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MEAT EXPORTERS WELCOMES SIGNING OF NZ/EU VETERINARY AGREEMENT

“It’s excellent news the provisional Agreement is now firmly and finally in place,” said Meat Industry Association Executive Director, Brian Lynch. He was commenting on the Government announcement that the six-year old provisional Veterinary Agreement between New Zealand and the European Union (EU) had been formally ratified by the two parties in Brussels on 24 January 2003.

“The EU is our dominant sheepmeat market. It takes nearly two-thirds our total lamb and mutton exports. Under current quota arrangements that’s about 225,000 tonnes each year. 95 per cent of our meat exports to Europe are in added value form. With by-products like hides and skins included the EU market is now worth two billion dollars annually. When the Vet. Agreement was first initialed in 1996 the EU market was worth barely half its present value”

“That’s impressive growth by any standard. It hasn’t happened without great effort by New Zealand meat exporters and farmers to supply product consistently to the expectations of a very demanding marketplace. European consumers like New Zealand meat products but they are sensitive about food safety issues and their loyalty can’t be taken for granted.”

“That’s where the Vet Agreement has such promise for the future. European hygiene requirements are among the most rigorous anywhere. The fact that the EU authorities have recognized our food safety systems as giving levels of protection that match their own, will be a huge advantage in strengthening the appeal of New Zealand meat products in that fastidious market.”

“Under the Agreement areas of potential regulatory duplication can be eliminated. New Zealand meat processors and exporters can expect fewer inspection visits, and faster border clearing times which is especially important for the premium chilled lamb that now makes up over 15 per cent of the trade. The Agreement has procedures for prompt handling of emerging issues in areas such as animal identification and welfare, and the possible implications of new EU legislation. It provides for a regional approach if New Zealand ever had to confront a serious food scare.”

Mr Lynch said the New Zealand meat industry would now want to subject every relevant EU hygiene regulation to cost benefit study to identify opportunities offered by the Agreement for fresh savings and efficiencies. “We will need to work closely with officials in the Food Safety Authority; they deserve much credit for bringing this lengthy exercise to a successful conclusion.”

For further comment call Brian Lynch on:

04 970 3444 (h)
04 473 6465 (w)
0274 452 958 (mobile)