THE LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE PVP ENFORCEMENT: AIB’S EXPERIENCE

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Hanoi, 7 September 2016

MY AGENDA FOR THIS AFTERNOON

1. WHAT IS AIB?
2. THREE SALIENT FEATURES TO KEEP IN MIND
3. WHAT ARE THE MAIN PIRACY ISSUES IN VEGETABLE SEEDS?
4. BEST PRACTICES: ENFORCEMENT EXPERIENCE IN SPAIN AND ITALY
5. WHAT LESSONS HAVE WE LEARNT SO FAR?
BEFORE WE START, THE DEFINITIONS USED:

**IP INFRINGEMENT** = THE NON-RESPECT OF IP RIGHTS HELD BY THE RIGHT HOLDER

- accidental
- ignorance
- to legally challenge existing IP rights

**IP PIRACY** = UNAUTHORIZED COPYING, DISTRIBUTION AND SELLING OF IP PROTECTED PRODUCTS

- for a significant period of time,
- intentionally committed
- to financial gain,
- on a commercial basis

BEFORE WE START, THE FOCUS OF MY PRESENTATION IS ON ‘VERTICAL’ PVP ENFORCEMENT

BREEDING COMPANY 1 → OTHER BREEDING COMPANIES

YOUNG PLANT RAISERS
GROWERS
TRADERS/WHOLESALERS
RETAILERS
CONSUMERS
MY CONCLUSION UPFRONT:

- ‘HORIZONTAL’ ENFORCEMENT (LEGAL DISPUTES BETWEEN BREEDERS) OF BREEDERS RIGHTS, WHERE TIME AND EVIDENCE-GATHERING CONSTRAINTS ARE LESS CRITICAL, HAS PROVEN TO BE FEASIBLE AND EFFECTIVE;

- ‘VERTICAL ENFORCEMENT’ OF PBR TO COMBAT PIRACY DOWNSTREAM IN THE VEGETABLE BUSINESS CHAIN PROVES TO BE MORE DIFFICULT AS IT REQUIRES A SUPPORTING LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK:
  - evidence of infringement cannot be obtained by the right holder himself as inspections of the growers are difficult/impossible
  - without active help from authorities, breeders’ enforcement efforts are unsuccessful
  - PBR enforcement is often hindered by the lack of effective enforcement of the national seed marketing regulations.

- CONSEQUENTLY, SOME WELL ORGANISED PIRATES HAVE SUCCESSFULLY ESTABLISHED PROFITABLE BUSINESS MODELS.

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WHAT IS AIB?

- AIB = ANTI-INFRINGEMENT BUREAU FOR IP RIGHTS ON PLANT MATERIAL
- START 1 APRIL 2010
- OFFICE: BRUSSELS (BELGIUM)
- Members are integrated vegetable seed companies: Bejo, Enza, Fito, Gautier, Limagrain, Monsanto, Nunhems, Sakata, Syngenta, Takii, Pop Vriend, Rijk Zwaan

Membership is open to other integrated vegetable seed companies.

WHAT IS AIB’s MAIN MISSION?

ENSURE LEVEL PLAYING FIELD FOR ALL PLAYERS IN THE VEGETABLE BUSINESS CHAIN
AIB’S MAIN OBJECTIVES

1. AWARENESS, PUBLICITY & DETERRENCE
2. CENTRE OF EXPERTISE AND RELATED NETWORK
3. WATCHTOWER
   - infringements: where & how many & scope?
4. ASSIST MEMBERS TO FIGHT SUSPECTED PIRATES

• WORLDWIDE BUT STARTED WITH “GREATER EUROPE” (EU, TURKEY, N-AFRICA)

NOTE:
- ENFORCEMENT OF IP RIGHTS REMAINS RESPONSIBILITY OF IP RIGHTS HOLDERS
- CLOSE COLLABORATION WITH NATIONAL ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES (POLICE AND ANTI-FRAUDE AGENCIES).

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OUR SECTOR FACES SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

THE VEGETABLE SEED BUSINESS CHAIN

- nature is a perfect copying machine
- copying is cheap, requiring little capital investment
- no distinction between legally and illegally produced harvested product
- illegality does not bother consumer
- often no perceived health hazards (like pharma, pesticides or car parts)

- vegetable seeds are often small volume:
  - in weight worth much more than gold!
  - easy to transport

SELLING VEGETABLE SEEDS IS GENERALLY REGULATED BY NATIONAL SEED MARKETING REGULATIONS

- REGISTRATION IN THE NATIONAL VARIETY CATALOGUE IS REQUIRED
- SEED PRODUCER HAS TO BE CERTIFIED
- ADHERENCE TO QUALITY STANDARDS
- ORIGINAL VARIETY NAME HAS TO BE USED

NON-PVP PROTECTED VARIETIES CAN FREELY BE REPRODUCED AS LONG AS
- ORIGINAL VARIETY NAME IS USED
- CERTIFIED SEED PRODUCER
- CONFORMITY TO QUALITY STANDARDS
- NAME OF THE “ORIGINAL” SEED COMPANY IS NOT USED
ITS VERY HIGH RESEARCH INTENSITY MAKES THE VEGETABLE SEED INDUSTRY VULNERABLE FOR PIRACY

R&D Intensity (R&D investments/Net Sales)

Source: EU Commission Annual Global Survey

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WHAT ARE THE MAIN ISSUES IN THE VEGETABLE SECTOR*?

1) VEGETATIVE PROPAGATION OF GRAFTED CROPS
   • TOMATO, WATER MELON, MELON, EGGPLANT
   • SUBSTANTIAL VEGETATIVE PROPAGATION IN TOMATO IN MEDITERRANEAN BASIN (20% IN SPAIN AND ITALY; IN CHERRY TOMATOES IN ITALIAN REGIONS UP TO 40%.

2) REPRODUCTION OF SEEDS OF OPEN-POLLINATED CROPS (LETTUCE, BEANS)
   • PRODUCED OUTSIDE OF NATIONAL REGULATED SYSTEMS
   • VARIETIES ARE OFTEN MIS-LABELLED (FRAUDE)
   • PRODUCERS ARE OFTEN NOT CERTIFIED
   • PRODUCTION OUTSIDE OF QUALITY CHECKS BY AUTHORITIES
   • SIGNIFICANT ILLEGAL NETWORK

* source: annual AIB infringement surveys 2010-14

WHAT ARE THE MAIN ISSUES IN THE VEGETABLE SECTOR*? (2)

3) F2 PRODUCTION OF ONION HYBRIDS
   • EASTERN EUROPE, TURKEY, FORMER RUSSIAN STATES, SPAIN
   • physical detection is often very difficult (hardly any differentiation)

4) UNAUTHORISED SALE OF UNPROTECTED (NO PVP) HYBRIDS
   • TOMATO, SQUASH, EGGPLANT, BRASSICA, ETC.
   • MANY COUNTRIES, SEVERAL CONTINENTS
   • CAUSE: THEFT / UNAUTHORISED USE OF PROPRIETARY PARENT LINES (IN LEGAL TERMS: TRADE SECRET THEFT)
   • LEADING TO SUBSTANTIAL (FINANCIAL) IMPACT ON RIGHT HOLDER
   • MARKET DISRUPTION REPORTED IN SOME CASES

5) SALE OF COUNTERFEIT SEED PACKAGES
   • EASTERN EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST, ASIA, AFRICA
   • FOUND IN MANY CROPS

* source: annual AIB infringement surveys 2010-14
PVP INFRINGEMENT IS OFTEN LINKED TO A CLUSTER OF OTHER ILLEGALITY / OFFENSES

THE FISCAL AUTHORITY IS WITH THE BREEDERS A MAJOR VICTIM OF ILLEGAL PROPAGATION OF CHERRY TOMATOES IN SICILY:

SURVEY 2014:

CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE OF LOST SEED SALES: US$ 7.9 MILLION

MULTIPLIER EFFECT

UNDECLARED TOMATOES US$ 500 – 600 MILLION !!!
LETTUCE SEED PIRACY: INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS ARE MAKING BIG PROFITS, SO DO USERS OF THE ILLEGAL SEEDS

PRODUCTION OF ONE SEED LOT (TO COVER 2000 HECTARES)
• SEEDS PRODUCED IN CHILE
• SEEDS PELLETED IN SPAIN
  • TOTAL COSTS 61,000 US$

SALES
• SOLD IN ITALY AND ABROAD
  • SALES REVENUE 522,000 US$
  • PROFIT FOR PIRATE 461,000 US$
  • REAL VALUE 2,500,000 US$
  • PROFIT TO GROWERS 1,044,000 US$ (US$ 1017/HA)
    (=US$ 400/acre)

THIS GIVES BREEDERS FRIENDS/ALLIES TO HELP THEM TAKING ACTION AGAINST INFRINGERS

• PHYTO – SANITARY SERVICES
• SEED INSPECTION AGENCIES
• AGRICULTURAL INSPECTION AGENCIES
• ANTI-FRAUD AGENCIES
• TAX AUTHORITIES
• POLICE
IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR AIB TO PROVE PVP INFRINGEMENT WITHOUT HELP FROM AUTHORITIES

- VEGETATIVE PROPAGATION OF TOMATOES / MELONS
  - HOW TO PROVE?
  - ACCESS TO GREENHOUSE AND DOCUMENTS REQUIRED (INVOICES / PLANT PASSPORTS)

- REPRODUCTION OF LETTUCE SEED
  - OFTEN ‘WHITE BAGGED’ (NO PROPER LABELS)
  - ACCESS TO GREENHOUSE /FIELDS AND DOCUMENTS REQUIRED (FOR INSPECTION OF INVOICES / PLANT PASSPORTS)

HOW TO FIND EVIDENCE OF ILLEGAL TOMATO REPRODUCTION?

- LEGAL AND ILLEGAL PLANTS CANNOT BE DIFFERENTIATED (STUBS!)
- ILLEGALLY GROWN TOMATOES HAVE IDENTICAL DNA
- INSPECTIONS OF TOMATO / LETTUCE AT RETAILERS IS OF NO USE
- PRODUCTION IN CLOSED GREENHOUSES → NOT ACCESSIBLE

COMPARISON BETWEEN INVOICES AND NO. OF PLANTS REQUIRED

BUT HOW?

RIGHT HOLDERS ARE IN NO POSITION TO DEMAND THIS (PREVALENCE OF PRIVACY PROTECTION ABOVE SALES CONDITIONS)
CLOSE COOPERATION BETWEEN PRIVATE SECTOR AND PUBLIC SECTOR HAS BEEN KEY FOR OUR SUCCESS

THE STEPS WE NORMALLY FOLLOW:

1. Intelligence reports on illegal reproduction received by AIB
   - Growers using a PVP variety are unknown to seed company
   - Persistent rumours in the market
   - Complaints from other growers on unfair competition
   - Observations from seed company sales representatives/technicians: “this grower uses our genetics, but we have not sold to him”

2. Verification of the intelligence by AIB

3. If intelligence found credible, denouncement is made to authorities:
   - Name of suspect
   - Address and GPS coordinates of greenhouse/plot
   - Supporting evidence like pictures, labels, etc.

4. Authorities to inspect the growers/plant raisers

WITHOUT ACTIVE HELP FROM AUTHORITIES OUR ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS ARE UNSUCCESSFUL

- IMPOSSIBLE TO OBTAIN SOLID EVIDENCE OF VEGETATIVE REPRODUCTION
- IMPOSSIBLE TO OBTAIN SOLID EVIDENCE OF USE OF ILLEGALLY REPRODUCED SEED

THIS IS HOW IT WORKS IN ITALY AND SPAIN:

- AIB PROVIDES VERIFIED INTELLIGENCE TO INSPECTION AGENCIES
- INSPECTION AGENCIES WILL CARRY OUT INSPECTIONS
- AIB RECEIVES (CONFIDENTIAL) REPORT ON THE RESULTS OF THE INSPECTIONS
VEGETATIVE RE-PRODUCTION OF TOMATO: HOW DOES IT WORK?

TOMATO PRODUCTION IN SOUTHERN EUROPE

- MOSTLY GROWN WITH TWO STEMS PER PLANT
- SEASON: SOWN AND TRANSPLANTED IN SEPTEMBER, AND GROWN UNTIL MAY

GRAFTING OF (TOMATO) PLANTS

CULTIVAR PVP

ROOTSTOCK

GRAFTED PLANT
GRAFTING FACILITATES TWO WAYS OF ILLEGAL VEGETATIVE REPRODUCTION OF (TOMATO) PLANTS

(1) ILLEGAL REPRODUCTION OF TOMATO PLANTS BY CUTTINGS

(2) THE BEHEADED CULTIVAR (‘STUB’) SHOULD BE DISCARDED AFTER GRAFTING
AN ILLUSTRATION OF STUBS

GREENHOUSE WITH STUBS (BEHEADED CULTIVAR TOMATO PLANTS) TO BE ILLEGALLY SOLD
ILLEGAL REPRODUCTION OF TOMATO PLANTS BY NURSERY
ILLEGAL REPRODUCTION OF TOMATO PLANTS BY NURSERY

HOW TO FIND EVIDENCE OF ILLEGAL TOMATO REPRODUCTION FROM BEHIND THE FENCE?
MY AGENDA FOR THIS AFTERNOON

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5. WHAT LESSONS HAVE WE LEARNT SO FAR?

WE FACE TWO MAIN TYPES OF INFRINGEMENTS

1. INFRINGEMENTS OF PLANT VARIETY PROTECTION (PVP)
   a) Vegetative reproduction
   b) Reproduction of open pollinated varieties

2. INFRINGEMENT OF THE SEED LAWS OR OTHER LAWS (E.G. COMPETITION LAW)
   - a competitor markets a variety not listed (variety catalogue)
   - a competitor markets a variety under a different, listed, name (fraud)
   - a competitor uses a variety’s name to market a different variety (fraud)
   - a competitor lists a variety under a different name in the national catalogue (defaults in registration procedure)
IN ITALY AND SPAIN PVP INFRINGEMENT IS CONSIDERED AS A CRIMINAL ACT

This gives the right holder two options in case of facing a PVP infringement:

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<tr>
<th>ADVANTAGE</th>
<th>DISADVANTAGE</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1. CIVIL ACTION:</strong> Right holder in command Claim for damages</td>
<td>High costs (lawyer)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. PENAL ACTION</strong> cheap (often free)</td>
<td>Dependency on authorities for action</td>
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<tr>
<td>often claim for damages can be filed later</td>
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IN MOST CASES AIB OPTS FOR PENAL ACTION

SPAIN

- **TOMATO**: AT LEAST 20% OF ACREAGE IS PROPAGATED BY VEGETATIVE METHODS
- **MELONS**: FIRST VEGETATIVE REPRODUCTION FOUND
- **OVERALL TENDENCY**: VEGETATIVE REPRODUCTION IS EMERGING IN ALL GRAFTED CROPS WITH A HIGH SEEDPRICE
- **LETTUCE**: SEED REPRODUCTION IN NORTH (PARTLY PVP VARIETIES)
BUILDING LINKS WITH THE RURAL POLICE (SEPRONA) IN SPAIN HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL

THE GROUP OF INTEGRATED VEGETABLE SEED COMPANIES OF THE SPANISH SEED ASSOCIATION

INSPECTION AGENCY OF SPANISH SEED ASSOCIATION (GESLIVE)

denouncements

RURAL POLICE (SEPRONA)

inspections

VARIETY TESTING OFFICE

PROSECUTOR

JUDGE

penal trial

2012 – 2014: INSPECTIONS OF SUSPECTED PLANT RAISERS ON VEGETATIVE PROPAGATION AND ARRESTS MADE IN SEVERAL CASES

- ALMERIA POLICE REFUSED TO ACT EX OFFICIO AGAINST SUSPECTED PLANT RAISERS, CLAIMING THEY REQUIRED PRIMA FACIE EVIDENCE FIRST

- IN CORN SALAD 25-30 % OF PRODUCTION IS BASED ON ILLEGALLY REPRODUCED SEED !!!
- IN OTHER LETTUCE SEGMENTS ALSO VERY SUBSTANTIAL % INFRINGEMENTS
- STRONG PIRACY IN BABYLEAF (SEED COST IS 50% OF PRODUCTION COSTS)
- THE PIRATE COMPANIES ARE WELL ORGANISED

ITALY
BABY LEAF LETTUCE PRODUCTION

AIB BUILT CLOSE PARTNERSHIP WITH ANTI-FRAUD UNIT OF ITALIAN MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (ICQRF)

THE GROUP OF INTEGRATED VEGETABLE SEED COMPANIES OF THE ITALIAN SEED ASSOCIATION

ANTI-FRAUD UNIT MINAGRI ICQRF

COMPETITION AUTHORITY

TAX AND CUSTOMS AUTHORITY

inspections

VARIETY TESTING OFFICE

PROSECUTOR

penal trial

JUDGE
SO FAR, 20 PVP INFRINGEMENTS HAVE BEEN PROVEN BY THE ANTI–FRAUD UNIT OF THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (ICQRF)

- AIB made 12 denouncements made on vegetative propagation of PVP tomato
- AIB made 15 denouncements on PVP lettuce piracy

Result:
- ALL denouncements have been followed by inspections by ICQRF.
- Seized seed and plant samples went for official variety identity testing
- First results confirmed 20 PVP infringements:
  - 7 PIRATE SEED COMPANIES
  - 2 MAJOR NURSERIES USING PIRATED LETTUCE SEED
  - PENAL INVESTIGATIONS STARTED BY PUBLIC PROSECUTORS
  - ORGANISED CRIME SUSPECTED IN SEVERAL CASES

AIB HAS REGULAR REVIEW MEETINGS WITH THE ANTI–FRAUD UNIT OF THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (ICQRF)

- Very open exchange on situation
- Good feedback on actions taken
- ICQRF is also doing inspections now on its own initiative (not only based on denouncements by AIB).
• TOMATOES: SIGNIFICANT VEGETATIVE REPRODUCTION (20%), WITH PEAKS OF 40% IN CHERRY TOMATOES - GROWING FAST

• INFRINGEMENTS REPORTED IN OTHER CROPS AS WELL (MELON, EGGPLANT)

WHEN FIGHTING ILLEGAL VEGETATIVE REPRODUCTION OF TOMATO WE ALLIED WITH THE TAX AUTHORITY!

THE GROUP OF INTEGRATED VEGETABLE SEED COMPANIES OF THE ITALIAN SEED ASSOCIATION

ANTIFRAUD UNIT MINAGRI

COMPETITION AUTHORITY

TAX AND CUSTOMS AUTHORITY (GUARDIA DI FINANZA)

VARIETY TESTING OFFICE

PROSECUTOR

penal trial

JUDGE
PENAL ACTIONS (DENOUNCEMENTS) ON VEGETATIVE PROPAGATION OF PVP TOMATO VARIETIES BY TAX AUTHORITY

• AFTER MAKING OUR FIRST TWO DENOUNCEMENTS IN OCTOBER 2014 TO THE TAX AUTHORITY:
  • INSPECTION OF THE DENOUNCED GROWERS
  • 43 INSPECTIONS OF GROWERS AND NURSERIES
    – PLANT MATERIAL SAMPLED FOR DNA ANALYSIS
    – ACCOUNTING DATA SEIZED AND ANALYSED

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WHAT LESSONS HAVE WE LEARNT SO FAR? (1)

1. PVP PROTECTION PROVIDES THE STRONGEST LEGAL GROUND TO DEFEND OUR IP AGAINST ILLEGAL REPRODUCTION

2. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR COOPERATION IS KEY IN ENFORCEMENT OF PVP WITHIN THE VEGETABLE SEED CHAIN

EVIDENCE OF INFRINGEMENT CANNOT BE OBTAINED BY THE RIGHT HOLDER HIMSELF AS INSPECTIONS OF THE GROWERS ARE DIFFICULT / IMPOSSIBLE

WHAT LESSONS HAVE WE LEARNT SO FAR? (2)

THE BASICS WHEN FIGHTING PIRACY IN THE VEGETABLE SEED CHAIN:

1. MASS BALANCE ANALYSIS (COMPARING SEED INVOICE WITH NUMBER OF PLANTS GROWN) IS OFTEN (THE ONLY) WAY TO OBTAIN LEGAL EVIDENCE OF PIRACY

2. TIME TO ACT AGAINST PIRACY IS SHORT. (Growing cycles are short, summer lettuce 3-4 weeks!)

3. THEREFORE SHORT CYCLE TIMES TO PRODUCE (DNA-BASED) VARIETY IDENTIFICATION TEST RESULTS ARE VITAL

4. DNA IDENTITY TEST RESULTS SHOULD BE ACCEPTED BY THE AUTHORITIES / COURTS FOR TAKING FIRST STAGE LEGAL ACTION
WHAT LESSONS HAVE WE LEARNT SO FAR? (3)

IN GENERAL, AT LEGISLATOR LEVEL

1. IT GREATLY HELPS IF IP/PVP INFRINGEMENT IS CONSIDERED A CRIMINAL ACT IN YOUR COUNTRY’S LEGISLATION

2. IT IS IMPORTANT TO ASSIGN A NATIONAL AGENCY FOR THE ENFORCEMENT OF PVP RIGHTS. (OUR ADVICE: THIS SHOULD BE A TECHNICALLY QUALIFIED AGENCY).

3. TESTING LABORATORY - THE LAW MAKER SHOULD APPOINT THE LAB(S) TO BE USED BY THE COURTS FOR THE OFFICIAL TESTING.

4. ONE SPECIALISED PVP COURT IS BETTER THAN 10 NON-SPECIALISED ONES!

WHAT LESSONS HAVE WE LEARNT SO FAR? (4)

FOR THE BREEDERS:

1. THE PRESENCE OF A SUPPORTING (SUB-) SECTOR PLATFORM OF RIGHTHOLDERS IS A IMPORTANT (PLATFORM TO DISCUSS ISSUES, LOBBYING, DECIDE ON COMMON ACTIONS, LIAISON AND SUPPORT FOR ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES).

2. IN CASE OF INFRINGEMENT BREEDERS SHOULD ASK THEMSELVES WHO ELSE WILL BE AFFECTED BY THE PIRACY (TAX OFFICE, HEALTH AUTHORITY, POLICE IN ITS FIGHT AGAINST ORGANISED CRIME), ETC. THESE AGENCIES SHOULD BE ASKED FOR HELP!

3. TRAIN BREEDERS’ FIELD STAFF TO REPORT SUSPICIONS OF PVP INFRINGEMENTS
   Train the sales people what facts to collect (the 1st time right!): photographs, lot numbers, labels, (closed) packages, address, GPS co-ordinates

4. BREEDERS SHOULD HAVE INTERNAL PROCEDURE HOW TO REPORT SUSPICIONS OF INFRINGEMENTS:
   Important to have one-single internal contact point to report suspicions to:
   • 100% safe
   • Discrete
   • AND PUTS THE SAFETY OF THE REPORTING PERSON FIRST WHEN CONSIDERING ACTION AGAINST INFRINGERS
AIB AND INTERPOL MADE A TOOL FOR BREEDERS TO MOBILISE THEIR STAFF: THE E-LEARNING MODULE “IPR IN THE VEGETABLE SEED SECTOR”

* In English / French / Italian / Spanish / Turkish language versions

MY CONCLUSION:

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