



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Commission to South Africa

8 December 2008

## Press Release

.../for immediate release

### **Contamination incident by dioxins and PCBs in pork meat from Ireland The Commission follows closely the contamination incident to ensure public health protection**

During routine monitoring by the Irish authorities of the food chain for a range of contaminants, elevated levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) were found in pork meat. As these PCB levels might be an indicator for unacceptable dioxin contamination, further investigations were immediately started to determine the dioxin content and to identify the possible source of contamination.

Yesterday, the analytical results confirmed the presence of very high levels of dioxins in pork meat, about 100 times the EU maximum level of 1 picogramme/gram fat for dioxins and 1.5 picogramme/gramme fat for the sum of dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs. Possible adverse human health effects are related to long term high level exposure to dioxins and PCBs. A short term peak exposure to dioxins and PCBs does not result in adverse health effects. However adequate measures have to be taken to remove highly contaminated products from the food chain to limit human exposure as much as possible.

The use of contaminated animal feed was identified to be the source. Preliminary evidence indicates that the contamination problem is likely to have started in September 2008. All possibly contaminated feed has been blocked.

The contaminated feed was provided to 10 pig farms which are producing about 10 % of the total supply of pigs in Ireland. Pigs from these farms were after slaughter processed by meat processing plants which are responsible for about 80 % of the total supply of pork meat and pork meat products from Ireland.

Given the high levels found and that it is not possible to trace back the Irish pork meat and pork meat products to the farms affected by the dioxin contamination incident, the Irish authorities decided yesterday to recall from the market all pork products produced from pigs slaughtered in Ireland, even if not more than 10 % of the Irish pig meat production is affected by the contamination incident. Distribution details of possibly contaminated pork meat and pork meat products to other Member States and third countries will be provided to the Rapid Alert System for Feed and Food (RASFF) later today.

Besides pig farms, the contaminated feed was also delivered to some cattle farms, however no dairy farms are affected. The use of this contaminated feed in a cattle diet is much more limited than in a pig diet but, as a precautionary measure, the affected cattle farms are blocked and investigation are ongoing to determine if the bovine meat is contaminated at unacceptable levels.

The Commission is closely following up this contamination incident and the actions taken to withdraw any potentially contaminated pork meat and pork meat products from the market ensuring consumer health protection. The Commission will organise within very short notice a meeting with the competent authorities from the affected Member States to share information and to ensure a harmonised enforcement approach across the affected Member States to ensure a high level of human health protection. The Commission will provide regular updates on developments in this contamination incident.

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