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VETERINARY LEGISLATION IN HUNTING IN SERBIA: ARE WE CLOSER OR FURTHER AWAY FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION?

Urošević I.M., Petrović J., Ristić A.Z., Mirceta J., Stojanac N.

Abstract

This paper analyzes the regulations concerning the health status of wildlife populations and game meat hygiene in Republic Serbia: Law on game and hunting (2010), Veterinary medicine law (2010) and subsidiary legal acts in comparison with EU legislative (in Austria and Croatia).

The legal framework in Serbia related to game meat is divided between the jurisdictions of rules that regulate hunting, veterinary, food safety and others. That implies also responsibilities in the food chain. In relation to legal regulations in the EU (i.e. Austria) evident are major differences compared to the relatively large competencies there having hunter and trained person, practically as a veterinary inspector in Serbia. Thus, the export of game meat from Serbia in an EU country would be complicated process. If we look the hunting legislation in Croatia, there are significantly used resources from the EU pre-accession funds for education and general harmonization of these regulations. This was not the case with Serbia, because according to available information there was nothing from EU projects directly related to hunting, including game meat hygiene.

According to the strategy of Serbia’s accession to the European Union, there is space for correction and supplement of legislation relating wildlife health management including game meat hygiene. It is also necessary previously to do extensive scientific researches about the situation concerning the meat hygiene of game animals in Serbia, due to lack of information about it. Specifically, how many facilities we have for temporary storage of game meat in accordance with the regulations of Serbia and/or from EU. It is also important to investigate how the current regulations in Serbia are applied in practice, and how much hunters and authorized people know about this legislation.

Keywords: EU, wildlife, meat hygiene, regulations, Serbia

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Introduction

In Serbia and all West Balkan region, wild game meat has great economic (hunting), and nutritional significance - in cooking because of the high content of valuable protein and less fat, but with more valuable composition (polyunsaturated). Certainly, ensuring the safety of game meat has an important role in the entire system of food safety, particularly in terms of zoonoses (Urosevic et al., 2011). Within the hunting economy game management in European Union, a significant place takes legislation of veterinary medicine. I.e. in Austria, meat from wild game is a highly valued product. To ensure food safety “from forest/field to fork”, hunters supplying meat to consumers or retailers have to undergo specific training (Winkelmayer, 2009). Serbia adopted a many different veterinary medicine and hunting regulations including by-law relating documents (Urosevic et al., 2011). In terms of hunting tourism and the export of game meat Serbia needs to harmonize the veterinary and sanitary regulations with European Union member countries. Currently, it is a big obstacle standing in the way of the arrival of a larger number of foreign tourists in our hunting grounds, the greater shooting of especially on small game, and then legal game meat transportation to their country of origin. In relation to Serbia and other countries in the region, Austria is an example of countries with similar hunting tradition and highly developed economic impact of hunting with regulations (Regulation on the inspection of meat, Anonymous, 2006) that comply with the European Union (Anonymous, 2004c). This was the reason that we make short analysis of regulations in the field of veterinary medicine in relation to game management in general.

Material and methods

This paper analyzes the regulations concerning the health status of wildlife populations and game meat hygiene in Republic Serbia: Law on game and hunting (Anonymous, 2010a), Veterinary medicine law (Anonymous, 2010b), the Law on food safety (Anonymous, 2009), "Regulation on veterinary-sanitary conditions, and general and specific requirements for food hygiene to be met by facilities for handling with shot wild game, and how to carry out official controls shot wild game (Anonymous, 2010c) and other subsidiary legal acts.

Results and discussion

Overview of legislation in Serbia relating to wildlife management: Law on Food Safety (Anonymous, 2009). In it, there is a provision about hunting and supporting activities relating to the storage, handling and transport of game carcasses from the production place to the facility. It was highlighted that in relation to the distribution of responsibilities, duties of state administration in food safety, veterinary inspections carried out as follows: in the phase of export products of animal origin, as well as the retail trade of game meat in specialized stores. In the Law on Veterinary Medicine (Anonymous, 2010b) provides the obligations to that needs to be fulfilled by a hunting grounds user during the handling of game meat. This law regulates and issues of veterinary - sanitary control of game animals meat. Legal persons engaged in hunting and Hunting associations shall be obliged to temporary store carcasses and parts of the of game for the implementation of veterinary -
sanitary controls, in the case the game is safe for human consumption. If the game meat and trophies are to be exported from Serbia it shall be subject of veterinary sanitary control at border crossings. Here are included only facilities which fulfill the veterinary-sanitary conditions, general and specific requirements for food hygiene and food for animals assigned the export control number and are entered in the Register of export facilities. In general, the export consignments of animals and animal products shall be issued by the original international veterinary certificate which confirms that the shipment fulfills the conditions of the importing country, and for food of animal origin, that these foods are safe for human consumption. Trophies of wild animals can be set out without the export facility, but with adequate preparation and provision of required documentation according to EU regulations. In the transport of hunted game and its parts, the main responsibility has a hunting ground user, which is in accordance with the Law on game and hunting (Anonymous, 2010a). Hunting grounds user belongs dead or caught animals and their parts (trophies, etc.) belongs to hunting grounds user. He shall determine by its act the price of: hunting wild game, meat of shot game, hunting services of the wildlife, etc. Hunting grounds user can export shot game shot animals or its parts, only if it registered for such activities, as mentioned above. In the 2010th the Ministry of Agriculture of Serbia passed a subsidiary act concerning to the safety of meat from game animals: „Regulation on veterinary-sanitary conditions, and general and specific requirements for food hygiene to be met by facilities for handling with shot wild game, and how to carry out official controls shot wild game (Anonymous, 2010c). In these regulations are more closely prescribed the veterinary-sanitary conditions, general and specific requirements for food hygiene, which in terms of construction and reconstruction of facilities must fulfill the temporary storage of shot game animals, and the manner of carrying out the official control shot game animals.

Overview of legislation in European Union - example from Austria

Austrian legislation on game meat hygiene from the year 1994 (Anonymous, 1994) introduced a three-step inspection system. The hunter was responsible for ante-mortem inspection and examination of the carcass and intestines upon evisceration. Trained persons were responsible for the examination of the carcass and (edible) inner organs. The official veterinarian was responsible for the inspection of carcasses entering game handling establishments and was also always responsible involved when serious abnormalities were detected during inspection by hunters or trained persons. For small game, a simplified version was established. Under the “new” EU hygiene package from year 2004 (Anonymous, 2004b), the responsibility of trained persons increased. This means, that in all situations of direct marketing, the (documented) inspection by both hunters and trained persons is mandatory, and in case of serious abnormalities (observed deviations) from normal condition, carcass and its organs must be presented to an official veterinarian for inspection. Since 1994, ca. 20.000 hunters have been trained as „trained persons“, which includes theoretical lessons on anatomy, normal appearance of organs, main diseases, hygiene, and legislation. Training books have been updated regularly to address changes in legislation (Winkelmayer et al., 2008). Their experience shows that a combination of basic courses, advanced training courses, and evaluation schemes can be effective in enabling hunters to fulfill the needs for a hygienic and safe direct supply of game meat in the sense of a longitudinal integrated “from forest/field to fork” approach. Responsibilities in the food chain are the following: for supplying the local market or the consumers directly with small quantities of meat, the examination, done by the trained person, is the end-
examination of game meat. Official Veterinarian after examination, which takes into account the findings documented by the hunter and the trained person, game meat may enter the EC/EU market (Winkelmayer, 2009).

Experiences from Croatia

Harmonization of the Croatian legislation to the one in the European Union in the field of veterinary medicine has been one of the more complex packages that Republic of Croatia had to fulfill as a candidate country. In particular, they highlighted the Veterinary Law (Anonymous, 2007a), Law on Food (Anonymous, 2007b), the Law on Hunting (Anonymous, 2005) and others, that provide a framework whereby they have made many subordinate legislation which specifically elaborates action in certain cases. So, Mikus (2010) notes that wild game meat is subject to veterinary inspection (Anonymous, 2007c, 2007d) and certain procedures prior to marketing. Game venison must be inspected as soon as possible after admission to the facility for the processing of carcasses of wild game. The official veterinarian takes into consideration the statement or information in accordance with the provisions of the Regulations on the hygiene of food of animal origin (Anonymous, 2007c) delivered by a trained person. Considering the legislative framework, if observe hunting from the perspective of sustainable development, particularly where aspire following modern European heritage, it is obvious that the framework of legislative measures and regulations of Republic of Croatia is really respectable (Florijancic et al., 2010). Anyway, the Croatian experience in adapting of legislation can be very useful for future candidate countries for accession to the European Union. Especially having in mind that the legislation in Croatia is fully harmonized with the one in EU enactment of the following laws: Veterinary Law (Anonymous, 2013a), Food Law (Anonymous, 2013b), The law on food hygiene and microbiological criteria for food (Anonymous, 2013c).

Serbian legislation perspective

As shown, the legal framework in Serbia related to game meat is divided between the jurisdictions of rules that regulate hunting, veterinary, food safety and others. Therefore dealt also responsibilities in the food chain. In relation to legal regulations in the EU (for example in Austria) evident are major differences compared to the relatively large competencies there have hunter and trained person, practically as a veterinary inspector in Serbia. Thus, the export of game meat from Serbia in an EU country would be complicated process. It should be emphasized also sharing of veterinary competence in control of game meat. In Serbia it is centralized at the federal level exclusively, and in Austria the jurisdiction transferred to Government of nine federal provinces. Least but not last, if we look the hunting legislation in Croatia, there are significantly used resources from the EU pre-accession funds for education and general harmonization of these regulations. This was not the case with Serbia, because according to available information there was nothing from EU projects directly related to hunting, including game meat hygiene. An exception is the action of oral vaccination of foxes and suppression of classical swine fever as a project funded from IPA funds, which is more or less implemented in all countries/ EU candidates the our region.
Conclusion

According to the strategy of Serbia's accession to the European Union, and the commitment to harmonization of regulations related to human and animal health and health safety of food of animal origin, there is space for correction and supplement of legislation relating wildlife management including game meat hygiene. Anyway, it should be determine the transitional period before the entry into force of provisions the Regulation - EC No. 852/2004 (Anonymous, 2004a) 853/2004 (Anonymous, 2004b) and 854/2004 (Anonymous, 2004c) to amend in the current Serbian regulations. Thereby, it should take good (and bad) experiences of countries in the region, which have this passed this for example as Croatia. It is also necessary previously to do extensive scientific researches about the situation concerning the meat hygiene of meat of game animals in Serbia, due to lack of information about it. Specifically, how many facilities we have for temporary storage of game meat in accordance with the regulations of Serbia and/or from EU, how is comply valid national regulations, and how many hunters themselves or trained person know about this. It is also important to investigate how the current regulations in Serbia (the above-mentioned) are applied in practice, and how much hunters and authorized people know about this legislation. And naturally, what are needs to be done to enable the easier procedures for the export of game meat that foreign hunters hunt in Serbia. After all mentioned, we could recommend good experience according game meat inspection system from Austria, and apply this model for future use in Serbia. It should not be ignored the continuing education of all stakeholders in hunting, which would be solve by the drafting guide for collection and testing with the instructions on the type of biological agents to be monitored in the meat of wild game, to determine the presence and frequency of hazards in wild game meat, which are important for human health. However, it should be considered that for effective implementation of regulations in regard to game meat hygiene, and the future implementation of EU regulations, it is not enough just to intensify control and penalty provisions for particular violations or crimes. All these measures requires time, persistence and of course the unity of all stakeholders (mutual interests), which currently is not the case in Serbia (Federal and Local authorities, Hunting Association, Hunting Chamber, consumers and others).

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