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Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

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ACTIONS AIMED AT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WTO AGREEMENT ON SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES

INFORMATION SUBMITTED BY THE INTER-AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR COOPERATION ON AGRICULTURE (IICA)

The following communication, received on 9 March 2015, is being circulated at the request of the IICA.

1. The observer organizations of the WTO Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Committee) are invited to submit reports on the activities they have carried out to promote the understanding and implementation of the SPS Agreement. The IICA would like to present some of the actions and activities that it considers relevant to the work of this Committee.

1 EFFORTS TO MAKE GREATER USE OF THE MULTILATERAL FORMS

1.1 World Trade Organization

2. The IICA-WTO Reference Centre¹ has handled approximately 1,400 technical enquiries of various kinds relating to trade, some of them on the subject of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures.

3. During the period 2013-2014, the number of SPS-related enquiries received by the Centre doubled, increasing from 4.2% of the total in 2013 to 9.1% in 2014. They covered a wide range of subjects, from the institutional framework to the overall SPS context, regional negotiations, and the standards imposed by markets for a specific product.

**Table 1. Number of SPS-related enquiries per year
2013-2014**

Year	SPS	Total
2013	24	572
2014	53	585

4. As part of the Reference Centre's outreach work, a national workshop was organized in Costa Rica under the leadership of the representatives of the country's academic institutions and with the support of the Academic Support and Reference Centres Unit of the WTO. The workshop took place during the second week of September 2014, and included an SPS module.

¹ The WTO Reference Centres promote the circulation of WTO publications and news, provide access to its databases and supply information on the e-training sessions available. They act as enquiry points, providing information to their users. These centres began as part of a technical cooperation programme aimed at mitigating the problems of access to information and of training in WTO-related areas faced by some of the developing countries. There are currently some 120 WTO Reference Centres throughout the world, one of them located in the IICA. Some of the reference centres are national, and others regional: the IICA Reference Centre serves the Institute's 34 member countries.

5. The IICA supported the IDB/WTO Regional SPS Workshop held in Montevideo, Uruguay, from 17 to 20 November 2014. It was attended by 46 participants from 19 countries of Latin America. The IICA was invited to give a presentation on the AHFS programme, which was well received by the participants and organizers and elicited their interest. The agenda of the workshop placed particular focus on facilitation of agricultural trade.

6. As part of the support it provides its member countries in the Caribbean region through the EU-CARIFORUM project to improve their understanding and implementation of the SPS Agreement, at the last meeting of the WTO SPS Committee, the IICA co-funded the participation of nine professionals from the region in the workshop on risk assessment organized by the Committee secretariat.

7. In addition to other activities under this project, a subregional workshop was held in Trinidad and Tobago on the development of programmes for the surveillance of food-borne diseases, a critical area for the management of food safety problems in the region. The workshop targeted public sector professionals in the areas of animal health, public health and microbiology, and benefitted from the cooperation of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and the University of the West Indies (UWI).

8. A seminar was also held in Trinidad and Tobago for interested private-sector representatives, to raise awareness of anti-microbial resistance. It was attended by approximately 40 participants from both the public and private sectors.

9. Turning to the projects implemented with the assistance of the IICA and funded by the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF), progress has been made in the following areas:

- Virtual school for food safety inspectors: the week of 26 February saw the launch of the first virtual course on food inspection, attended by 340 inspectors from Central America and the Dominican Republic. Eight different virtual classrooms were set up and coordinated by each one of the universities participating in the project.
- Strengthening regional capacity to meet pesticide export requirements based on international standards: training courses were organized during 2014 for government officials in charge of organizing field trials and implementing laboratory protocols. Field trials were also organized in Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Panama and Peru.
- FEEDLATINA (Latin American and Caribbean Feed Industries Association) Feed & Food Security Programme for the harmonization of regulations and safety of animal feed in Latin American and the Caribbean: two meetings of the Project Steering Group were held in 2014, as well as the first meeting of the Joint Technical Group in which the priority topics in the area of animal feed capacity building were identified.

1.2 Codex Alimentarius

10. As part of the Programme to Promote Participation in the Codex Alimentarius in the Americas (IICA-Codex Programme), the IICA will provide support, during the first 4 months of 2015, for participation of approximately 17 delegates in the Committee on General Principles, the Committee on Contaminants in Foods, the Committee on Pesticide Residues, and the Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Foods.

11. By the end of 2014, the implementation of the IICA-Codex Programme, which began in October 2009, had involved:

- participation in 35 meetings of the Codex;
- support for the participation of 190 delegates;
- coverage of 12 committees or working groups;
- 30 Latin American and Caribbean beneficiary countries; and

- support for the organization of 41 coordination video conferences to find common positions and establish technical dialogue between members of the Codex Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean (CCLAC).

12. Thanks to this IICA-Codex Programme, support has been provided in five areas of fundamental importance to IICA member countries: (i) Effective participation in the Codex Alimentarius; (ii) capacity building; (iii) institutional strengthening; (iv) promotion of science as a basis for adopting standards; and (v) development of effective communication as a mechanism for reaching consensus and common positions in the interest of the region.

13. As part of the IICA-Codex project's support for the capacity-building and effective communication component, the IICA supports the holding of Codex colloquiums, in which 15 to 20 countries of CCLAC region meet face to face to share technical analyses of the subject areas that are of particular interest in 3 Codex committees.

14. In February 2015, the seventh Codex colloquium was organized in Colombia to examine the issues covered by the Committee on General Principles, the Committee on Contaminants in Foods, and the Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs. This exercise should help the participating countries (15 in total) to achieve better cohesion among them when participating in those Codex Committees.

15. At the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015, a twinning activity was conducted between Belize and Costa Rica. This is another one of the mechanisms used by the IICA to promote capacity building on the basis of the knowledge and resources available among the countries of the CCLAC region themselves.

16. For Belize, the objective was essentially to strengthen the National Codex Committee and some of the Codex subcommittees considered to be of strategic importance to the country. Efforts were also made to secure the participation of the private sector and the government decision makers in order to obtain their support and permanent involvement. The activity began with a visit to Costa Rica by three officials from Belize to learn how the Codex functioned in Costa Rica. This was followed by an outreach and awareness-raising event in Belize with the participation of a delegate from the Codex focal point in Costa Rica.

17. The IICA's activities in relation to the Codex Alimentarius have received financial support from the governments of Canada and the United States, and technical support from Brazil and Costa Rica.

1.3 International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)

18. Through its strategic partnership with the IPPC, the IICA is currently involved in updating the Handbook of Good Practices for Participation in Meetings of the IPPC.

19. Regional workshops on capacity building and revision of the IPPC's draft International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs) for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean: these regional workshops took place from 22 to 25 September in Jamaica and from 28 to 31 October in Costa Rica with view to promoting the active participation of the National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPOs) in the preparation of the ISPMs and to foster capacity building in areas of interest relating to plant protection. The Latin American workshop was attended by 25 delegates from 17 countries and 3 observer organizations, while the Caribbean workshop was attended by 17 delegates from 13 countries.

2 SUPPORT FOR STRENGTHENING OF THE INSTITUTIONAL, TECHNICAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

20. As part of the IICA's training programmes for its member countries on new legislation that significantly impacts trade, since 2014 it has been working on building up the capacity to meet the United States' new food safety requirements.

21. With the support of the United States Department of Agriculture, the IICA and its partners in the different countries have been organizing national workshops to enhance understanding of the

Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and its proposed regulations, to ensure that the export sector is properly equipped to respond to the new requirements.

22. These workshops were held in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama and were attended by more than 500 participants representing producers, exporters and public sector organizations. As part of this cooperation, a number of visits were organized to companies in Guatemala and Honduras to determine their readiness to implement the requirements introduced by the FSMA.

23. In 2015 an event was organized in the Dominican Republic involving workshops in Santiago and Santo Domingo where once again companies were assessed. Similar activities are scheduled to take place in Colombia, Paraguay, Peru and the Caribbean.

24. Tool for the assessment of national capacities to respond to animal health and plant protection emergencies: the IICA has developed a new tool to provide countries with a method that will help them to analyse and determine their readiness to deal with emergencies and to plan their response.

25. Performance, Vision and Strategy (PVS) for NPPOs: the IICA, keen to contribute to strengthening NPPOs, continues to support countries through the use of the new PVS tool available in Spanish and English. The PVS process has been introduced in five countries of the hemisphere (Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Paraguay).

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