

Importation of roughage and risks to animal and plant health, risks for zoonotic disease transmission and the establishment of alien organisms.

Background

The heat wave and drought during the summer of 2018 caused crop failures in many areas of Norway, resulting in increased demand for imported animal feed used to meet the needs of livestock producers. Importation of hay, straw, silage or other types of roughage from abroad may introduce novel pathogenic agents and harmful, alien organisms.

In the summer of 2018, The Norwegian Food Safety Authority (NFSA) carried out preliminary assessments of imports of hay, straw and other types of roughages from the EU and third countries, concerning the risks to animal- and plant health. Based on these assessments, the NFSA advised against importing roughage from geographical areas in which, for example, African swine fever is present. The new Animal Health Regulation, taken in effect July 2018, requires animal keepers to strengthen preventive control measures for infectious diseases. Despite the need to improve preventive animal health care, Norway cannot stop the import of feed, based on animal health considerations, from countries within the European Economic Area (EEA). There are, however, more regulatory options concerning imports from third countries. The Regulation on additional requirements relating to importation of hay and straw as animal feed (In Norwegian: Forskrift om tilleggskrav ved import av høy og halm til dyrefôr), taken in effect October 2018, requires the product to be stored in the exporting country for at least two months. It also requires that the product is harvested from areas that have not been fertilized with manure during the last two years. The regulation further stipulates that a certificate is required, where an official veterinarian in the exporting country confirms the product has been harvested from regions free of restrictions due to contagious animal disease.

The NFSA can only provide guidance based on current knowledge to importers or livestock producers. From a plant health perspective, national requirements concerning importation of roughage from all countries (including the EU) may be requested (as the plant health area is not part of the EEA Agreement), as long as the request is justifiable scientifically, and supported by evidence in a risk assessment. The NFSA needs a more complete assessment addressing plant and animal health and zoonotic diseases. This will help the NFSA provide the public with the best possible information about the safe import of feed, and provide guidance for risk-mitigating measures.

In addition to containing pathogenic agents and plant pests, imported feed may also lead to the introduction and establishment of alien organisms, with potentially adverse consequences for biodiversity in Norway. The Regulation relating to alien organisms (In Norwegian: Forskrift om fremmede organismer) does not regulate the importation of feed. However, Chapter V of the regulation requires caution by anyone engaging in activities that may result in the unintentional spread of alien organisms. The Norwegian Environment Agency needs a solid foundation of knowledge in order to provide better guidance to businesses and individuals about how to best practice caution in the importation and use of foreign roughage. Information may include, among other things, differences in risk levels, based on the countries/areas from which

importation occurs, and relevant measures for reducing identified risks. Import of roughage in 2018 has been conducted by individuals and businesses with varying capacities to implement comprehensive measures (freezing, burning, isolating, etc.). For this reason, an assessment is requested about whether there are less resource-demanding measures available.

Terms of reference:

The Norwegian Food Safety Authority and the Norwegian Environment Agency request the following from the Norwegian Scientific Committee for Food and Environment (VKM).

1. Based on the situation in 2018, provide an overview of the types of roughages that are relevant for import into Norway, measures of treatment, import volumes, as well as relevant exporting countries (EEA and third countries).
2. Assess the probability for introducing quarantine pests listed in Annex I and II in the Regulation relating to plants and measures against pests.
3. Assess the probability of introducing contagions to animals concerning diseases listed in Annex A, B, C of the Regulation on warning and notification of diseases in animals. The assessment shall include livestock, i.e. cattle, sheep, pig, horse, poultry, wild animals and pets.
4. Assess the probability of introducing contagions to humans concerning relevant zoonotic diseases not addressed in question 3.
5. Assess possible negative effects on biodiversity following introduction of harmful, alien organisms. The scope of organisms to be included in the assessment can be redefined during the project period, based on questions 2-4.
6. Regarding questions 2-5, VKM is requested to examine possible differences between various types of roughage and feed from different countries of origin.
7. Identify and assess possible measures of risk reduction and their consequences. This includes:
 - a. Relevant measures from the producer, exporter, during transport and storage at the producer and/or from the final recipient in order to reduce the probability of introducing harmful, alien organisms. Also assess the consequences from these measures.
 - b. Relevant measures from the importer and/or final recipient should harmful, alien organisms be found in the imported feed.
 - c. The Norwegian Food Safety Authority advises against importing roughage from countries in which African swine fever is present. If this import occurs nonetheless, describe possible measures that can be performed in order to reduce the probability of introducing the pathogenic agent to Norway.
 - d. Relevant measures of risk reduction to reduce the probability of introducing pathogenic agents or plant pests.

Limitations:

GMO, chronic wasting disease, quarantine pests from Appendix 1 and 2 in the Regulation on plant health.

Legal background:

- Regulation on alien organisms
- Regulation relating to plants and measures against pests
- Regulation on additional requirements relating to importation of hay and straw for animal feed.

Relevant reports/websites etc.:

- A preliminary risk assessment on the importation of hay, straw and other roughage from EU and third countries (In Norwegian), *performed by the Norwegian Veterinary Institute in 2018 on behalf of the Norwegian Food Safety Authority.*
- Supplementary assessment on the importation of roughage from Iceland, Canada and USA (In Norwegian), *performed by the Norwegian Veterinary Institute in 2018 on behalf of the Norwegian Food Safety Authority.*
- A preliminary risk assessment on plant health concerning importation of hay, straw and other roughage from EU and third countries (In Norwegian), *performed by the Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Institute in 2018 on behalf of the Norwegian Food Safety Authority.*

Conditions:

The assessment is to be written in English with a Norwegian summary. The report is to be published in dialogue with the Norwegian Environment Agency and the Norwegian Food Safety Authority. We also refer to the collaboration agreement between the Norwegian Environment Agency and VKM.

Deadline for delivery of the report is in April of 2021.

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