



Singapore's experience in remote audits

SPS Thematic Session on the Use of Remote (Virtual) Audit

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What are audits?

- An audit is a systematic and functionally independent examination to determine whether activities and related results comply with planned objectives¹
- For trade to occur, an importing country may determine that it is necessary to conduct an evaluation of the effectiveness of an exporting country's official inspection and certification systems
 - Such an evaluation could be done through the use of an audit, either on-site or remotely
- Examples of forms of remote audits:
 - Documentary assessment (e.g. questionnaire)
 - Submission of videos for certain procedures
 - Virtual conferences between Competent Authorities of importing and exporting countries
 - Virtual inspections

¹ *Principles for Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification (CAC/GL 20-1995)*

Singapore's use of remote audits

- Singapore has been using various forms of remote audits pre-COVID-19 (e.g. questionnaires, submission of videos) to supplement on-site audits
 - Important to us as an importing country to be able to assess exporting country's system effectively and efficiently
- Since COVID-19, availability of various technology and tools have allowed us to conduct remote audits virtually, in real time, both as an importing and exporting country
 - Approvals for new commodities, individual farms / establishments
- As an importing country, decision on whether to use virtual audits would depend on the complexity of the audits
 - E.g. If the audit process is straightforward or can be targeted to specific components that need to be assessed, compared to complex audits which involve detailed evaluation of the country/region's regulatory frameworks, verification of its effectiveness, and establishing confidence in the control system

Singapore's experience in use of remote audits

Benefits

- ✓ Reduced costs and time from travelling
- ✓ Opportunity for more participants to be involved
- ✓ Availability of simultaneous interpretation

Challenges

- Network / connection issues
- Differences in time zones between importing and exporting countries
- Limited span of vision compared to on-site audits (only able to view what the camera shows, dependent on operator of camera)
- Unable to use all senses (e.g. smell, reading of body languages)

Moving forward

- With lifting of travel restrictions, on-site audits have gradually resumed
- While not able to completely replace on-site audits, virtual audits continue to remain as an option in the suite of audit tools, based on circumstances
 - Useful to develop guidance to support the consistent application/use of virtual audits
 - Electronic Working Group under Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS) to develop discussion paper on “Use of remote audit and verification in regulatory frameworks”

Thank you