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*A REPORT FOR
THE CALIFORNIA
CHERRY BOARD*

GENERAL ISSUES OF INTEREST TO THE CCB:

Thematic Session on Pest-Free Areas

- Following an oral proposal by the United States at the November 2017 meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Sanitary and Phytosanitary Committee (SPS), SPS committee members agreed to hold a thematic session on pest-free areas on February 27, 2018.
- The thematic session will provide an opportunity for WTO members to increase their awareness of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) standard for pest-free areas, and share practical experiences about the challenges and benefits of implementing pest-free areas in practice. This, in turn, should contribute to building confidence among trading partners when recognizing or seeking recognition of their pest-free areas.
- It is proposed that the meeting provide a discussion on pest-free areas from the perspective of an importing as well as an exporting party. More information is available at the following WTO [notification](#).

Korea Proposes Amendments to Standards for Food Utensils, Containers, and Packages

- The Republic of Korea [notified](#) the World Trade Organization (WTO) of a [proposed amendment](#) (in Korean) to the “Standards and Specifications for Food Utensils, Containers, and Packages.”
- The proposed amendments include combining the standards and specifications of the utensils, containers, and packages for food and livestock products as well as revising the method of sampling and handling of samples.
- The proposed date of entry into force is January 1, 2019.

India Operationalizes Organic Standards

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India operationalized its “Food Safety and Standards (Organic Food) Regulation, 2017” on November 9, 2017, according to a U.S. Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service GAIN [report](#).
- The regulations were finalized after incorporating comments received from stakeholders on the draft regulation that was [notified](#) to the World Trade Organization (*BCI Monitor* 6-27-17).
- The regulation states that any food offered or promoted as organic food must comply with all the applicable provisions of the National Program for Organic Production (NPOP), the Participatory Guarantee System for India (PGS-India), or any other system or standards that may be notified by FSSAI.

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- The regulation also mandates that foods labeled as organic must convey full and accurate information on the organic status of the product, and carry either a certification mark or quality assurance mark given by an authorized body mentioned above.

European Union Extends Russian Sanctions

- The European Union (EU) agreed on December 14 to extend economic sanctions on Russia for another six months. The sanctions, which target Russia's energy, financial, and defense sectors, were set to expire on December 31, 2017.
- The economic sanctions were first imposed in 2014 over Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region as well as for its support to separatists in eastern Ukraine. Since 2014, both Russia and the EU have extended sanctions multiple times.
- In July 2017, Russia [extended](#) sanctions on agricultural products against the EU, as well as the United States, until December 31, 2018.

Update on the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

- South Korea's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy announced the completion of its statutory requirements for renegotiating trade deals, and said it will push to begin talks on the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (KORUS) as early as within a month, according to the Korean Yonhap News Agency.
- The trade ministry submitted its plan to renegotiate KORUS to the National Assembly on December 18 – the last step required before talks can begin. The plan included input from the public hearings held in November and early December, the first of which was cut short by protests from agriculture groups opposed to giving the U.S. more access to the Korean market.
- During the first special session of the KORUS joint committee, held in August 2017, the United States had a list of demands that included a request that Korea remove the remaining agriculture tariffs under the agreement (*BCI Monitor* 8-22-17). South Korean farmers are pressing the Moon Jae-in administration to take a hard line in the upcoming talks with the U.S., especially regarding requests for increased market access.

The Eleventh World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference Concludes

- The 11th biennial World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference that brought together nearly 4,000 ministers, trade officials, and other delegates from the WTO's 164 members and observers ended on December 13 with members failing to conclude any new agreements.
- The accomplishments from the three-day meeting include a commitment from members to secure a deal on fisheries subsidies by the end of 2019, the renewal of a moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions for another two years, as well as a moratorium that prevents members from bringing non-violation cases under the WTO's intellectual property agreement.
- Additionally, the U.S. along with 16 other WTO members, issued a [joint statement](#) on agriculture Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) to demonstrate their commitment to farmers to fix missing and misaligned pesticide MRLs for agricultural exports. The joint statement called for the strengthening of science-based SPS measures, an increase in the efficiency of Codex in setting international standards on pesticide MRLs, as well as greater transparency and predictability in the establishment of national MRLs.