
6th MEETING OF THE PAN-AMERICAN COMMISSION ON FOOD SAFETY (COPAIA 6)

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Provisional Agenda Item 1

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Technical secretariat's report on compliance with COPAIA 5 recommendations

The Fifth Meeting of the Pan-American Commission on Food Safety (COPAIA 5), which consists of delegates from the Ministries of Health and of Agriculture and representatives of the consumer and production sectors of the Andean Area, the British Caribbean, Central American and Latin Caribbean, Southern Cone, and North America subregions, met in Rio de Janeiro on June 10, 2008. During the discussions they acknowledged that access to safe food and to a nutritionally appropriate diet is a right of every individual. Moreover, in conformity with Art. 3 of the Regulations, as an advisory body to RIMSA, they formulated the recommendations below to PAHO and the Member States.

The PAHO/WHO Veterinarian Public Health Project's technical group on food safety, as COPAIA's ex officio secretariat herewith submits a report on compliance with the Commission's recommendations.

EX OFFICIO TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT'S REPORT ON COMPLIANCE WITH COPAIA 5 RECOMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

- Designation of competent food safety authorities as independent bodies under a comprehensive legal framework encompassing the entire food chain from production to consumption.

FAO and WHO have pointed out that food control systems should address all foods, both national and imported, and should consist of five basic components: (a) Legislation; (b) Food control management; (c) Inspection services; (d) Laboratories; and (e) Information, communication, education, and training. They should also be in accord with the principles related to the integrated concept of “from production to consumption,” risk analysis, transparency, and assessment of regulation results.

Initiatives aimed at ensuring the sustainability and reliability of the national food safety systems that meet the aforementioned characteristics should be based on the identification, analysis, and prioritization of needs. This requires an instrument to guide the characterization and analysis of the institutional and operating capability of each national service, which can measure progress and lead to the definition of technical cooperation strategic actions to modernize services. To contribute to this endeavor, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the Pan-American Health Organization joined efforts to adapt the Performance, Vision, and Strategy (PVS) tool. It should be recalled that this adaptation had been recommended by COPAIA 3. PVS is a tool for cooperating with the countries of the Americas in the strengthening of their national food safety systems, so as to help protect consumers' health, foster efficiency, and help the countries to successfully compete on national, regional, and international markets.

Services that have the same capabilities and attributions described in PVS have demonstrated efficiency and excellence in fulfilling their mission through (1) technical capacity to address current and new problems on the basis of scientific principles; (2) the human and financial capital to raise funds and hire professionals endowed with technical and leadership skills; (3) interaction with the private sector to stay the course, identify needs, and implement programs and services jointly; and (4) capacity to safeguard public health and market access by complying with norms and regulations in force, with the requisite flexibility to adapt to changes these may undergo. Implementation of the PVS methodology has allowed the different food safety system actors nationwide to participate in the analysis and discussion of results, with a view to helping define joint policies, set priorities, and implement measures. PVS has been implemented in coordination by the IICA and PAHO, and the results have lent support to several countries in the continent during the period covered by this report, including Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil (at the states' level), Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador (initially at the national level and then at the provincial level), Jamaica, and Caribbean countries. The main results achieved were overall performance in each of the four capacity areas; knowledge of the relative performance in respect of each attribution; detection of differences in the response of the various users so as to arrive at a common viewpoint; and contribution to the definition and specification of objectives and requirements.

E-Learning has been incorporated by the food safety authorities into the management of food safety in the countries, with support from the Santa Fe Food Safety Agency of the Santa Fe Province, Argentina, in the implementation of the “electronic government” strategy (17 virtual provinces, with 1,488 participants) and of the

Brazilian National Sanitary Surveillance Agency-ANVISA in the holding of a public consultation (one virtual seminar, with 152 participants) (<http://bit.ly/NI7Ybi>), among other initiatives).

Recommendation 2

- Adoption of regulations and other measures based on risk analysis to ensure food safety along the entire food chain from production to consumption, consistently with the Codex Alimentarius Commission and other relevant organizations that work on the definition of norms and standards.

In view of most countries' weakness in the use of the risk analysis tool, PAHO developed didactic material for a series of courses to strengthen the countries' capabilities for using it. This material is available in both English and Spanish at the Food Safety Virtual Library (<http://bvs.panalimentos.org>). The preparation of this material was a joint effort by PAHO and the Brazilian Sanitary Surveillance Agency-ANVISA. The first step was its validation through the training of the entire ANVISA personnel. There are audiovisual material, andragogic techniques, consultation texts, and exercises for training in Food Safety systems. There are sensitivity courses encompassing the three risk analysis components (Management, Communication, and Assessment). Courses were also prepared on the systematic review of the literature, metanalysis, and quantitative risk assessment, as well as on the systematic review of the literature, metanalysis, and risk assessment (FAO Manual, translated into Portuguese with FAO's authorization). All this material and a methodological framework are currently used to strengthen the countries' capabilities for establishing food norms based on risk analysis.

Another action recommended was the support of the Codex Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean. This work has been done in conjunction with FAO in the form of technical forums prior to CCLAC regular meetings. All these seminars recognized the need to adopt common regional positions regarding the Codex norms and guidelines. Two seminars that stood out were the one on risk-based inspection systems, held in 2008 during the Sixteenth Meeting of CCLAC (<http://bit.ly/Mg2VyU>) and the one held in 2010, on international risk assessment for the establishment of standards, (ftp://ftp.fao.org/codex/Meetings/CCLAC/cclac17/la17_06e.pdf). The two meetings' reports, which highlight the identification of issues of interest to the Regional Committee, may be assessed at:

<http://bit.ly/M6bzNQ>

<http://bit.ly/Mg4T2b>

Recommendation 3

- Ensuring the food legislation's effective enforcement through methodologies based on risk analysis, such as the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) whenever possible.

In this connection, joint work with the countries proceeded, with a view to strengthen national capabilities for using the modern inspection and audit methods based on good practices principles and on HACCP. All the didactic material employed is available in three languages at the Virtual Food Safety Library (<http://bvs.panalimentos.org>). In coordination with OIRSA, courses were taught in all of Central America during the period covered by this report. At Colombia's request, PAHO gave a series of courses for INVIMA's institutional strengthening. In Brazil, the courses were adapted to specific food chains, such as salts added water, food for athletes, and canned food.

Recommendation 4

- Adoption of programs for the monitoring of food, total diet studies, and disease surveillance systems, so as to obtain prompt, reliable information about the prevalence and emergence of food-transmitted diseases and biological and chemical hazards in food sources.

PAHO has developed a strategy for working as an international network, as opposite to individual national surveillance systems. This has permitted more effective response to the growing occurrence of food-transmitted diseases. The countries work together to promote the national surveillance of these diseases, and as they exchange information, they learn from each other. The networks have also promoted the use of standard protocols, thereby improving the quality and reliability of the information obtained throughout the Region. This leads to greater food safety in the entire Region, where three network systems operate.

The Inter-American Network of Food Analysis Laboratories-RILAA

(<http://www.panalimentos.org/rilaa/>)

This network was established in 1997 to achieve methodological equivalence of the food analysis laboratories, promote the implementation of equivalent quality management systems in the network laboratories, and reinforce technical and scientific cooperation among the countries that are part of the network. RILAA is formed by 152 laboratories of 29 countries of the Americas, including 13 national networks. It has on its payroll experts that can move from one country to another, coordinates inter-laboratory tests, and has in place a warning system to lend support to member laboratories as regards both food safety problems and routine operations. The network also provides a wide range of on-line training courses (e-Learning).

WHO's Global Food Infection Network (<http://www.who.int/gfn/en/>)

Established in 2001 in the Americas, it operates with three subregional reference centers, one each in Argentina, Costa Rica, and Trinidad and Tobago. It connects all the Region's reference clinical, food analysis, and veterinary laboratories as well as epidemiologic services. Its main purpose is to create national capabilities to detect, control, and prevent food-transmitted diseases and other enteric diseases, from production to consumption.

The Pulsenet Network for Latin America and the Caribbean (<http://bit.ly/NFWUHZ>)

Established in 2003 for the following purposes: to strengthen national capability and surveillance on the basis of a regional food-transmitted diseases laboratory; to promote the diagnostic of and research on the "morbidity burden;" to ensure early detection of emerging and reemerging pathogens; to establish national and regional databases; to reinforce communication among member countries; and to ensure active use of national and regional information in coordinating health intervention actions. The Pulsenet Network has established a shared regional pathogen isolation database, and actively promotes further research in the Region. In Latin America it connects 14 laboratories of 15 countries, as well as the 22 Caribbean countries through the Caribbean Epidemiology Center-CAREC.

Some of these three networks' most noteworthy results include the following:

- Establishment and use of common protocols and laboratory procedures among the countries to promote effective diagnostic and surveillance techniques, in respect of both food (RILAA) and the clinical area (WHO-GFN and Pulsenet).
- Establishment of shared databases for the exchange of knowledge and best diagnostic practices (all three networks)
- Holding of 30 virtual seminars with 11,342 participants from 21 countries (<http://bit.ly/hFJwhJ>).
- Realization of microbiology aptitude tests (for 86 labs of 20 countries) and of physical-chemical and chemical residue analysis (for 54 labs from 19 countries) (<http://bit.ly/PZuKyP>).
- Guidance for the implementation of norm ISO/IEC 17025, and completion of the audit phase involving nine tests of six labs (<http://bit.ly/Azga9E>).
- Two network assembly meetings, in 2008 and in 2010 (<http://bit.ly/NrRPII>).
- A seminar on "Chemical Contaminants in Food: Total diet study; Chile's case study," held September 25, 2009, with 409 participants from 19 countries of the Region (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela), through e-Learning under RILAA.
- The Digital Wave technology of Pulsed Field Gel Electrophoresis (PFGE) is now available in the entire Region through interconnected networks.
- Establishment of an international roster of experts to be called upon in case of need or emergency for responding promptly and efficiently to problems throughout the Region.
- Creation of capabilities in the Region to recognize and handle genetic data of harmful bacteria based on the establishment of standard protocols for selected pathogenic agents (Salmonella spp., Vibrio cholerae, Escherichia coli STEC-O157 and non-O157 STEC, Shigella spp., Campylobacter spp., and Listeria monocitogenes). A regional database has been established with this information, and this has facilitated and fostered regional field research

Some products generated:

- Preparation and distribution of laboratory procedure and protocol manuals
- Agreements to facilitate the purchase of low-cost reactants in developing countries

- Development of new technologies and standard protocols, such as the one on *Shigella* spp. <http://1.usa.gov/QdLwt0>
- Better food safety legislation and regulations in the countries
- Studies to determine the morbidity burden of diseases related to [lack of] food safety under National Health Systems
- Shared regional database on isolated pathogens
- Regional specialists database
- Virtual Library (<http://bvs.panalimentos.org/php/index.php?lang=es>) and monthly electronic bulletin (<http://bit.ly/M0lgNM> and <http://bit.ly/PWCTmw>) for selective information dissemination (over 1,898 addressees)

Recommendation 5

- Establishment of procedures such as traceability and alert systems throughout the food industry, to allow the prompt identification and investigation of incidents related to contaminated food and report to WHO incidents contemplated in the International Health Regulation (IHR 2005) through the International Food Safety Authorities Network-INFOFAN and the IRS focal points.

Intensive work has been done with FAO and WHO during this period for the setting up of response guides on food safety emergencies. These guides are available at (<http://bvs.panalimentos.org>). The training programs were implemented, one for South America and another for Mexico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic; training in English for the Caribbean is still pending. See meeting reports at (<http://bvs.panalimentos.org>). The training made possible the reinforcement of the preparedness for prompt response to food safety emergencies. Workshops under the WHO-GFN network helped strengthen work procedures of INFOFAN Emergency and the National Liaison Centers in connection with food safety events of importance to international public health

Recommendation 6

- Promotion of communication and effective consultation with consumers, the food industry, and other relevant sectors with a view to the formulation, implementation, and review of food safety policies and priorities, including education with a systematic focus along the entire food chain from production to consumption.

Food safety is an issue that extends far beyond public health, with ramifications into the agricultural, tourism, and national and international trade sectors. Because it is also a cross-boundaries issue, its public health aspect is more effectively addressed through association between countries and strong international networks. International networks for which PAHO/WHO provide a secretariat for addressing food safety in the Americas illustrate what cooperation among countries in the area of health may do for the development of national capabilities and to strengthen the dialogue between different sectors. One example of this is the work done in Colombia under a GFN Network project, which has set up an integrated antimicrobial resistance surveillance system. The Colombian Integrated Program on Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance (COIPARS) is an initiative coordinated by the agricultural sector (CORPOICA and ICA), with the participation of both the public and the private sectors.

The private sector's participation was of utmost importance for the implementation of the integrated program in the country, in which the Colombian Poultry Federation (FENAVI) and the food distribution chains played a major role.

Similar projects are currently under way in Argentina, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Also worth mentioning is the work done in the Caribbean on morbidity. Eight countries of this subregion – Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Dominica, Trinidad and Tobago, Bermuda, Guyana, Barbados, and Grenada have completed their studies and, during a WHO-GFN workshop in July 2012, they have developed issues briefs and policy briefs to guide their food safety policy. This methodology will be extended to other subregions.

Recommendation 7

- Proceeding further with the strengthening of capabilities in respect of food safety by means of effective cooperation between developed and developing countries, as well as among developing countries, so as to promote the access to food safety for all.

The PAHO/WHO food safety programs at both the regional and subregional level have adopted an explicit focus on strengthening and encouraging the establishment of networks among countries in respect of food safety management. Through these networks, among other things, there is an exchange of crucial information and technology; common methodologies and protocols are established; appropriate practices are shared; the purchase of laboratory reactants is facilitated; and financial, human, and material resources are mobilized.

Information about and experience in food safety management have been exchanged not only in the entire Region but also worldwide through WHO. Learning and interaction occur under these cooperation networks, thereby providing an occasion for the interaction of communication professionals.

PAHO's role as a facilitator of networks of cooperation among the countries on food safety management has been one but not the only significant factor. PAHO actively promotes and fosters direct associations among countries when there is a need to address specific food safety issues.

Since 2000, twelve projects on technical cooperation among countries have been financed by PAHO (TCP) to strengthen and improve food safety management systems in the Region.

But it is important to make it clear that these networks do not depend on PAHO for their functioning. PAHO participates as a collaborating member to support the development of strong food safety management in the Member States. Both the networks and the Technical Cooperation Projects in the Americas are a prime example of sustainable 'technical cooperation among countries.

Recommendation 8

- Establishment of cooperation programs among international and regional technical cooperation organizations involved in food safety in areas of common interest and pursuant to the Member States' mandates.

PAHO/WHO coordinate their work with sister organizations of the Inter-American System, particularly with IICA. Together, as mentioned, they work on the implementation of PVS. They have also implemented the Second Executive Series on Food Safety Leadership, which helped 32 young leaders throughout the Americas to develop their leadership skills and to expand their food safety knowledge. See the projects developed by each one of them (<http://bvs.panalimentos.org>).

With FAO they carry out coordination activities and the strengthening of capabilities for the Codex focal points in the countries of the Region, as well as providing training in response to emergency situations. Together they have acted as RILAA's Ex Officio Secretariat for fourteen years. There are also direct technical cooperation activities in member countries.

With OIRSA and subregional SICA organizations they work to reinforce surveillance, response to emergencies, and antimicrobial resistance capabilities. In particular, they coordinate a project on the avian chain Salmonella.

Lastly, under WHO there is a clear, well-defined coordination in studies on disease burden, antimicrobial resistance, chemical contaminants, strengthening of capabilities for integrated surveillance of food-transmitted diseases, health promotion programs encompassing the five keys to food safety, and the INFOSAN network.