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Report on Food Safety Activities of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture

Dr. Ricardo Molins

Director of Agricultural Health and Food Safety - IICA

1. INTRODUCTION

1. IICA wishes to share some of last year's activities on food safety with the Food Safety Commission and the representatives from Member Countries' health services.

2. MODERNIZATION AND INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

2. In line with the modernization and institutional strengthening policy, integrated system for quality control and food safety in the Region have been fostered through application of the Performance, Vision, and Strategy (DVE) instrument, achieving the linkage and interinstitutional coordination needed to define the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, including the private sector.

3. In cooperation with PAHO, the DVE instrument has been applied in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia.

4. In Colombia, IICA helped establish the *COMPES SANITARIOS* – public policies for the national health system.

5. In Venezuela, IICA worked with the Integrated Food Protection System (SNICA). Evaluation of the system revealed the need to train all staff in charge of quality control and food safety as sanitary auditors; staff members from the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, and Food received training. The initiative was a joint effort with PAHO.

6. IICA participated in the first regional workshop of food safety experts at the Secretariat of the Andean Community (CAN), where the proposal to form the Andean Food Safety System was formulated and analyzed, and IICA gained a permanent seat in the Advisory Forum. This will permit

first-hand identification of the countries' needs and the formulation of technical cooperation project proposals in coordination with other international organizations.

7. IICA-Argentina organized the application of the “*Performance, Vision and Strategy (DVE) for National Food Safety Services*” instrument. It held a seminar and workshop in SENASA to update staff members on several aspects of food safety and to offer training in application of the instrument. The activity was a joint effort with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

8. IICA-Paraguay provided assistance in applying the “*Performance, Vision and Strategy (DVE) for National Food Safety Services*” instrument. It held the “Workshop-Seminar on the Performance, Vision, and Strategy of the National Food Safety Services,” which the SAIA Regional Specialist and the IICA office in Paraguay organized to apply the instrument and train staff from SENACSA, SENAIVE, and INANay. This initiative led to the installation of a system to guarantee food safety.

3. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING IN SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES (SPS)

9. IICA continues to implement the SPS Initiative for the countries of the Americas. The 41st meeting of the WTO's SPS Committee in March 2008 was the 17th consecutive meeting in which the Initiative supports IICA member countries in the Americas; the 17 meetings represent 41% of the meetings held by the committee to date.

10. By facilitating the effective application of WTO's Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement and the sanitary and phytosanitary standards of the international reference organizations (*Codex*, OIE, and the IPPC) through the national SPS committees, successful sanitary, phytosanitary, and food safety measures have been achieved, as well as standards and regulations for the international livestock trade. This has helped increase competitiveness and access to international markets for countries of the Region.

11. In all, since October 2002, the initiative has facilitated the participation of 223 technical personnel from 32 countries. The existing institutional frameworks have been strengthened and new institutions have been created, thus promoting the development or strengthening of an international agenda in the countries and linkage of the work of WTO's SPS Committee with that of the three reference organizations.

12. In the Andean Region, IICA provides cooperation and technical assistance to the national *Codex Alimentarius* committees, which has led to their strengthening through the active participation of all public and private stakeholders, as well as academia.

13. Several workshops to disseminate information on the importance of *Codex Alimentarius* for the countries have been organized jointly with FAO (for example, Ecuador: 280 participants, Venezuela: 100 participants).

14. In Central America, the Regional Traceability Project is being prepared jointly with the national liaisons on traceability (SPS subgroup of the Central American Customs Union), the Secretariat of the Central American Livestock Council (SCAC), and IICA's Projects Unit.

15. The sharing of experiences in SPS and guidelines for the preparation or implementation of national SPS agendas in Honduras, Costa Rica, and Panama has been promoted. In Honduras, IICA supports the SPS Committee as the Technical Secretariat.

16. In Central America, IICA has provided support for the CAC Secretariat. Thus, the SPS Subgroup of the UAC has established a work plan in safety that seeks to provide harmonized food safety guidelines and procedures to facilitate the proper application of sanitary and phytosanitary measures by the UAC countries to guarantee the production of safe food fit for consumption. Furthermore, IICA, together with the CAC Secretariat, has supported the formulation of the Safety Work Plan and is currently helping to implement it.

17. In the Southern Region, IICA helped organize the Regional Seminar of the WTO Agreement on Application of the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures for Southern countries. It was held in Asunción, Paraguay on 22-24 April and arose from the proposal that IICA made to the Southern Livestock Council (CAS). It was organized by the Secretariat of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Institute for the Integration of Latin America and the Caribbean (INTAL) of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), in collaboration with IICA. The participants included representatives from *Codex Alimentarius*, the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), and the Secretariat of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), with sponsorship from the Paraguayan government.

18. Within the framework of the umbrella agreement between IICA-Argentina and SENASA, a Letter of Understanding was signed for institutional and technical strengthening in the area of standards and principles in international feed and agro food trade between the two institutions. The goal is to provide technical and management assistance to SENASA for institutional and technical strengthening in sanitary and phytosanitary standards and principles.

19. IICA-Argentina cooperated with SENASA in disseminating information on and training staff members and provincial officials on the WTO's Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement and the structure, operation, and international standards of *Codex*, the IPPC, and the OIE. Four seminars and workshops were held on multilateral agreements (WTO/SPS), international standards, and their impact on the food trade; the events took place in Buenos Aires in March, in Santa Fe in August, in Mendoza in October, and in Río Negro in December; some 80 participants attended each event. FAO and PAHO collaborated in several of the seminars.

4. GOOD PRACTICES

20. Support for efforts by countries in the Region to develop standards and norms, leadership capacity, and technical competency in food safety throughout the food and agriculture chain has succeeded in improving food quality and safety through the promotion of Good Agricultural Practices, Good Manufacturing Practices, and the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) system.

21. In collaboration with the AECI and MAPA of Spain, a regional workshop on good agricultural practices (GAP) was organized in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, which focused on Spanish policies and the implementation of GAP in the poultry, livestock, and fruits and vegetables sectors. As a result of the workshop, there has been collaboration in the formulation and implementation of projects on quality and safety management systems for small and medium-sized agroproducers and food industries.

22. IICA is also providing technical assistance to help prepare GAP guidelines, directives, standards, and protocols for the poultry, livestock, fruits and vegetables, tourism, and education sectors.

23. In collaboration with the IICA/ILRI-CF project, RIOPPAH, and PAHO, IICA organized a regional workshop in April in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, to train auditors in HACCP and GAP systems.

24. IICA-Argentina provided technical assistance to SENASA for the preparation and execution of the program to promote good agricultural practices and technical cooperation in activities for the induction and training of professionals and producers. These activities were organized by sectors and regions, in groups with similar production characteristics, and in almost all cases involved local governments.

25. IICA-Caribbean organized the regional workshop “Improving Food Security in the Tourism Sector through Application of GHP/HACCP,” in collaboration with FAO; 20 people from 10 countries attended.

26. IICA-Barbados held a national workshop on HACCP and GAP systems, with the collaboration of the United States. The workshop was directed to small producers and agents from hotels, restaurants, and supermarkets, with a total of 25 participants.

27. IICA- St. Lucia held a workshop on good practices in pig production, with cooperation from FAVA/CA volunteers; 50 producers and technical personnel attended.

28. IICA-Antigua and Barbuda organized weekly presentations on good hygiene and sanitization in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Regulatory Agency.

29. IICA-Guyana held a workshop and several seminars on good agricultural practices, in collaboration with vegetable producers in the Pomeroon region.

30. The IICA office in the Dominican Republic presented draft Regulations on Good Agricultural Practices and Good Manufacturing Practices to the Secretariat of Agriculture for its approval within the official regulations.

5. SUPPORT FOR THE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

31. IICA-Southern Region publishes quarterly an electronic newsletter called the CODEX-SPS Opinion Forum to improve the skills of national committee members responsible for application and oversight of WTO’s Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement and *Codex Alimentarius* agreements. The newsletter specializes in the topics of the events held in these two international organizations, the SPS Committee and the *Codex Alimentarius* Commission and committees.

32. The AGROSALUD information system aims at distributing information on agricultural health and food safety, and its lines of action include standards and actions of the WTO and the international reference organizations.

33. As part of the AGROSALUD platform, the “Observatory of Emerging Situations and Emergencies” will soon begin operations as a tool for communication and information targeting the public and private sector. Its purpose is to bring users up to date in matters, positive and negative, relevant to economic well-being and public health in the Hemisphere in the areas of animal health, crop health, and food safety. These events will be selected from official references in order to ensure transparency and harmonization and will be backed up by press releases and documents from the same sources.

6. TRACEABILITY

34. A regional workshop on national traceability systems was held in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, with participation of the public and private sectors of all the countries represented. This support and the holding of national workshops have resulted in a portfolio of national projects and a regional traceability project. There is also a virtual traceability network that has become a venue for sharing information on national and regional experiences on traceability.

35. An international seminar on traceability was held on 22 and 23 May in Costa Rica. The event was organized by IICA with the IICA/ILRI-CFC project, the CAC-Taiwan project, and RIOPPAH; 164 delegates from the Central American countries, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic participated.

36. Forty-one delegates from the Central American countries participated in the regional workshop on traceability, held on 24 May in Costa Rica.

37. A national workshop-seminar on traceability was held in Tegucigalpa on 5-6 November 2007. It was organized by IICA with support from the IICA/ILRI-CFC project and the National Agriculture and Livestock Health Service of Honduras, with participants from the public and private sectors. Traceability needs were identified, objectives defined, the scope and the depth of the country's traceability system analyzed, and future actions outlined.

7. SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

38. A series of activities in food safety have been implemented in Venezuela that include the training of trainers in food safety for actors who provide food services in the tourist sector in several states.

39. In Venezuela and Ecuador, projects have been developed to train trainers, basically educators in rural technical schools, in food hygiene and basic quality standards and safety. Food safety has been included as a subject in the curriculum, with extracurricular activities for community participation.

40. The Central American Livestock Council (CAC) has contributed to the formulation of Central American agricultural policy (PACA) with respect to agricultural health and food safety. PACA has a series of policy measures on food safety issues.

41. Preparation and implementation of the Poultry Sector Safety Plan, in conjunction with the Federation of Poultry Chambers of Central America and the Caribbean (FEDAVICAC) and RIOPPAH, includes:

- The poultry sector's participation in the national *Codex Alimentarius* committees has been strengthened, with the development of national plans and regional articulation in areas of interest.
- A compilation of standards on chickens and chicken eggs was prepared with active country participation to exchange information.
- A comparative matrix of existing regulations was prepared (chickens: Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Panama; eggs: Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Panama) and its review by the countries promoted.
- A proposal for regional chicken regulations was drafted.

- Safety and quality capacity in the poultry sector developed in terms of GMP and HCCCP issues, GMP and HACCP audits, traceability, and risk analysis. Eleven technicians from the subregion's poultry sector participated in courses organized by IICA and RIOPPAH during 2007.

42. IICA in Central America has helped draft a proposal for a regional public resource project for fruit-growing in Central America (BPR/IDB): a program to improve the competitiveness of fruit-growing in Central America that has a health and safety component. At the request of the Central American agriculture ministers, the Puebla-Panama Plan submitted the project to the Inter-American Development Bank for financing.

43. IICA-El Salvador conducted a tour with fruit-growers producers and technical personnel to familiarize them with the operations model of the Comprehensive Agricultural and Environmental Protection Program (PIPAA), and the fruit and vegetable inspection and certification system in Guatemala.

44. IICA-Honduras, within the framework of the III Export Platform, has helped provide food safety training for business enterprises and support the sanitary evaluation of food producers in the business group participating in the platform. The business group is made up of a group of rural agribusinesses that produce local products in Danlí, El Paraíso. Based on the results of the sanitary evaluation, recommendations were made to facilitate compliance with safety requirements. Also, current development processes have been supported in the reference territory, Belén Gualcho, in agricultural health and food safety.

45. IICA-Panama has assisted the Technical Committee on Safety in implementing safety systems in the framework of the project: institutional strengthening and integration of rural development policies and strategies. The Technical Committee on Safety includes the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MIDA), the Department of Food Protection - Ministry of Health (DEPA-MINSA), the Food Protection Authority, the University of Panama, the Technical University, and the Ministry of Trade and Industries. Thirty-five small agroindustrial businesses in Panama have received support for implementing safety systems.

46. IICA-Southern Region, together with IICA-Andean Region provided horizontal technical cooperation to SASA in Venezuela for the workshop "*Production and the Control of Mycotoxins, Strengthening Food Safety,*" which helped develop skills in the surveillance and control of mycotoxins in food.