PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

14th INTER-AMERICAN MEETING, AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL, ON HEALTH AND AGRICULTURE

Mexico City, D.F., Mexico, 21–22 April 2005

Provisional Agenda Item 8

RIMSA14/6 (Eng.)
29 March 2005
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

PROPOSED PAHO/WHO PLAN OF ACTION FOR TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN FOOD SAFETY, 2006-2007

The microbiological and chemical agents that cause foodborne diseases continue to have a direct impact on public health, and an indirect impact on tourism and the regional and international food trade.

The PAHO/WHO Plan of Action for Technical Cooperation in Food Safety for the 2006-2007 biennium entails carrying out activities aimed at helping to meet the global objectives of the World Health Organization for this PAHO/WHO priority work area; meeting the Millennium Development Goals; and responding to specific cooperation needs in the Region of the Americas.

The main strategy consists of the mobilization and optimal use of the regular internal resources of the Organization and the countries, extrabudgetary resources, and strategic collaboration with Member States and other regional and international agencies. Cooperation efforts during the 2006-2007 biennium will be aimed at strengthening the basic components of food safety systems through projects in: a. **Risk assessment,** by strengthening epidemiological surveillance of FBDs and monitoring microbiological and chemical contaminants; b. **Risk management,** by using systematic risk assessment for developing integrated food safety programs and interventions; and c. **Risk communication and education,** by promoting the adaptation, validation, and adoption of the manual for applying WHO's five keys to safer food at schools, markets, and in communities, especially in priority countries and the least protected communities, in addition to developing presential and distance education programs.

In coordination with FAO and WHO headquarters, the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) will be consolidated, and the participation of Latin American and Caribbean countries in the Codex Alimentarius will be promoted and coordinated. The political will and decisions of the Member States in assigning and promoting the mobilization and coordination of resources at the national, regional, and global levels is a *sine qua non* for moving toward the common objective of reducing the impact on health, society, and the economy of waterborne and foodborne diarrheal diseases and the presence of microbiological and chemical contaminants in food. Food safety and food security are inseparable. Through other initiatives they both contribute jointly to progress toward the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly a reduction in hunger and poverty, a reduction in the impact of infant morbidity and mortality, and education and sustainable development.

CONTENTS

Page

Problems and Challenges in Food Safety

1. The main source of development resources in the majority of countries in the Region is derived from their longstanding calling and tradition as food producers and from a growing tourism industry. For example, 40% and 48% of the total exports from South and Central America respectively are agricultural in nature. In the Caribbean subregion, information from the World Travel and Tourism Council indicates that in 2004, the travel and tourism sector accounted for 14.8% of GDP, or US$40.3 billion from tourism-related business activities. It is estimated that by the year 2014 this sector will account for 16.5% of GDP and will generate $81.9 billion in economic activity.

2. The microbiological and chemical agents that cause foodborne diseases (FBDs) continue to have a direct impact on public health, and an indirect impact on tourism and the regional and international food trade. WHO reports that 2.2 million deaths per year are attributable to diarrheal diseases, and 1.8 million occur in children under 5. In the Region of the Americas, waterborne and foodborne diarrheal diseases are one of the leading causes of morbidity in all age groups, and of mortality in children under 5. The incidence of diarrheal disease outbreaks has increased in countries stricken by natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods.

3. Although not very well known, the **direct economic impact** of the diseases associated with the consumption of contaminated food is estimated to be significant at the global, regional, and national levels, particularly among the most vulnerable populations. Acute diarrheal diseases of bacterial and viral origin continue to be one of the leading causes of morbidity in all age groups, and of disease and death in the under-5 age group, having a greater impact on unprotected and poor communities.

4. The **indirect economic impact** associated with the absence of or deficient food safety is manifested through the potential losses to agribusiness, trade, and tourism. For example, in 2003 Latin American and Caribbean food exports amounted to $63 billion as a result of the application of good standards and inspection systems.

5. **In tourism:** The presence or absence of diarrheal disease outbreaks is one of the priority factors used by tourism agencies in classifying and ranking tourist destinations. The tourism industry contributes to the creation of employment opportunities and economic development in the countries of the Region. Outbreaks of foodborne diseases are regularly reported in a number of tourist destinations in the countries of the Region and on cruise ships. Tourism is one of the Region's fastest-growing industries, and the number of tourists visiting the countries of the Region rose from 92.9 million in 1990 to 128.4 million in 2000, representing a cumulative increase of 5%. Tourism represents up to 25% of GDP in some countries of the Region and the main category of employment and income. According to data from the World Travel and Tourism Council in the

Caribbean, in 2004 this industry provided 2.4 million jobs (15.5% of total employment) and generated $40.3 billion in business activity, which represents a considerable tenfold increase over the $3.8 billion generated in 1980.

6. **In agribusiness, in addition to losses occasioned by the rejection of food in national and international markets, there are concerns over** emerging and re-emerging chemical and microbiological threats. Without being exhaustive, some aspects to bear in mind are:

- Outbreaks of emerging diseases caused by bacteria, viruses, and marine toxins, associated with deficiencies in the food safety systems;
- Development of microbial resistance to antibiotics;
- Development of mycotoxins and the appearance of new zoonotic diseases such as bovine spongiform encephalitis (BSE) and avian influenza;
- Persistence of diseases such as brucellosis, cysticercosis, and tuberculosis, etc. in vulnerable and at-risk populations.
- Improper use of agricultural chemicals, poor solid waste and wastewater management, and the use of other food contaminants such as additives. The market for these latter items is sizeable; for example, in the European Union alone, approximately 320,000 tons of active substances are currently sold annually, accounting for one-quarter of the world market.

7. **Sanitary barriers to the food trade and new requirements imposed by the international systems for the control of sanitary problems** to meet the requirements of the World Trade Organization (WTO) include:

- Harmonization of systems for sanitary certification and certification of origin to comply with the agreements on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT);
- Sanitary quality control systems such as Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOP), and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP);
- Harmonization of norms and standards in keeping with Codex Alimentarius. Reliable traceability systems;
- Standardized systems for organic agriculture and product quality certification.

8. In order to minimize the direct and indirect impact of these diseases and microbiological and chemical food contaminants, technical cooperation activities in support of national, subregional, regional, and global food safety initiatives must be implemented.

Progress in the Implementation of the Regional Program for Technical Cooperation in Food Safety

9. Progress in the implementation of the Regional Program for Technical Cooperation in Food Safety is described in detail in the report of the Fourth Meeting of the Pan American Commission for Food Safety (COPAIA 4), and the Progress Report issued by the Veterinary Public Health Unit in compliance with the 2004-2005 mandates of PAHO/WHO's Governing Bodies for RIMSA 14.

10. Although great strides have been made in the Region of the Americas with regard to regional surveillance of FBDs, training in modern inspection systems, and the development of educational materials for food safety, national investment in this area, combined with the limitations of regular technical cooperation funds seriously jeopardize development of the countries' capacity to modernize their food safety programs.

11. In light of this, it is imperative to further raise awareness about the importance of food safety among the population at large, and, in particular, at the highest political levels in order to mobilize the necessary resources for implementing the global mandates issued by the Member States at the World Health Assembly through Resolution WHA53.15, and at the PAHO/WHO Directing Council through Resolution CD42/10 in May and September 2000, respectively.

12. These actions, together with the mobilization of the countries' resources in the public and private sector, will give new impetus to efforts to work toward implementation of the global strategy and the regional program for technical cooperation in food safety, and achievement of the basic objective of reducing the impact of food contamination and diarrheal diseases caused by the consumption of contaminated food and water on health, the economy, and society.

Institutional Background

13. The first PAHO program for technical cooperation in food safety was developed in 1986 at the recommendation of the Inter-American Conference on Food Safety, pursuant to the mandates of RIMSA 4, and the 31st PAHO Directing Council.

14. The progress made in the implementation of the regional program for cooperation in food safety is analyzed by the Pan American Commission for Food Safety (COPAIA) and the Inter-American Meeting, at the Ministerial Level, on Health and Agriculture (RIMSA), two advisory bodies that recommend the biannual plans of action for cooperation with Member States to the PAHO/WHO Governing Bodies, in keeping with the strategic and programmatic guidelines.

Organizational Background

15. The program is executed under the technical coordination of the Veterinary Public Health Unit, in conjunction with INPPAZ, the intercountry veterinary public health advisors located in Barbados, Brasilia, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela, and national advisors in Bolivia, Colombia, Paraguay, and the Dominican Republic. Also, cooperation activities were coordinated with the Institute of Nutrition for Central America and Panama (INCAP), the Caribbean Epidemiology Center (CAREC) in Trinidad and Tobago, and the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute (CFNI) in Jamaica.

Mandates:

16. In 1985, the Inter-American Conference on Food Safety pointed out that *the main problems in the area of food safety and food quality, although known to the public and private sectors, have not been solved, due to the lack of resources, technical assistance, training, and coordination among the different national and international institutions.*

17. In 1986, as recommended by the Inter-American Conference on Food Safety, and in accordance with the mandates of RIMSA 4 and the 31st meeting of the PAHO/WHO Directing Council, the Regional Program for Technical Cooperation in Food Safety was established, and some cooperation activities were initiated under the Program on Veterinary Public Health.

18. In May 2000, the World Health Assembly of WHO adopted Resolution WHA53.15 recognizing food safety as an essential public health function and requesting to the Director-General of WHO to establish a global food safety strategy.

19. In September 2000, through Resolution CD42.R3 of the PAHO/WHO Directing Council, the Member States requested the Director to prepare a plan of action for the development of the regional program for cooperation in food safety .

20. In 2003, the PAHO Directing Council adopted the final report of RIMSA 13, which contains the following Resolutions: RIMSA 13.R1, RIMSA 13.R2, RIMSA 13.R6, and RIMSA 13.R8. These resolutions urge the Member States to strengthen their food safety policies and programs and request the Director of PASB to mobilize the necessary

resources for implementing the 2004-2005 Plan of Action in Food Safety and to cooperate in the development of national, subregional, and regional food safety initiatives to protect public health, reduce foodborne diseases, and promote the economic and social well-being of Member States.

Purpose and Objectives of the Plan of Action for Technical Cooperation in Food Safety for the Region of the Americas, 2006-2007

21. The PAHO/WHO regional plan for technical cooperation for the 2006-2007 biennium was designed in coordination with the WHO Food Safety Department, using the WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety and the PAHO Regional Program for Food Safety as a frame of reference.

22. The plan consists of developing cooperation activities geared to meeting the global objectives in this priority work area as defined by the World Health Assembly of WHO, while responding to the specific cooperation needs of the Region of the Americas.

23. Food safety and food security are inseparable. Together with other initiatives, they jointly contribute to progress toward the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly the reduction of hunger and poverty, sustainable reduction of the impact of infant morbidity and mortality, and education and development.

Purpose

24. To promote an environment that makes it possible for the health sector, in cooperation with other sectors and partners, to evaluate, communicate, and manage the risks associated with food contaminants.

Objectives

25. To reduce the impact on health, the economy, and society of waterborne and foodborne diarrheal diseases and the presence of microbiological and chemical food contaminants.

Technical Cooperation Strategy

26. Cooperation efforts during the biennium 2006-2007 will be aimed at strengthening the basic components of food safety systems, through three projects:

27. **Risk assessment,** whose purpose is to strengthen surveillance of food safety in the countries and the monitoring of food contaminants, along with the countries' response capacity and participation in international networks. Emphasis will be placed on national and local training to improve the acquisition, analysis, and use of information for epidemiological characterization of problems related to the lack of safety, with a systematic from-the-farm-to-the-table approach, and on improving emergency and disaster response capacity.

28. **Risk management,** whose purpose is to provide adequate technical cooperation to the countries to improve their capacity to manage food safety risks through the use of systematic risk assessment for the development of integrated food safety programs; training in the application systems for good agricultural and manufacturing practices, including sanitation standard operating procedures and hazard analysis critical control points (HACCP), with emphasis on small- and medium-sized industry; the updating and harmonization of food safety legislation through the experiences in the English-speaking Caribbean and Southern Cone countries and use of the LEGALIM text database software; and, in coordination with FAO and WHO, support for active country participation in Codex Alimentarius through the trust fund.

29. **Risk communication and education,** whose purpose is to improve the national capacity to maintain the flow of communication about food safety issues with and between the public and private sectors, through the adaptation, validation, and adoption of the manual for the application of the five keys to safer food in schools, markets, and communities, particularly in priority countries and the least protected communities; and, in coordination with FAO and WHO, to consolidate the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) by keeping focal points and the points of contact designated by the governments informed about relevant food safety problems at the global level.

30. The **main strategy consists of** the mobilization and optimal use of the regular internal resources of the Organization and the countries, extrabudgetary resources, and strategic collaboration with Member States and other international agencies, in addition to the coordination of efforts to facilitate the attainment of common goals such as the distribution of up-to-date relevant information, and effective training for problem-solving in the area of food safety and promoting intersectoral coordination among all the links of the food chain. Likewise, PAHO will center its strategy on forging partnerships with other national, binational, subregional, and international organizations for technical cooperation programs in food safety. It will continue to promote active participation by the Member States at meetings of the pertinent international organizations--in particular, the Codex Alimentarius and its commissions.

31. Activities will include: a) joint programming of technical cooperation with PAHO/WHO Representative Offices in the countries, and other technical units at the Headquarter and country level; b) project design, in coordination with FAO, the Food Safety Department of WHO, and other bilateral and multilateral agencies such as the FDA, IICA, USDA/FSIS, USAID, OAS, RIOPPAH, and consumer organizations for the mobilization of extrabudgetary resources; c) emphasis on the development of intervention projects at the operational level in the application of tools such as HACCP and the five keys to safer food by using the risk approach; d) the preparation of projects for technical cooperation among countries to facilitate the sharing of good food safety practices and experiences; and e) raising awareness at the political level and among the population at large about the importance of food safety, through political and technical forums and the media.

Expected Results and Indicators: Regional Plan for Technical Cooperation, 2006-2007

32. The expected results and indicators of the technical cooperation are presented in the table below. It is important to emphasize that the feasibility of implementing the proposed plan will depend on the countries' political will to facilitate and set in motion the mobilization of internal and external cooperation resources in this PAHO/WHO priority work area.

Expected Results	Indicators	Base Line End 2005	Goal End 2007
1. Strengthened epidemiological surveillance of FBDs, monitoring of food contaminants, and response plans (Risk Analysis)	01. Number of countries participating in regional (VETA, INFAL, PulseNet) and global food safety networks (SALM-SURV & INFOSAN).	20	35
	02. Number of countries implementing contaminant monitoring plans	6	12
	03. Number of countries implementing plans for epidemiological surveillance of FBDs	2	5
	04. Number of countries with completed assessments of economic, social, and health impact	2	5
2. Strengthened national capacity in microbiological and chemical risk analysis (Risk Analysis)	01. Number of countries participating in two risk analysis studies in matrices of food/ microbiological and chemical hazards relevant for the Region	2	5
	02. Number of countries participating in total diet studies	2	5
3. Improved integrated/intersectoral policies and systems and participation in *Codex Alimentarius*. (Risk Management)	01. Number of countries that have established operational food safety systems	2	5
	02. Number of countries that have established or updated plans of action, legislation, rules, and standards on food safety	10	15
	03. Number of countries that have set up national Codex Alimentarius committees using PAHO/WHO guides	05	15

4. Strengthened national capacity for the implementation of GAP, SSOP, GMP, and HACCP. (Risk Management)	01. Number of countries using HACCP with an emphasis on the small-and medium-sized food industry	3	10
	02. Number of countries implementing GAP, GMP, SSOP and HACCP based on matrices of food/pathogens identified through epidemiological studies	0	4
5. Strengthened national capacity in the area of food safety risk communication and education (Risk Communication & Education)	01. Number of countries that have used and evaluated the manual for the application of WHO's five keys to safer food	2	7
	02. Number of countries that have integrated food safety into the curricula of primary schools under the healthy spaces strategy.	3	7
	03. Number of countries implementing food safety strategies as part of healthy markets strategies	5	0
	04. Number of countries that have adapted, validated, and adopted guidelines for the certification of food handlers based on education and basic training	0	35
	05. Number of professionals participating in presential and distance education courses in food safety, and food safety training programs for managers	0	20

References

1. Committee on the Inter-American Conference on Food Protection. Food Protection in the Americas. National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 1987.

2. OMS. Inocuidad de Alimentos. Resolución WHA53.15 de la 53.ª Asamblea Mundial de Salud, 20 May 2000.

3. OPS/OMS. Informe final de la 3.ª Reunión de la Comisión Panamericana de Inocuidad de Alimentos (COPAIA 3), Washington. D.C., 2003.

4. OPS/OMS. 13.ª Reunión Interamericana a nivel Ministerial en Salud y Agricultura (RIMSA 13). Informe Final. Washington, D.C., 24-25 April 2003.

5. PAHO/WHO. Health in the Americas 2002. Scientific Publication No. 587. Vols. 1 & 2. Washington D.C., 2002.

6. WHO. Global Food Safety Strategy for Food Safety. Safer Food for Better Health. Geneva, Switzerland, 2002.

7. World Travel Tourism Council. Caribbean: Travel and Tourism Forging Ahead. The 2004 Travel & Tourism Economic Research.

- - -