of dairy policies should also be welcomed at those meetings.

Structure of the agenda and conduct of deliberations

4. It was suggested that some routine matters could be dealt with at joint sessions in order to avoid repetition. The idea was experimented with at the December 1987 sessions of the Committees.

Recording of the deliberations

5. It was suggested that copies of the original version of the Chairman's general report to the Council of Committee meetings held in March and September could be made available to the participants in the Council. They would then have the text of the report in front of them at the time of adoption, something which might enable them to make a more critical appreciation of its contents.

There might be some problems with the writing of the records of the meetings. It was suggested that a full report of joint sessions be recorded in the report of the Committee of the Protocol Regarding Milk Fat, with a cross-reference to that in reports of the two other Committees.

The secretariat informed the members that the discussions on the market situation under the three Protocols in a single statement meant a lot of work for the secretariat when it had to decipher the relevant information for the three Protocol Committee reports separately. The matter would be facilitated if members provided their statements in writing on the three Protocols separately or at least furnished the vital statistics used to illustrate market trends in their respective countries.

Written procedures

6. It was queried whether more extensive use should be made of written procedures, as for instance regarding information exchanged bilaterally between participants and regarding matters raised at meetings.

It would also be useful to know whether important information, concerning proposals under consideration with regard to dairy policies, could be made available to the Committees and the Council.

A preliminary discussion revealed that while there was a broad agreement on the need for written procedures regarding information requested during meetings (multilateralization), some difficulties were perceived regarding replies provided on certain sensitive bilateral questions where confidentiality was considered to be essential. Information on matters related to proposals regarding dairy policies was, however, out of the question because of its secrecy and sensitivity. Further reflection and discussion were deemed necessary.

ANNEX

GATT

**INTERNATIONAL DAIRY
ARRANGEMENT
COMMITTEES OF THE PROTOCOLS**

**COMPUTER SYSTEMS
PROPOSAL**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GENERAL	2
DATA COLLECTION	2
REPORTS/STATISTICAL TABLES	2
SYSTEMS PROPOSAL	3
SYSTEMS DESCRIPTION	3
SYSTEMS FUNCTIONS	3
DATA CAPTURE	3
DATA UPDATE	4
DATA INQUIRY	4
REPORTS	4
HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE	4
Mainframe - Multi user powerful machine.....	4
Micro computer - Stand alone personal computer	4
ADVANTAGES OF THE COMPUTER SYSTEM.	5
ACCESSING NATIONAL STATISTICAL DATABASES	5

GENERAL

The Dairy Arrangements entered into force on 1 January 1980 and now have sixteen participants. Since the Arrangements have been functioning, a large amount of statistical documentation has been received by the secretariat, dating from 1970 for certain dairy products and from 1973 for other dairy products. A considerable effort is required for data collection, preparation of reports and statistical tables. To facilitate this work extensive use could be made of computer facilities.

DATA COLLECTION

The secretariat receives four Quarterly Questionnaires covering six products and two semi-annual questionnaires covering a further six products, covering the following areas.

- (1) Production
- (2) Trade
- (3) Consumption
- (4) Stocks
- (5) Prices
- (6) Data on Food Aid
- (7) Complementary Information

REPORTS/STATISTICAL TABLES

Summary tables relating to milk products are circulated in four documents containing twenty five tables on production, trade, consumption and stocks, as well as exports by region of destination. These summary tables are at present revised and published four times a year before and after the annual meetings.

The Status Report on the world market for the dairy products, circulated by the secretariat twice a year, covers all the data submitted by the participants and from other sources. This information is finally published in the annual report.

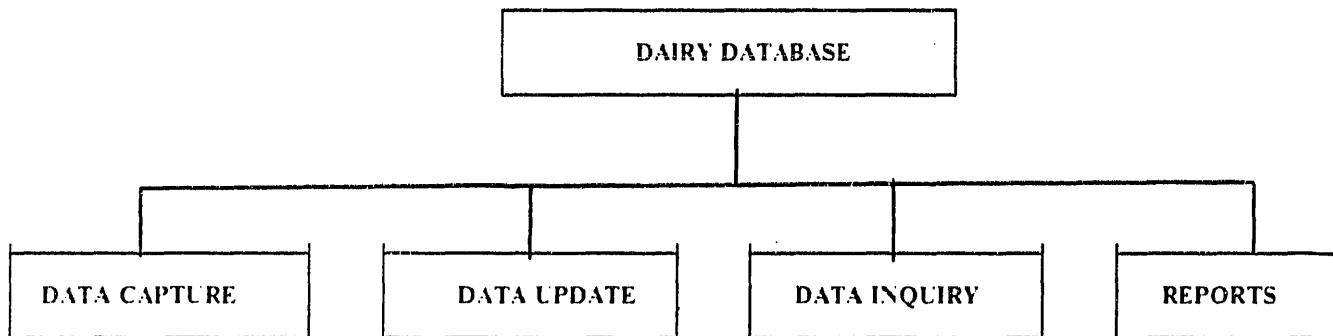
SYSTEMS PROPOSAL

The following is a preliminary proposal, at present under consideration within the secretariat, of which the immediate aim is to computerize all the statistical work on dairy products.

SYSTEMS DESCRIPTION

The Dairy application would be a statistical database system which will provide information for decision making processes for the International Dairy Arrangement Committees of the Protocols.

SYSTEMS FUNCTIONS



DATA CAPTURE

There are two possibilities of collecting data.

- (1) Dairy Questionnaires (1-4) would be used to collect the data from the participants and then would be entered interactively by the secretariat into the database with appropriate validation checks.
- (2) The participants could provide data to the secretariat in machine readable format (ie tape, floppy disk) based on standard formats established by the secretariat. The data would be entered into the database using computer programs written by the secretariat. This method of data capture would be complex and require more preparation by the participants.

DATA UPDATE

- (1) This function would allow the secretariat to revise data as required and keep up-to-date information in the database.

DATA INQUIRY

- (1) This function would allow the secretariat to obtain information on regular or on an adhoc basis for data analysis.

REPORTS

- (1) This function would allow the secretariat to produce summary reports, annex tables and any other reports required by the participants.
- (2) These reports could be further processed by the DCF (Document Composition Facility - Computer Language) in order to obtain a high quality document (eg. 1 December 1987, MEAT STATISTICS - SUMMARY TABLES).

HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE

Mainframe - Multi user powerful machine.

- (1) IBM 370 (International Computing Centre) - Hardware
 - (2) SAS Products (Statistical Analysis System) - Software
- or

Micro computer - Stand alone personal computer

- (1) IBM PS/2 or IBM XT/XT286 or compatibles - Hardware
- (2) DBASEIII or PARADOX - Software

ADVANTAGES OF THE COMPUTER SYSTEM.

- (1) The work load would be reduced for the preparation of the statistical tables needed for the International Dairy Arrangement Committees of the Protocols and for the Dairy Annual Report.
- (2) Revising of data would be faster than is possible manually.
- (3) Summary tables could be easily obtained.
- (4) The typing process for the summary tables would be eliminated.
- (5) Paper work and filing requirements will be minimized.
- (6) Data accuracy and consistency would be increased.
- (7) Further data analysis would be possible on request.

ACCESSING NATIONAL STATISTICAL DATABASES

The secretariat sees no technical difficulties in accessing the national statistical databases as long as they are connected via public data networks (eg. TELEPAC) to the International Computing Centre at Geneva. However, to access databases, the secretariat would require database-specific training, additional resources, specific approvals from participants and appropriate procedures would have to be established.