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Agreement on agriculture and food safety

What is it about?

Trade in food and agricultural products between Switzerland and the EU is worth more than CHF 16 billion every year. The EU is Switzerland's main trading partner. Agricultural products provide a clear illustration of this: 50% of Swiss exports in this sector go to the EU, while 74% of imports originate from the EU (2023 figures).

Food fraud and contamination are a persistent issue, with products finding their way onto the market that are unsafe and threaten public health. Switzerland and the EU want to work more closely together to minimise the risks. The aim is to create a common food safety area that encompasses all plant and animal health-related and legislative aspects of food safety along the food chain and covers the majority of trade in agricultural products with the EU.

Expanding the Agreement on Trade in Agricultural Products (Agreement on Agriculture) in the area of food safety will ensure better protection for consumers and improve market access by comprehensively removing non-tariff barriers to trade. Harmonisation of agricultural policies remains out of the question. The existing border protections will be maintained. Specific exemptions ensure that the agreement will not lead to a lowering of the standards applicable in Switzerland, particularly in the areas of animal welfare and genetically modified organisms.

Outcome of the negotiations

An additional protocol to the Agreement on Agriculture will create a common food safety area, i.e. it will extend the scope of the agreement to ensure that it encompasses the entire food supply chain. This will also give Switzerland the desired access to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the relevant EU networks. Switzerland will furthermore now be included in the EU system for the authorisation of plant protection products.

The existing exemptions, such as the ban on animal transit, will remain in place and new exemptions have been negotiated, notably on animal welfare and genetically modified organisms. Beyond the mandate, the negotiations also succeeded in ensuring that the obligation to indicate the country of origin of foodstuffs sold in Switzerland would remain in place.

The common food safety area will encompass plant health (currently Annex 4), animal feed (currently Annex 5), seeds (currently Annex 6) and trade in animals and animal products, including food products of animal origin (common veterinary area; currently Annex 11) – all of which are included in the current Agreement on Agriculture. In addition, it will regulate trade in non-animal foodstuffs and the authorisation of plant protection products.

The annexes to the agreement that are not part of the common food safety area (i.e. current Annexes 1–3, 7–10 and 12) will continue to apply as before and will not be subject to dynamic adoption of EU law developments. In the event of disputes with relation to these annexes, an arbitration panel is provided for, but without the involvement of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). In addition, any compensatory measures in these annexes would only be applicable in the event of a breach of the Agreement on Agriculture (incl. food

security), and would not be applicable in the event of a breach of any other single market agreement.

Switzerland and the EU remain free to shape their own agricultural policies. The existing border protections (including customs duties and quotas) will also remain in place.

The negotiation objectives have been achieved.

Importance for Switzerland

The agreement offers significant benefits with regard to the food industry, plant and animal health and the protection of consumers. It also safeguards Switzerland's sovereignty with regard to its agricultural policy.

The creation of a common food safety area and access to the EFSA and European early warning and cooperation systems will enable Switzerland to identify and mitigate risks in the food chain more effectively.

The removal of non-tariff trade barriers in the common food safety area will facilitate access to the EU market for Swiss food producers.

Switzerland remains free to shape its own agricultural policy. The existing border protections will also remain. During the negotiations, Switzerland additionally secured important exemptions that will enable it to maintain its high standards on issues such as animal welfare and the regulation of genetically modified organisms.