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SPECIFIC ISSUES OF INTEREST TO THE CPAB:

AMS Issues Request for Proposals to Buy Canned Pears

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) recently published a request for proposal to purchase canned pears.
- AMS guarantees a minimum purchase of 372,600 cases and may purchase a maximum of up to 411,480 cases of #300 canned pears. The pears are intended for needy families and other domestic assistance programs and deliveries will be made from July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011. Details of the proposal, including minimum purchase amounts, are subject to change.
- Offers are due by June 8, 2010. For more information, please see: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5084661>.

EU Amends Duty Trigger Level for Pear Imports

- On May 27, the European Commission published a regulation adjusting the trigger levels for additional duties on pears and other commodities.
- Pears imported in the period from January 1 to April 20 will face a duty trigger level of 280,764 metric tons (MT), an increase from the previous duty trigger level of 224,927 MT. Additionally, pears imported from July 1 to December 31 will face a duty trigger level of 83,435 MT, an increase from the previous duty trigger level of 38,957 MT.
- To view the regulation in full, please see: <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:129:0050:0051:EN:PDF>.

UK Publishes 2011 Food Monitoring Program Proposal

- The United Kingdom's (UK) Pesticide Residues Committee (PRC) has put together a preliminary list of commodities to be surveyed in their 2011 pesticides monitoring program.
- The PRC's proposed list includes 16 fruits and vegetables as well as several other fresh and processed foods. However, not all of the foods currently listed will be included in the program. The PRC plans to review and finalize the list before their meeting in July.
- The UK will also take part in the EU's harmonized pesticide monitoring program in 2011. As a participant, the PRC will monitor eight specified commodities, including pears.
- Comments on the list are due by June 16, 2010. For additional information or to view the proposed list of monitored commodities in full, please see: <http://www.pesticides.gov.uk/prc.asp?id=2897>.

GENERAL ISSUES OF INTEREST TO THE CPAB:

Japan and China Sign Food Safety Cooperation Agreement

- On May 31, officials from Japan and China reached an agreement to improve food safety standards in both countries. The bilateral agreement aims to improve the efficacy of food safety oversight and bolster consumer confidence in the safety of imported food.
- The initiative follows several food contamination incidents, including the melamine milk scandal in China and the 2007/2008 scandal in which 10 Japanese consumers were sickened by imported Chinese dumplings containing pesticides.

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(Japan and China Sign Food Safety Cooperation Agreement continued)

- The pact stipulates that officials from each country are permitted to inspect the other's food processing facilities when concerns are raised over the safety of certain food items. The countries will also hold annual meetings and establish an action plan to determine the best methods for handling food safety issues quickly and efficiently.

New Zealand and Russia to Begin Free Trade Talks

- The governments of New Zealand and Russia announced that they will begin talks for a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA). The announcement followed a May 31 meeting between New Zealand Trade Minister Tim Groser and Russian Economy Minister Elvira Nabiullina. Any deal would include Kazakhstan and Belarus, Russia's customs union partners.
- New Zealand currently has bilateral FTAs with China, Thailand, Singapore, and Chile, and is in FTA talks with South Korea, India, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates). New Zealand is also involved in the ongoing negotiations of the Transpacific Partnership agreement (TPP: the U.S., New Zealand, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam).

New Website Promotes Dialogue on the Transpacific Partnership Agreement

- A new website has been launched to provide a comprehensive database of information on the ongoing negotiations of the Transpacific Partnership agreement (TPP: the U.S., New Zealand, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam).
- Entitled the Transpacific Partnership Digest, the website contains highlights of the latest stories and reports on the TPP, legal texts of existing FTAs among the countries involved in TPP negotiations, documents posted by governments, businesses, and activist groups about the TPP, an automatically updated RSS feed of all news articles referencing the TPP, and other features. To access the site, please see: <http://p4tpp.dyndns.org/>.
- The second round of TPP negotiations will take place the week of June 14 in San Francisco.

EU Issues Report on Trade-Restrictive Measures by Trade Partners

- The European Commission (EC) published a report on May 28 outlining protectionist measures taken by the European Union's (EU) 30 main trade partners since October 2008. The report indicates that 73 protectionist measures were implemented since November 2009, for a total of 278.
- Russia, Argentina, and Indonesia were identified as the countries implementing the most protectionist policies. Russia's incorporation of increased tariffs as a permanent part of its customs union with Belarus and Kazakhstan was cited as particularly troubling. The EC also indicated that few protectionist measures have been removed.
- The full report is available here: http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2010/may/tradoc_146198.pdf.

U.S. Accepting Comments on Codex Activities

- The USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) recently announced an opportunity to comment on international standards under consideration by the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Codex will be holding its 33rd session in Geneva on July 5-9.
- Issues to be reviewed at the upcoming Codex meeting include new Codex MRLs approved by the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues (CCPR) earlier this year. There is no deadline for comments on Codex-related activities, though the issues listed in the announcement are currently moving forward. For additional information, please see: <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/pdf/2010-13403.pdf>.

CNN Special Report Focuses on "Dirty Dozen" List

- This week CNN ran an investigative report entitled "Toxic America" concerning the use of various chemicals commonly used in the U.S. A section of the report focused on pesticide residues on produce.
- The article specifically cited the Environmental Working Group's (EWG) Shopper's Guide to Pesticides list, an annual survey of what it considers to be the "most and least contaminated" fruits and vegetables. In media reports, the 12 products identified as the most contaminated by the EWG study have been referred to as the "dirty dozen."
- Ranked 33rd out of 49 products, pears are identified as one of the least contaminated products. At this ranking, pears narrowly missed placement on the "Clean 15" list, which identifies the 15 products that contain little to no pesticides. The report does not indicate that there were any residue violations in their samples. In the CNN article, EWG claims that consumers can reduce pesticide exposure by 80 percent by avoiding conventional produce EWG has identified as most contaminated.
- In response to the CNN report, United Fresh issued a statement citing a USDA study indicating that over 98% of fresh fruits and vegetables showed undetectable or extremely low levels of pesticide residues, and the remaining 2% typically contained residues below federally allowed levels. The statement called the CNN report and EWG list "irresponsible," saying that "creating needless alarm about infinitesimally small residues could actually discourage consumption of fresh produce, thereby negatively affecting the health of millions of American consumers."