



19 March 2021

(21-2328)

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Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

Original: English

**SUMMARY OF NOVEMBER'S SEMINAR  
"FARMERS' PERSPECTIVES ON SPS CHALLENGES  
FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD PRODUCTION AND TRADE"**

SUBMISSION BY CANADA, COLOMBIA, COSTA RICA, ECUADOR, GUATEMALA,  
PARAGUAY, AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The following document, received on 18 March 2021, is being circulated at the request of the Delegations of Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, and the United States of America.

1. On 2 November 2020, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, and the United States organized a virtual seminar entitled "Farmers' Perspectives on SPS Challenges for Sustainable Food Production and Trade" as part of the SPS Committee week.
2. Building upon concerns expressed by many WTO Members on SPS issues, the objective of the seminar was to provide a forum to discuss real-world SPS challenges that farmers around the globe face to safely and sustainably produce and trade food. Speakers in the session addressed a broad array of issues, including food security, climate change, COVID-19, changes to maximum residue levels (MRLs), sustainable food production and trade, scientific evidence, risk-communication with civil society to enable consumers' trust, the role of Codex in international trade, challenges for small farmers and policy makers, and what can be done to overcome those challenges. Various perspectives were presented by the FAO, governments, and actual farmers and exporters.
3. A diverse group of farmers representing different continents, climates, cropping systems, production methods, marketing channels, and export markets discussed their farms and businesses, their SPS-related challenges, and the regulatory and technological tools they have available.
4. Panelists identified the following challenges facing agriculture and its producers:
  - a) Growing population and demographic changes;
  - b) Uneven impacts of climate change;
  - c) Impact of evolving pest and disease pressures in different regions and climates;
  - d) Challenges associated with MRLs, including decisions regarding the approval and renewal of active substances that are not based on risk assessment techniques developed by the relevant international organizations;
  - e) Cost of compliance and of violation of MRLs, cost of registration for minor crops, default setting of MRLs at the limit of quantification and impact of these policies on producers;
  - f) Insufficient transitional periods to adapt to regulatory changes, complexity for producers of following the changing and different MRL requirements in different markets, new and more stringent requirements, and lack of alternatives to adapt to these new regulations;
  - g) Lower profitability due to costs associated with overcoming regulatory burdens;
  - h) Accessibility of tools to deal with pests, diseases, and production challenges;
  - i) Misinformation about agriculture and food safety.

5. Panelists also identified the following opportunities facing agriculture and its producers:
  - a) Promoting a synchronized global approach on MRLs through the harmonization of standards, which should be based on science, risk assessment and follow international standards;
  - b) Proper use of plant protection products, combined with innovation and modern biotechnology;
  - c) Digitalization, new technologies, and innovation can provide new opportunities in trade and production agriculture;
  - d) Partnerships with the private sector, and the value of working together to solve problems;
  - e) Better communication with consumers to build trust in science-based evidence and refute misinformation and misperceptions about food and agriculture;
  - f) The value of international standards and the International Standard Setting bodies (ISSBs), especially Codex Alimentarius for food safety standards, and the importance of harmonization with those standards for facilitating trade.
  
6. Panelists remarked that governments have a responsibility, both to consumers and farmers, to achieve the proper balance between food safety objectives and the requirements for safe and profitable agricultural production. Climatic conditions in different parts of the world require different strategies for pest management and adaptation.
  
7. Panelists highlighted the benefit of informing the public of the consequences of policy choices and suggested that greater involvement of scientists and producers in decision making processes may be critical to finding solutions to challenges faced by producers around the world. From the panelists' perspective, a collaborative and inclusive approach that takes into account Members' own unique circumstances will be needed.
  
8. The panelists left the participants with some closing thoughts. When measures are not based on science, consumer confidence decreases and confusion about food safety increases. There is a need to better communicate risk to consumers, and utilize the work of the ISSBs, such as Codex Alimentarius Commission, in standard setting. Panelists made a call to the participants of the seminar and the SPS delegates to maintain their commitment and constructive work, and to continue the dialogue and find a way forward that works for all farmers, consumers, and the planet. Several mentioned the importance of the work in the SPS Committee, the Approval Procedures Working Group, and the MC12 Declaration and Work Programme.
  
9. Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, and the United States invite all Members to engage meaningfully and collaboratively on these pressing issues at the WTO, in particular in the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures.
  
10. The Seminar recordings are available online in English, Spanish, and French here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChr4LpCLzLVlp6PK0LPIR7w>.
  
11. The report on the global economic impact of missing and low pesticide MRLs, which was presented at the seminar, and other details from the seminar are available online here: <https://geneva.usmission.gov/2020/11/12/farmers-perspectives-on-sps-challenges-for-sustainable-food-production-and-trade/>.

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