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Foodborne diseases are a significant public health issue in the Region of the Americas due to the magnitude of the problem, the emergence of pathogens, and their social and economic impact. Notwithstanding the recognized limitations in the coverage and quality of epidemiological surveillance systems and geographical differences during the last nine years, the Regional Information System for Epidemiological Surveillance of FBDs (SIRVETA) has received 6,332 reports of foodborne disease (FBD) outbreaks from 22 countries in the Region: 6% from the Andean Area, 63% from the Caribbean, 4% from Central America, 10% from North America, and 17% from the Southern Cone. A total of 230,141 people have been stricken in these outbreaks and 317 have died. The epidemiological and risk profile reveals the growing importance of new agents such as *E. coli* O157:H7, *Salmonella enteritidis*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and *Norovirus* and the dynamic interaction of factors that create new niches and forms of transmission within the context of growing inequities and weak social responses.

These factors include globalization, the rapid growth in the availability of processed foods, technological and demographic change, travel and tourism, new behavior patterns in the population, and a deterioration in the quality of drinking water in many geographical areas. The challenges posed by FBDs imply an approach involving comprehensive policies that will facilitate the development of develop control systems, with emphasis on institutional strengthening and coordination for surveillance, prevention, and control; intersectoral knowledge management to orient intervention strategies and activities; and promotion of the participation of all actors in the food production chain and community alike. It is recognized that the ministries of health and agriculture, as well as the environmental health agencies require support to strengthen their steering role in food safety as an essential public health function.

Within this context, the technical cooperation response of INPPAZ was crafted, emphasizing policy development, institutional modernization, and education and mass communication for the intensive use of information technology tools.

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Background

1. Conditions in the international environment have a significant impact on the health of the peoples of the Americas. In the area of food safety, globalization has led to a transformation of the food markets, marked by the rapid growth of expensive processed foods at the expense of unprocessed foods and basic commodities. Another phenomenon is the accelerated vertical and horizontal integration of the food industry and its internationalization, which is creating a situation in which an ever-smaller number of food suppliers are feeding a growing population. This is reflected in a change in the epidemiological pattern of foodborne diseases (FBDs) in which cluster outbreaks are being replaced by outbreaks from a common source, with the cases scattered geographically. Recent examples in the past two years have been the outbreaks of FBDs in several Canadian provinces and U.S. states—outbreaks attributable to *E. coli* O157:H7 in ground meat, Norwalk virus in oysters, *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* in mollusks, *Listeria* in prepackaged salads, and *Salmonella* in melons.
2. In many Latin American countries, however, the traditional cluster pattern continues to be the norm. For example, in the reports to the Regional Information System for Epidemiological Surveillance of Foodborne Diseases (SIRVETA), administered by INPPAZ, in the past four years 36% of outbreaks occurred in the home and 39% in institutional facilities or restaurants. Of these, 67% were bacterial in origin, 16% viral, 2% parasitic, and the remaining 15% chemical. Another example of particular importance for countries that depend on tourism, are outbreaks in hotels. Published reports from the Caribbean countries note case rates ranging from 11% to 20% in cross-sectional studies of thousands of tourists interviewed.
3. These new economic and political relationships are part of the complex web of interdependence that demands a new institutional framework to meet the challenge of providing safe food to the peoples of our Hemisphere. In particular, the roles of the ministries of health and agriculture, as the agencies responsible for overseeing food safety, must be redefined, gradually transferring functions from the public sector to civil society and creating new forms of service delivery.
4. This new institutional framework will require organizations that provide effective, quality services. These organizations will require strong leadership, management and administrative procedures, and adequate, well-utilized human, infrastructure, financial, and technology resources. In light of this, the need to inform all sectors in the food chain of their responsibilities, duties, and rights should be understood.
5. Forums organized by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)—for example, RIMSA 12 in 2001, which discussed the organization of national food safety

programs--have identified several problems stemming from the lack of integration throughout the food production chain, namely:

- Difficulties in drafting a national policy on food protection.
- Institutional constraints to organizing food protection based on a national policy, integrating actors, and ensuring coherence in the actions of participating institutions.
- The inability to clearly identify and delimit the authority, functions, and activities of the steering agencies and actors in the chain of production.

6. The need for comprehensive food safety policies has been discussed extensively in the Pan American Commission for Food Safety (COPAIA). At its second meeting in February 2002, the agriculture and health sectors of the countries of the Region indicated the political will to set up food safety programs as an essential public health function, promoting coordination and integration with producers, consumers, and other sectors. Since its creation in 2001 (RIMSA 12), COPAIA has underscored the need to improve technical aspects of the food safety programs.

7. One of the most important technical areas, especially in the areas of prevention, control, and reduction of FBDs, is epidemiological surveillance. This is reaffirmed in the Strategic Plan of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau 2003-2007. The representatives of the countries participating in the third Meeting for Epidemiological Surveillance of FBDs in 2001 identified the principal needs for strengthening surveillance. They considered the greatest challenges to be the training of human resources, especially physicians in the public health services, as essential for detecting and reporting cases and outbreaks, and the need to develop laboratories, integrating and linking them to the surveillance systems. At its last regular meeting in 2001, the Inter-American Network of Food Analysis Laboratories (INFAL) also recognized the health and commercial importance of national studies of microbiological and chemical contaminants in the food supply in every country in the Hemisphere. Thus, it reached an agreement to conduct a survey to characterize laboratories by groups, in order to diagnose problems and identify the strengths and needs of each Member State, in addition to promoting quality assurance programs. Finally, the countries requested that subregional reference laboratories be established.

8. Consumers play a key role in food safety. Thus, INPPAZ has promoted the practice of informing consumers about risks. A technical consultation on the development of strategies to promote food safety through education and mass communication was held in 2000. Here, two lines of action were recommended: that the countries' health agencies encourage community participation to promote food safety; and that they develop communication strategies that would help the community to identify with the problem and make desirable behaviors that contribute to food safety part of their health practices. As an initial phase, it was recommended that INPPAZ launch regional activities to raise

awareness and motivate policymakers and the various target groups within the community, with emphasis on consumers.

9. In order to improve food safety for consumers, the countries have requested that their national food safety systems adopt modern inspection procedures based on good manufacturing practices (GMP), Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOP), and the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) methodology. Recent examples of this are the agreement with the National Sanitary Surveillance Agency (ANVISA) of Brazil, and the requests from the National Service for the Safety and Quality of Agricultural Food Products (SENASAG) of Bolivia, the Colombian Agricultural and Livestock Institute, and the Intersectoral Commission on Food Safety of Costa Rica.

10. Finally, regulatory issues have been widely discussed in forums promoted by PAHO. In COPAIA in particular, the participants commented on the wide range of laws, decrees, regulations, standards, and manuals arising from the conceptualization, justification, delegation of responsibilities, and decisions in this field. This regulatory framework is increasingly committed and subject to international standards as a result of commitments and agreements regulating the production, trade, and consumption of food products, administered by the World Trade Organization. The development of standards and sanitary codes by the FAO/WHO Codex Commission and by the consultations and working groups of the World Health Organization (WHO) provides a solid technical foundation for improving the quality and safety of food for domestic consumption and international trade. However, recent studies on the countries' participation in different horizontal and cross-disciplinary Codex committees have found low levels of participation by the PAHO Member States.

Current Foodborne Disease (FBD) Situation

11. Approximately 70% of the cases of acute diarrheal disease are caused by the consumption of contaminated water or food, according to WHO estimates.

12. Interest in learning about FBDs has been growing in recent years, given their impact on morbidity and the economic losses that they produce in the community.

13. FBDs can be caused by microorganisms and their toxins, marine organisms and their toxins, fungi and their toxins, and chemical contaminants.

14. Since 1989, the PASB has been working with the Member States to build national capacity for FBD surveillance. Milestones in this process have been the formation of working groups, the publication of the VETA Guide, the organization of training workshops, and the creation of SIRVETA. However, weakness still persist in the countries, chiefly in epidemiological surveillance and the FBD component, as well as

other areas, such as the detection and investigation of outbreaks, reporting, and the analysis and use of data. It is therefore difficult to obtain information for evaluating the FBD situation in the Region. However, taking into account the limitations in the coverage and quality of the epidemiological surveillance systems and geographical differences, the following is a summary of the information reported to SIRVETA over the past nine years. The system has received 6,332 reports of FBD outbreaks from 22 countries in the Region: 6% from the Andean Area, 63% from the Caribbean (with one country contributing more than 58.71% of the total reports), 4% from Central America, 10% from North America, and 17% from the Southern Cone. A total of 230,141 people have been stricken in these outbreaks, and 317 have died. The most common incidence (the mode) is 2 cases per outbreak, which is consistent with the finding that 32% of all outbreaks occurred in the home. In some 26% of the outbreaks, there was no laboratory analysis to identify the etiologic agents. Of the outbreaks with laboratory information (4,686), 45% were caused by bacteria, 21% by viruses, and 20% by marine toxins. The remaining 14% were caused by parasites, chemical contaminants, and plant toxins. The food items most commonly associated with the reported outbreaks were: water, with 23% of the cases; fish, with 18%; and red meats, with 12%.

15. Stratification of the general data by region reveals significant changes in the frequency distributions, indicating the need to carefully consider the differences in the countries' social and economic situations and the coverage and quality of their national surveillance systems when evaluating the information. For example, water, fish, and red meats were the food items most commonly implicated in outbreaks in the Caribbean (like the general pattern, since the Caribbean is responsible for 63% of the reports), while in the Andean Area (n=421 outbreaks), the foods with the most reports were dairy products, with 28%; fish, with 18%; and the mixed foods, with 11%. In Central America (n=258 outbreaks), 63% of the cases did not report the food involved, 10% were caused by dairy products, and lower percentages for other foods. In the Southern Cone (n=1,169 outbreaks), 18% were not identified, 14% were from mixed food, 11% from dairy products, and 11% from red meats. In North America, a single country reported a total of 722 outbreaks; in 35%, the food was not specified; in 19%, they were caused by water; and in 13%, by mixed food.

16. The pattern showing the home as the location with the greatest number of reported outbreaks is consistent across all the subregions, the most dramatic case being Central America, where 50% of the outbreaks occur in the home. With regard to etiological diagnosis, Central America is the subregion with the highest percentage of cases in which the food associated with the agent is not identified (73%), and it reports bacteria as the most detected etiology, accounting for 22% of the outbreaks. The Andean Area reports bacteria as the etiologic agent most frequently detected (57%), and 25% of the cases reported do not link the agent and the food. The Caribbean follows the general pattern, with bacteria (36%), viruses (20%), and marine toxins (21%) as the three most

common etiologies. In the Northern subregion, 55% of cases are without etiological association, with 26% of the outbreaks caused by viruses and 12%, by bacteria. Finally, the Southern Cone reports that bacteria are responsible for 53% of the cases and that 39% fail to associate the agent with the food.

17. Clearly, surveillance of FBDs in the Region must be strengthened. Thus, political and technical decisions are needed to coordinate the surveillance of FBDs with the national surveillance and food safety systems, promote coordination with laboratories, and guarantee a plan for ongoing in-service training and the appropriate resources to ensure the sustainability of these activities.

Report on the Principal Technical Cooperation Activities of INPPAZ

18. The Pan American Institute for Food Protection and Zoonoses (INPPAZ) is an integral part of the Veterinary Public Health Unit of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), under the Disease Prevention and Control Area. It was created in 1991 to replace the Pan American Zoonoses Center (CEPANZO) as a regular component of technical cooperation in veterinary public health, with a view to developing and strengthen the food safety programs of the PAHO/WHO Member States.

19. The present report summarizes the technical cooperation activities for the period October 2001 and 2002, which have been grouped under four projects:

- Institutional modernization
- Education and mass communication
- Promotion of food safety policies
- Information technology

Institutional Modernization Project

Epidemiology and Surveillance of FBDs

- Support to the countries in monitoring public health and in the organization and implementation of local FBD surveillance activities, in geographically and demographically defined areas. These activities should be linked with the national surveillance system and response infrastructure for prevention and control and adapted to local conditions. There should be a plan of action containing the objectives, technical activities, monitoring, evaluation, and management mechanisms. Workshops have been held in Costa Rica and Uruguay, and others have been programmed for El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, and Paraguay for

- late 2003. In the case of activities that are well under way, such as that of Uruguay, support is being provided to document the experience, and an agreement was reached that in-service training activities would be coordinated with INPPAZ; support was provided in Uruguay for the launch of the Integrated Program for Food Protection in the Department of Maldonado, identifying technical cooperation needs to strengthen the FBD surveillance in the country's most important tourist area (Punta del Este).
- The Regional Information System for Epidemiological Surveillance of FBDs (SIRVETA) was presented to WHO in November 2001 and adopted as a model for implementation in 47 European and Asian countries.
 - Publication of training materials for physicians and staff in primary care services, with 12 modules with technical content, self-evaluation, and bibliographic references.
 - The Network of Professionals Working in Foodborne Disease Epidemiology (EPI-ETA), a joint effort with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (www.epi-eta.org), went into operation in July 2002. It currently has 192 registered users from all subregions in the Americas. The Network has promoted the discussion of such technical issues as public health risks associated with the consumption of soft cheeses and botulism.
 - As part of the collaboration with the CDC, a course in the epidemiology of FBDs and surveillance systems was held at the Caribbean Epidemiology Center (CAREC) (October 2002) for the Caribbean countries and a second one is being organized in Argentina at the Instituto Malbrán (May 2003) for the Latin American countries.
 - Final approval is pending for a project with the IDB for the River Plate Basin. The project for the Regional Surveillance System for Foot-and-mouth Disease in the Expanded MERCOSUR, was drafted by INPPAZ in collaboration with PANAFTOSA.

Inspection Services

20. In this component, technical cooperation resources have been allocated specifically to meet the priorities indicated by the countries, in keeping with the strategies identified in the work program and the country needs generated by institutional, political, and economic changes. In this regard, most of the cooperation activities during the present year have been geared to addressing priorities stemming from the political and economic crisis in Argentina and have involved the implementation of strategies for

managing and communicating risks in the chain of production and the marketing of foods in that country. The economic crisis has led to the emergence and expansion of the informal sector for the production and marketing of foods, posing new challenges for the national authorities in terms of developing strategies to ensure food safety under these circumstances.

21. The Barter Network is a new modality for the exchange of goods among the country's inhabitants. An estimated 5 to 7 million people are involved in trading goods under this system, with food representing a significant proportion of the total. A high percentage of these foods are home-made, artisanal products, and they are sold in the open air or in locations where it is difficult to prevent contamination, with the resulting risk of transmitting disease. As a priority cooperation strategy, INPPAZ provided technical assistance to the authorities of the National Food Institute in planning strategies for a comprehensive program for safe food handling in barter clubs.

22. The main results of this technical cooperation were:

- The preparation and publication of a Manual on Safe Food Handling in Barter Clubs, which the Barter Network has already disseminated to the associated networks.
- Cooperation for holding a national meeting with barter clubs to discuss joint strategies to ensure food safety in this type of trade.

23. In this component for the modernization of inspection services, another priority is the project with the authorities of the National Sanitary Surveillance Agency of Brazil (ANVISA). Under this project, a training program for federal, state, and municipal personnel has been developed to improve their capacity to implement and verify adherence to Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOP), and the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) system in establishments in the food production chain overseen by ANVISA. The objectives of this phase of the project include training the human capital that will be working as food inspectors in these approaches and training a critical mass of trainers who can sustain the training process over the long term. In the first phase (2001-2002), 761 inspectors completed their training.

24. In response to a request from the Colombian authorities, a project was launched to fully modernize the inspection services. Its activities included technical assistance in the formulation of a national food safety policy, the development of a strategy and regulations for official certification based on GMP, SSOP, and HACCP, the development of programs to train trainers in these areas, and the provision of standard training materials.

25. To support the development of the new national agency to oversee food safety in Bolivia, the National Service for the Safety and Quality of Agricultural Food Products (SENASAG), the Center furnished assistance in the preparation and discussion of the National Program for Food Protection and Food Safety (PROINAL) and its technical documents. The process has continued, training human resources recently recruited to the Program in GMP, SSOP, and HACCP, in addition to a group of inspectors to audit these programs.

26. Another important cooperation category is support to Latin American scientific societies, disseminating information on modern approaches to food inspection to professionals working in the fields of food science and technology and the microbiology of food. These activities include the dissemination of information on modern approaches to inspection and risk management in their national and regional activities, especially congresses and training courses.

27. As technical cooperation for strengthening municipal food inspection programs, INPPAZ has supported the development of this type of program in Uruguay and several provinces in Argentina.

28. As part of the joint activities with other international organizations in this component, it has organized the IV Pan American Meeting of Official Services and Institutions for the Inspection and Quality Control of Fish Products, in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and INFOPESCA,.

Reference Services

29. **Survey of the member laboratories of INFAL.** The survey, which identifies the capacities and cooperation needs of the member laboratories of INFAL, has been completed by 50 laboratories in 27 countries. The evaluation group met in December 2002 and has issued the corresponding report.

30. **Interlaboratory tests.** Samples for the interlaboratory test for *Salmonella* spp, coordinated by Canada, were distributed to the 41 participating laboratories in September 2002. INPPAZ organized three tests in conjunction with INTI of Argentina: 1) for chlorinated and phosphorated pesticides; 2) physical-chemical tests of meats and 3) for *Listeria monocytogenes* in powdered milk. The samples were distributed in January 2002. Eighteen laboratories from 19 countries participated in the first two tests and 23 participated in the third. The results are being evaluated, and the report will be distributed the first week in April.

31. **Centers of excellence to support technical cooperation.** Under the strategy described above, guidelines have been established for the designation of centers of

excellence and arrangements have been made with 15 laboratories in 10 countries to provide support for the technical cooperation of the INPPAZ in food safety. To date, four laboratories has been designated centers of excellence, conducting approximately 300 tests.

32. **Total diets.** From 8 to 13 July 2002 a joint Latin American workshop with WHO on total diet studies was held at our headquarters in Martínez, Argentina. Nineteen participants from nine countries attended. Efforts are already under way in Chile and Argentina to conduct these studies. The Ministry of Health of Argentina has indicated to INPPAZ that these studies are among its technical cooperation priorities.

33. **In support of INFAL a website has been created exclusively for the project.** Available in English and Spanish, the website is being translated into the other two official languages of PAHO. It has a modern platform for information exchange among the members of the Assembly and Executive Committee of INFAL and an ample Discussion Forum with five chat rooms for work and three channels for information dissemination and technical consultations: INFAL News (bilingual), RILAA SOS (in Spanish), and INFAL SOS (in English). INFAL will hold its 2nd.General Assembly from 9 to 13 June 2003.

Food Regulations

34. In December 2002 the computerized food legislation system was installed in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, adding to the countries already participating in the regional system; Guatemala, Panama, and the Dominican Republic are scheduled to join in the coming months. INPPAZ has assisted the countries by installing the system on their national servers or offering a hosting system on its own servers. This database will be the starting point for analyzing the countries' legislation to help achieve equity in the harmonization and regulatory processes related to food safety. For project coordination purposes, this system operates under the Virtual Health Library (VHL) on Food Safety and is an essential part of the VHL on Health Legislation. Technical cooperation has also been provided to Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Cuba, Guatemala, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela, and information from the United States and Canada is being compiled to complement the regional database. Furthermore, in November 2001 technical cooperation activities began in the English-speaking Caribbean to install the system in those countries.

35. INPPAZ successfully participated at a Meeting of the Codex Committee on General Principles. This meeting dealt with such topics as traceability and risk analysis as basic mechanisms for meeting food safety objectives and the modification of the Code of Ethics for the international food trade. In this regard, INPPAZ endorsed the positions adopted by the countries of the Region in these matters.

36. Support was provided for the Codex Commission's Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean (CCLAC) with the establishment of discussion forums on the INPPAZ website. There are currently five active discussion forums on: additives and pesticides; issues of specific interest to the CCLAC; the Codex Commission; the Committee on Imports and Exports; and Committee on Food Hygiene. It is anticipated that this support for the Regional Committee will be expanded this semester, adding all the information pertaining to the CCLAC to the discussion forums--that is, working documents, the positions taken by the countries, the status of topics to be addressed at the meetings, etc.

37. Continuing the line of support for the CCLAC, in collaboration with the FAO, an agenda was drawn up for the technical meeting of the Committee in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, scheduled for December 2002, and financing was provided to the countries for their participation.

38. A strategic document was prepared to facilitate the active and effective participation of the countries of the Region in Codex Alimentarius. This document was presented in the Workshop prior to the 13th meeting of the CCLAC, at which time it was agreed that the FAO would collaborate in the effort through suggestions for improving the document. Furthermore, in the report of the meeting it was stipulated that INPPAZ would collaborate with certain countries of the Region in reviewing the Guidelines for Food Safety in Tourist Areas.

39. In light of a request from the WHO Regional Office for Africa (AFRO), technical cooperation was provided to Mozambique, with proposals for the review and harmonization of food legislation of that country. In 2003 the work will be expanded to cover the legislation on additives and pesticides and, as the available technology permits, give the country access to the Regional System on Food Legislation.

Education and Mass Communication Project

Audiovisual Resources

40. INPPAZ currently has several media products with educational messages to promote safe food handling. The television spots, available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French, contain basic messages and educational images about safe food handling practices. Other products, developed in conjunction with DPI, are the radio spots, which are distributed regularly to more than 140 radio stations across the Americas. Other institutions, such as the Instituto Pasteur in Argentina, are using them for training people with visual impairments. These spots are also distributed to other agencies working in health, such as the National Food Institute (INAL) of the Ministry of Health of Argentina and the Ministry of Health of Cuba.

Creation of Info-PANALIMENTOS

41. The objective of the Info-PANALIMENTOS electronic newsletter is to report on new developments in food safety and disseminate information on the activities and strategic lines of the Institute. Through this specialized information service, INPPAZ communicates weekly with more than 2,000 professionals involved in policy-making or technical functions, private or public, regional or local. A number of agencies, such as the National Sanitary Surveillance Agency (ANVISA) of the Ministry of Health of Brazil, forward the newsletter to all their employees. The main recipients of Info-PANALIMENTOS are from Latin America, but there are users from around the world—for example, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, Egypt, Latvia, and Thailand, to mention but a few. The information sources for Info-PANALIMENTOS currently exceed the 6,000 mark and come from media all over the world. In 2002, 382 news items and 52 issues were published, as well as four special editions. The main source of new users is our website.

Canal Comunidad

42. During 2002, INPPAZ created a website devoted to the consumer (www.panalimentos.org/comunidad), with scientific information conveyed in layman's terms. This website suggests interactive activities and encourages the sharing of the information through games, tests of knowledge, and other educational resources. The tests make it possible to determine how well the topics dealt with are understood. All the materials and resources are available through this website, which has a download section.

Bulletin

43. The bulletin *Food Safety*, the official publication of the Institute, has had three issues to date. Its objective is to maintain closer contact with the Representative Offices and country counterparts and to keep all professionals interested in food safety informed.

Educational Materials

44. A variety of educational materials have been produced for school-age children and the consumer at large. Of particular importance is the work that has been done with the "5 Keys to Safer Food," developed by WHO—material that has been adapted and turned into an interactive training tool. Some of the other materials produced are coloring books (for children aged 4-7), board games (for children aged 8-12), posters, and interactive media. In addition, educational calendars were published in 2002 and 2003, and work was done to adapt technical materials for consumers—for example the Manual of Recommendations for Food Handling in the Barter Clubs of Argentina.

Indigenous Population

45. In 2002, there were three missions to Tartagal, in Argentina's Salta Province, with staff from the PAHO/WHO Representative Office in Argentina. The purpose of these missions was to provide technical cooperation to the members of the Chorote indigenous community. INPPAZ collaborated in the creation, development, and production of educational materials on food safety and participated in training adapted to the indigenous population on the use of stoves and latrines. It also adapted the "5 Keys to Safer Food," to the usage and customs of native peoples, based on their eating habits, the products they consume, and the environment in which they live.

Events

46. Events were held to promote food safety from a comprehensive perspective. An example of this was the Municipal Healthy Food Day, held in Uruguay, which assisted the PAHO/WHO Representative Office in that country with the production of materials and activities.

The Media

47. There were several activities geared to the mass media, in addition to the periodic sending of news items for events and conferences. Basic press kits were also prepared. A joint project is currently under way with Argentina's Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Fishing, and Food (SAGPYA) to promote knowledge among the media about food safety; a sixth edition of these very successful technical articles is about to be published.

Schools

48. Work is currently under way on an interdisciplinary food safety curriculum for schools, with resources for teachers and students.

Project for the Development of Food Safety Policies.

Pan American Commission for Food Safety (COPAIA)

49. The second, successful meeting of COPAIA was held, which adopted the terms of reference and consolidated this important body for the promotion of national food safety policies. The recommendation to develop a virtual campus and create a master's degree program in the management of food safety programs is being implemented. Similarly, there has been participation in the Executive Series on Leadership for Food Safety and direct support for the academic projects of the representatives of Antigua, Barbados,

Belize, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Guatemala. Finally, there has been participating in interinstitutional coordination meetings with the FSIS, FDA, FAO, University of Puerto Rico, Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), and CDC to coordinate technical cooperation activities in the Hemisphere. CAREC received assistance in hiring a professional to serve as the focal point for the development of epidemiological surveillance of FBDs in the countries of the English-speaking Caribbean.

Collaboration with Other Regions of WHO

50. In response to requests for collaboration after the meeting of regional advisers, the WHO Regional Offices for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO) and Africa (AFRO) received technical assistance from experts from INPPAZ. This assistance involved work with EMRO in information technology, matters related to the preparation of a manual on food safety legislation, and the development of the Food Safety World (FS-World) portal, for which a planning team was named. The work with AFRO involved specifically regulatory activities in Mozambique.

Information Technology (IT)

51. This Area was established in October 2000 and has the continuing support of PAHO's Information Technology Area (ITS). Since its creation, this area has had three basic purposes: to support technical cooperation in food safety, to support internal administrative processes, and to support the Organization in general.

IT Support for Technical Cooperation

52. The main objective of the IT Area is to support and strengthen the technical cooperation activities of the Institute and heighten the efficiency of internal activities through the intensive use of new technologies. Since its creation, this Area has faced the challenge of continuously developing itself, investigating new technologies that could improve the quality of the Institute's technical cooperation and internal processes.

53. As a result, there has been a gradual improvement in systems development techniques to provide the tools for improved service that can better adapt to the needs stemming from the demand for technical cooperation. Standards have been set to ensure that the products developed can be used and adapted to all needs. For this reason, they are designed for the Internet, are easy to install, and can be accessed from anywhere.

Main Products:

- Self-administrable Web pages:
 - Regional Information System for the Surveillance of Foodborne Diseases (SIRVETA)
 - EPI-FBD
 - Virtual Campus, developed to provide support for undergraduate and graduate programs in food safety
 - Inter-American Network of Food Analysis Laboratories (INFAL)
 - The “Food Safety World” (FS-WORLD) portal
 - Virtual Food Safety Library
 - New INPPAZ Home Page
- Virtual Campus in Food Safety
- Inocuito
- Discussion forums that are utilized in the following important technical cooperation projects:
 - Support for the (virtual) discussions of the members of the Codex Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean
 - Virtual Food Safety Campus
 - Discussions among the over 600 ANVISA staff members trained by INPPAZ
 - Support for (virtual) discussions among members of the Inter-American Products Network to support the Agreement between ANVISA and PAHO/INPPAZ
 - Web page of the Agreement
 - Intranet of the Agreement
- Graphic design activities aimed at communicating with the different publics: community, scientists, educators

IT Support for Internal Administrative Processes

54. All internal support processes are divided into two approaches: the first is full utilization of the tools of the AMPES/OMIS management system; the second is establishment of the Paperless Office Project, which has been in operating on the Institute's Intranet since October 2000, as detailed below:

Paperless Office Project

55. The main objective of the Paperless Office Project is to optimize administrative procedures, following the official procedures of the Pan American Health Organization, and to cut costs with the use of modern information technology tools.

56. The following information management systems are part of the Paperless Office Project:

- Remote management
- Web-based trip report system
- Help Desk
- Travel authorizations
- Sisdoc (virtual disk)
- Monitoring and calculation of overtime
- Control of supplies
- Translations
- Requisitions of materials and equipment
- Requests for use of the official car

Support for the Organization in General

57. These products, developed to support the Organization in general, can be used by the Representative Offices or Centers, as necessary. Thus, we are providing support to the units at PAHO Headquarters, the Representative Offices in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, and Costa Rica, the Latin American and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences Information (BIREME), CAREC, and the Latin American Center for Perinatology and Human Development (CLAP).

Technical Cooperation Plan 2004-2005

58. INPPAZ has been structured in a way that allows it to meet the needs at the hemispheric, regional, and national level. Its actions should be geared to the countries and, more concretely, to the links in the food production chain: producers, transformers, distributors, and consumers. This implies a coordinated effort centered on the end users of the process. To this end, INPPAZ implements hemisphere-wide projects that contribute to general areas of common interest in the countries and are related mainly to conceptual and policy areas and to support for the regions and Member States--for example, the development of food safety policies through COPAIA. At the next level, it implements regional projects linked for the most part to the specific problems and opportunities of each region--for example subregional projects with the MERCOSUR countries. Finally, it furnishes technical assistance to the national projects in each country, in partnership with the PAHO/WHO Representatives Offices, which are the units closest to the users and beneficiaries in each country.

59. In its planning for 2004-2005, INPPAZ reviewed the cooperation model required to meet the challenges of today's world described in the situation analysis. Meeting these new challenges demands a systemic approach at every level of the thematic areas (institutional modernization, education and mass communication, policy promotion).

60. This strategy consists of a series of elements, chiefly: the policy orientations issued by COPAIA, the orientations of the Strategic Plan of PAHO 2003-2007, the vision of INPPAZ, and partnerships and cooperation.

61. The vision of INPPAZ: to achieve food safety in the Member States, with a view to protecting the consumer and improving the access of foods produced in the Americas to the international markets. Responsibility for building this capacity is shared throughout the food production chain.

62. Strategic partners: The countries' needs, especially in the face of globalization and integration policies, have generated new FBD risk profiles. At the same time, the capacities of the Member States have generally been improving, and therefore, an agency like INPPAZ must adapt. Complementation with other PAHO programs, Pan American centers, international organizations such as RIOPPAH, FAO, and IICA, and national organizations is one way of dealing with this new range of scenarios. These partnerships will compensate in part for the cutbacks in financial resources and personnel to boost the response capacity of INPPAZ.

63. Use of information technology: INPPAZ will continue to invest in the use of IT, with the aim of becoming a knowledge management center that promotes the generation of national knowledge in food safety.

64. Technical cooperation among countries is a cooperation tool that INPPAZ wishes to utilize, identifying working groups at the national and subregional level in the different thematic areas.

Activities 2004-2005

65. INPPAZ will continue to work to make food safety part of the policy agenda in the biennium 2004-2005. However, this effort must be accompanied by a strengthening of institutional and technical capacity to implement an integral policy that starts with primary production and ends with the consumer.

66. Thus, to build this capacity, the Institute's lines of action for the biennium 2004-2005 are based on helping the Member States to prevent exposure to chemical, microbiological, and physical contaminants; supporting the assessment, management, and communication of risks associated with food; and strengthening food safety systems as an institution, specifically in:

- Epidemiological surveillance. Here, the greatest challenge is training human resources as a key factor in detecting and reporting cases and outbreaks.
- The development of laboratories and their integration and linkage with surveillance systems.
- Modern inspection services, based on Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), including the Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOP), and the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) methodology. These programs have been proven to reduce the risks of contamination and prevent its occurrence during food processing.
- Build capacity in conducting risk assessments with precise data.
- Education and mass communication to encourage community participation in food safety and to develop communication strategies to assist the community in identifying with the problem and adopting desirable behaviors in their health practices that contribute to food safety.
- Regulations that are increasingly committed to food safety and subject to international standards, pursuant to the commitments and agreements administered by the World Trade Organization, regulating the production, trade, and consumption of food products. The development of standards and codes of hygienic practice by the FAO/WHO Codex Commission and the WHO consultative meetings and expert groups constitutes a solid technical foundation for ensuring the quality and safety of food for domestic consumption and international trade.

67. The following table summarizes the expected results and indicators of the program activities for the biennium 2004-2005:

Expected result	Indicator
National capacity built in epidemiological surveillance of foodborne diseases, with the identification of hazards throughout the chain of production.	Number of countries with basic indicators in foodborne diseases. Number of countries periodically collecting data on episodes of foodborne disease. Number of centers of excellence collaborating with the national laboratories.
National capacity strengthened in the areas of chemical and microbiological risk assessment.	Number of countries actively participating in microbiological and chemical risk assessments. Number of countries participating in total diet studies.
Member States have the capacity to participate scientifically in Codex.	Number of standards, guidelines, and recommendations to Codex, with country participation. Number of instances in which the developing countries effectively participate in the work of Codex. Country proposals for the exhaustive review and optimization of the work of Codex.
Better communication and dissemination of information on the topic of food safety.	Number of messages produced to guarantee that food safety is a public health priority. Number of messages produced to guarantee that the results of the evaluations and risk assessments are communicated in an easily understandable way. Number of products and publications on food safety distributed to the target audiences (links in the food production chain). Development of methods to encourage consumer participation.
Greater cooperation among countries in the area of food safety.	Reports of the Inter-American Network of Food Analysis Laboratories. Reports of the Network of Professionals working in Foodborne Disease Epidemiology. Reports to the Regional System for Epidemiological Surveillance of Foodborne Diseases. Projects for technical cooperation among countries in the area of food safety.
Strengthened institutional capacity.	Number of courses on modern inspection systems. Evaluations and harmonization of food laws and regulations. Number of graduates of the professional master's degree program for food safety program administrators.