

Remote auditing of the operation of official control systems in the SPS domain – experience of the European Commission's Health and food, audits and analysis Directorate

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DG Health and
Food Safety

Health and food audits and analysis programme 2022

- ~ 220 audits/year
- EU Member States and third countries
- Systems audits – not inspections
- SPS-domain:
 - Food and feed safety, animal health and welfare, public health, plant health

Remote audits – why?



other considerations
security, limited trade

- Necessitated change in approach – travel not possible
- Roll out of video-conferencing tools
 - Webex, Skype for Business, Microsoft Teams, Zoom etc....
- Commenced September 2020
- Principles of audit have not changed

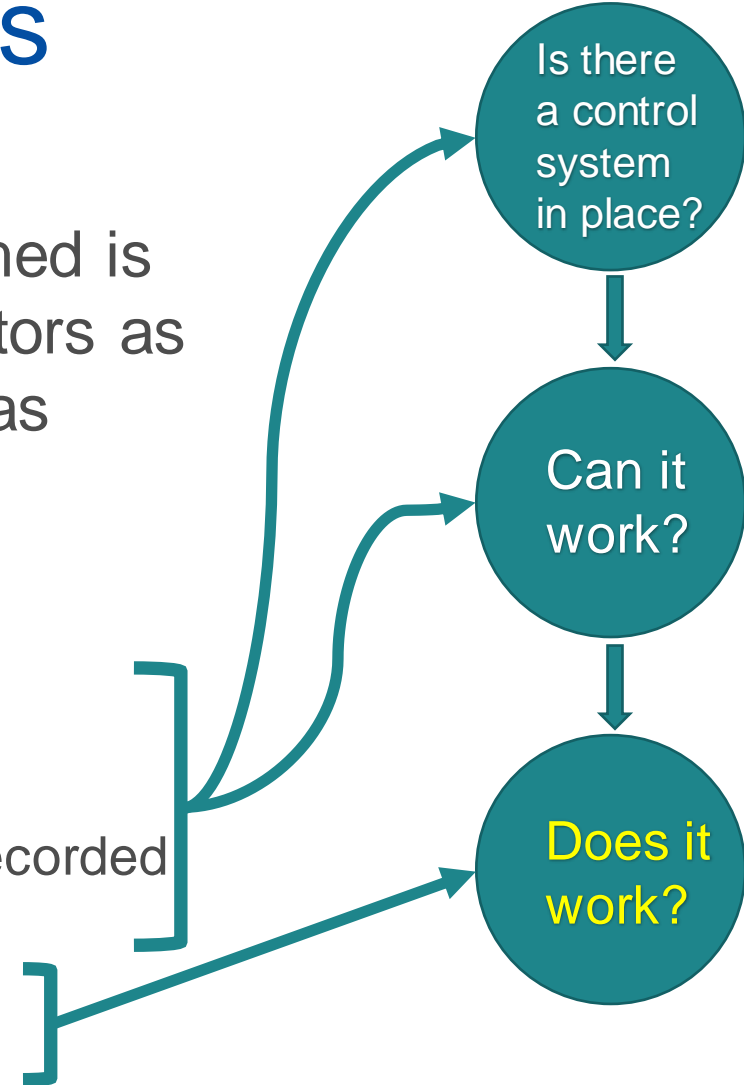
Remote audits - commonalities

- Need to have clear objectives
- Need for audit plan and pre-audit questionnaire
- Need to request, gather (translate) and assess evidence – demonstrating whether and how the control system works
 - Legal basis
 - Training
 - Procedures
 - Control records
 - Enforcement
- Need to have clear reporting modalities



Remote audits - differences

- Possibility to verify *how* controls are performed is limited – we are NOT virtually visiting operators as examples of how the competent authority has verified their compliance with EU rules
- More emphasis on:
 - control framework
 - legal basis, structure, staffing
 - documentary evidence of controls and what is recorded
 - competence of control staff (on paper)
- Indirect evidence (e.g. RASFF alerts)



Remote audits - challenges

- Internet connectivity, access to videoconferencing platforms, audio visual equipment & familiarisation
- Interpretation (simultaneous or consecutive)
- Attention span
- Screen (document) sharing – operator reticence
- Speed of information processing
- Ensuring the most appropriate people are present (and participate) in the remote meeting
- Time span of the entire exercise
- (Storage and use of images – personal data)



Remote audits – lessons learned

- Possible
- A ‘greener’ alternative to on-the-spot
- More emphasis on thorough preparation and analysis of data
- When does the ‘audit’ (proper) begin?
- Overall can be more time consuming and the answer to the ‘does it work’ question may not be accurate (i.e. false-positive outcome)
- Some topics more suitable for remote audits than others



Commission remote audits – reports

- 154 **fully remote** audits (SPS) between 31/3/2020 and 31/12/2021 – 107 in EU Member States; 47 in third countries
- 70 reports published to date - https://ec.europa.eu/food/audits-analysis/audit_reports/index.cfm
- 11 **partially remote** (4 to be completed on-site in 2022)
- Since Jan 2022, have moved to a **hybrid audit model** as the default



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Health and food audits and analysis

DG(SANTE) 2021-7253

FINAL REPORT OF AN AUDIT
OF DENMARK
FROM 28 APRIL TO 12 MAY 2021

IN ORDER TO
EVALUATE THE CONTROL SYSTEM IN PLACE FOR LIVE BIVALVE MOLLUSCS

DG(SANTE) 2021-7344

FINAL REPORT OF AN AUDIT
CARRIED OUT IN
ITALY

FROM 9 TO 19 NOVEMBER 2021
IN ORDER TO
EVALUATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ANIMAL HEALTH CONTROLS IN
RELATION TO AFRICAN SWINE FEVER

Thank you



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