

Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

REPORT BY THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)

ADENDA ITEM 4 - TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND COOPERATION

1. WHO provides various technical assistance to Member States with a particular focus on strengthening national capacities for: assessing and responding to foodborne diseases (FBDs) and their risks; participating in the WTO multilateral trade negotiations including the SPS Agreement and the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission at national, regional and international level; and reviewing/developing national food legislation with a view to meeting the obligations of WTO trade agreements and harmonizing with Codex standards, guidelines and recommendations. The following are some examples of these activities carried out by the WHO Head Quarters in Geneva, Switzerland and the six WHO Regions (Regional Offices for the Americas, Africa, Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, Western Pacific and South-East Asia).

A. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR FOODBORNE DISEASE SURVEILLANCE AND RESPONSE

2. Surveillance data are of paramount importance for all steps of risk analysis, namely, risk profiling, risk assessment, risk management and risk communication. WHO offers technical assistance to Member States to improve FBD surveillance data in order to reduce uncertainties in risk assessment and thereby entail an appropriate selection of prevention and control strategies. Examples include:

(a) WHO Training Courses for Laboratory Microbiologists¹

3. WHO offers training courses for national reference laboratories in different regions to strengthen the capacities of WHO Member States for surveillance and control of the major FBDs. So far, eight training courses are organized in South East Asia, Central America, South America, China and the Mediterranean. In July 2001, a training course was organized in Merida, Mexico with participants from: Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico and Panama. In September 2001, a training course was organized in Buenos Aires with participants from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Future courses are planned in Poland for Middle and Eastern Europe and in Thailand for South East Asia.

(b) Upcoming WHO Consultation on Global Strategy for Foodborne Disease Surveillance

4. This Consultation will be convened on 26-29 November 2001, in Geneva, Switzerland to establish a "global network of networks of FBD surveillance systems (FoodWeb)" by bringing

¹ This is part of WHO's Global Salm-Surv (GSS) Programme (<http://www.who.int/salmsurv>) which is a global surveillance network on *Salmonella* in the human health, veterinary and food-related areas. The WHO Global Salm-Surv comprises the following elements: external quality assurance and reference testing program on *Salmonella* serotyping and antimicrobial susceptibility testing; communication and information exchange between laboratories and individuals through an electronic discussion group; and web-based databank containing annual surveillance results of national and regional laboratories.

together various potential partners. This is part of WHO's comprehensive strategy for strengthening national capacities for FBD surveillance systems in developing countries: surveillance data are used for planning, implementing and evaluating public health policies, however little information exists for measuring the incidence, prevalence and types of FBD in developing countries. Such a "global network of networks" that transcends current boundaries, by involving developing countries, could be used as a rapid alert system when FBD outbreaks occur and would enable rapid exchange of new information and technologies. The starting point of the Consultation will be to review national and international experiences on FBD surveillance networks and to identify the needs of surveillance data for risk analysis, especially risk assessment.

(c) WHO Training Workshops on Surveillance of Human Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs)²

5. WHO offers training workshops on developing surveillance systems for human TSEs to provide skills in the screening and diagnosis of human TSEs. Workshops have been held in every region (Bangkok, Beijing, Cairo, Dakar, Buenos Aires and Bratislava) and more are planned in the NIS in 2002. Workshops can be requested by any WHO Member State although funding would have to be identified to support the workshops. Training in the laboratory diagnosis of human TSEs is coordinated through WHO Collaborating Centres in Human TSEs. Trainees learn how to make the diagnosis through neuropathology, Western blot and cerebrospinal fluid testing.

B. WHO TRAINING COURSE "PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF THE MULTILATERAL TRADE AGREEMENTS"

6. This training course was held on 10-14 September 2001 in Geneva, Switzerland with the cooperation of WTO. Public health and trade specialists were brought together to explore the links between the two disciplines and to gain a broad understanding of the public health implications of the multilateral trade agreements (MTAs) with a focus on poor people. The course was designed to enable its participants to acquire a grounding in negotiating skills; be able to identify the opportunities for constructive interventions by public health practitioners in trade negotiations; and be in a better position to participate in national, regional and international MTA deliberations. The training material used for this course will soon be available on CD-ROM. A guide on health and the MTAs is also being prepared by WHO in collaboration with WTO.

C. EXAMPLES OF REGION SPECIFIC TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

1. FBD Surveillance

7. The Pan American Institute for Food Protection and Zoonoses (INPPAZ)/Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) of the WHO Region for the Americas coordinates the Regional Information System for the Epidemiological Surveillance of FBDs (SIRVETA). Since 1994, 21 countries have informed the system of data on FBD outbreaks to provide basic information for risk analysis.

2. Risk Analysis

(a) Joint FAO/WHO/ILSI Workshop on "Risk Analysis: Exposure Assessment"

8. **The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO)** organized this workshop in January 2001, preceding the First Session of the Codex Coordinating Committee for the Near East which was organized in Cairo, Egypt. The objectives of the workshop were: to acquaint

² I.e. CJD (Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease)

participants with the principles of risk analysis and the methodologies for assessing exposure to food borne hazards; to sensitize participants to the risk assessment needs in the region; to provide guidance to participants on the necessary data required for exposure assessments; and to encourage participants to apply the acquired knowledge in risk analysis of food borne hazards in the development of their food legislation.

(b) International Workshop on Risk Analysis and Food Safety

9. **The WHO Regional Office for the Americas (AMRO)**, together with FAO, sponsored workshops in September 2000 to provide training to give practical consideration to the issues and types of hazards and risks that needed to be addressed. Also, in February 2001, preceding the Codex Regional Committee of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Pan American Institute for Food Protection and Zoonoses (INPPAZ)/Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), jointly with FAO, conducted a workshop on "Risk Analysis and Exposure Assessment" in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic.

3. National Food Legislation, the WTO SPS Agreement, and Codex

(a) Technical Assistance by the Pan American Institute for Food Protection and Zoonoses (INPPAZ)/Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)

10. In the **WHO Region for the Americas**, INPPAZ/PAHO is supporting various technical assistance activities to stimulate the commitment of the countries of the region to the Codex standards. Technical and financial support is provided to the Codex Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean for organizing the meetings and to enable the participation of most countries of the region. Assistance is offered to countries for the dissemination of information on Codex meetings and facilitation of exchange of information by conducting virtual meetings of national contact points in preparation of Codex meetings. A free Internet site has been developed for this purpose. In 2001, INPPAZ/PAHO has also been conducting a project with Brazil to provide training for the staff of the National Agency of Sanitary Surveillance (ANVISA) to strengthen capacities for the revision/development and enforcement of national food legislation in addition to Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP), Good Agricultural Practice (GAP), Standard Sanitation Operating Procedures (SSOP) and HACCP.

11. Member States have requested INPPAZ/PAHO support for establishing a database on food standards and legislation. INPPAZ/PAHO has recently developed the Information System on Food Legislation, an electronic tool for maintaining a database on national food legislation and standards, enabling a comparison of food legislation among different countries as well as with Codex standards and thereby contributing to harmonization of international legislation. The system has been completed in Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Guatemala. INPPAZ/PAHO, upon request, provides technical assistance to Member States to update national food safety legislation.

(b) The Caribbean Food Safety Initiative "Assessment of the Food Safety Systems as Related to Human, Animal and Plant Health"³

12. **The WHO Regional Office for the Americas (AMRO)** has been promoting this initiative to assist the English-speaking Caribbean countries to meet the obligations of the WTO SPS Agreement and keep the competitiveness of these small state economies for health and development. It consists of four technical cooperation components: harmonization of food legislation/regulations in line with

³ A project proposal has been recently submitted for funding to the USAID/CARICOM agencies. For information contact: Dr Genaro W. Garcia, Regional Adviser, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Email: garciage@paho.org Tel: (202) 974-3193

Codex standards; laboratory-based surveillance; risk analysis and HACCP application; and community outreach in food safety. The program comprises an assessment of the food safety system in each country and provides policy guidance at the country and sub-regional level.

13. **The WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific (WPRO)** has been undertaking a series of activities aimed at increasing the understanding of the work of Codex and the WTO SPS Agreement during 2000-2001, which will be continued in 2002 and beyond. In May and June 2001, joint FAO/WHO workshops on "Food Safety and Codex" were held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, for senior health and non-health authorities to draft a national plan of action for food safety and Codex. In June 2001, two more workshops of a similar nature were held by WHO in Suva, Fiji, and Honiara, Solomon Islands. In July 2001, a Joint FAO/WHO workshop on food safety and Codex was held for health, environment and industry personnel in Majuro, Republic of the Marshall Islands. Another WHO workshop on this theme is scheduled to take place in November 2001 in Kiribati and Samoa, pending government agreement. Many of the Pacific Island countries have identified a need for greater understanding of the implications of the WTO and its trade agreements.

14. Technical advice and funding is being provided for inter-ministerial meetings and working groups on food safety policy, laws and standards in accordance with Codex to Viet Nam by WHO with funding from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2001-2002.

15. An agreement for the performance of work to provide technical advice to national Codex committee members for strengthening food legislation and participation in the work of Codex is under preparation for one or two countries in the Western Pacific Region for 2002-2003.

16. Following the request to WPRO from China in 2000 for the symposium (implemented November 2000) and workshop (implemented December 2000) covering WTO requirements on food safety and the steps that needed to be taken to prepare China for the accession to the WTO, in the recent 52nd Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific (September 2001), China again noted the need for WHO to provide information, technical advice and guidance on the WTO SPS Agreement and suggested WHO should further strengthen its collaboration with WTO and other international organizations.

17. **The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO)** has been providing technical assistance for reviewing national food legislation in Member States with a view to harmonizing them with the Codex standards, guidelines and recommendations. A number of countries have been reviewing their food safety legislation (Egypt, Oman, Sudan) or actually updating it (Jordan). Assistance by WHO/EMRO includes collecting and forwarding food legislation from and to Member States. Activities are planned to assist countries in the region develop a full understanding of the content and implications of the SPS and TBT agreements at a national level, become more actively involved in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and to involve the Ministries of Health in the process.

ADENDA ITEM 6 - MATTERS OF INTEREST ARISING FROM THE WORK OF THE OBSERVER ORGANIZATIONS

18. The following is a brief description of some of the activities conducted by WHO since the previous SPS Committee meeting in July, and those scheduled to take place.

A. CHEMICAL CONTAMINATION OF FOOD

- (a) Meeting of Global Environment Monitoring System/Food Contamination Monitoring and Assessment Programme (GEMS/Food-Euro) Contact Points

19. This meeting was held on 10-12 July 2001 in Berlin, Germany, and discussed the re-establishing of data collection and cooperation in the area of food contamination monitoring. A training course in the electronic reporting of data was held immediately following the workshop.

- (b) Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues (JMPR)

20. The 2001 JMPR was held on 16-25 September 2001 in Geneva, Switzerland and evaluated 26 pesticides, including two new compounds and seven that were subjected to full re-evaluation, for toxicology or residues or both, within the Periodic Review Programme of the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues (CCPR).

- (c) Upcoming Second International Total Diet Workshop

21. This workshop will be held on 5-15 February 2002 in Brisbane, Australia with the purpose to develop procedures and to train staff for Total Diet Studies in Member States. Member States undertaking these activities will be able to acquire data needed for effective participation in Codex work and risk assessments of chemical contamination of food at a national level. Enabling these risk assessments would provide the capacity for priority setting of foodborne disease risks and lead to effective risk management. This Workshop will be held in collaboration with a FAO workshop on food composition and nutrient assessment, also to be held in Brisbane.

B. MICROBIOLOGICAL CONTAMINATION OF FOOD

- (a) Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on Risk Assessment of Microbiological Hazards in Foods

22. This Expert Consultation was held on 23-27 July 2001 in Geneva, Switzerland to examine available relevant information on the exposure assessment and hazard characterization steps of risk assessments of two more pathogen-commodity combinations identified as priority issues by the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (CCFH), namely, *Campylobacter* spp. in broiler chickens and *Vibrio* spp. in seafood. The preliminary report of the Expert Consultation was submitted to the 35th Session of the CCFH (8-13 October 2001, Bangkok, Thailand) which defined more focused questions for the continued work of the Expert Consultation. A final report will be delivered to the CCFH in 2002.

23. A Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on the risk assessment of Enterohemorrhagic *Escherichia coli* will be convened in early 2002.

- (b) Upcoming WHO Consultation on Global Strategy for Foodborne Disease Surveillance

24. This Consultation will be convened on 26-29 November 2001 in Geneva, Switzerland to establish a "global network of networks of foodborne disease (FBD) surveillance systems (FoodWeb)" by bringing together various potential partners. This is part of WHO's comprehensive strategy for strengthening national capacities for FBD surveillance systems in developing countries: surveillance data are used for planning, implementing and evaluating public health policies, however little information exists for measuring the incidence, prevalence and types of FBD in developing countries. Such a "global network of networks" that transcends current boundaries, by involving developing countries, could be used as a rapid alert system when FBD outbreaks occur and would

enable rapid exchange of new information and technologies. The starting point of the Consultation will be to review national and international experiences on FBD surveillance networks and to identify the needs of surveillance data for risk analysis, especially risk assessment.

- (c) Proposed FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on "Principles and Guidelines for Incorporating Quantitative Risk Assessment in the Development of National and International Food Safety Policy" (tentative)

25. This Expert Consultation is currently being planned to provide guidance for the systematic use of the results of risk assessments by the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (CCFH) in developing standards, guidelines and recommendations. International risk assessments on *Salmonella* in broilers and eggs and *Listeria* in ready-to-eat foods will be used as resources in developing principles and guidelines to achieve this goal through the following approaches: illustration of how completed international quantitative risk assessments can be integrated into the various outputs of the CCFH, and demonstration of how risk management questions posed by the CCFH should be formulated in cases where a quantitative risk assessment is commissioned to achieve risk management goals.

C. ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE

- (a) WHO Consultation on Methods and Principles for the Monitoring of Antimicrobial Usage in Food Animal Production for the Protection of Human Health

26. This Consultation was held on 10-13 September 2001 in Oslo, Norway in concurrence with recommendations from the WHO Consultation on the Medical Impact of the Use of Antimicrobials in Food Animals (October 1997, Berlin, Germany). Many international bodies have identified surveillance of antimicrobial consumption in food animals as a pre-requisite for the identification of risk factors for the emergence of antimicrobial resistance in zoonotic bacteria and the evaluation of public health intervention for their containment. However, there is still insufficient information available on antimicrobial consumption, as very little progress has been made on strengthening of antimicrobial usage surveillance at national and international levels. This Consultation focused on this issue to develop models for and an inventory on existing national and international strategies for national and international surveillance of antimicrobial usage in food animals for the protection of human health, and to make recommendations to support governments, national authorities, the pharmaceutical industry, international organizations and other stakeholders in their endeavours to establish national antimicrobial usage surveillance programmes. Existing data on non-human antimicrobial usage, national experiences and approaches in the setting up of antimicrobial usage surveillance systems was reviewed. The WHO Collaborating Centre for Drug Statistics Methodology and pharmaceutical industry representatives participated in the Consultation. Recommendations and guidelines that can assist governments in establishing national monitoring programs are being developed.

D. FOODS DERIVED FROM MODERN BIOTECHNOLOGY

- (a) Third Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on Foods Derived from Biotechnology

27. WHO and FAO convened this Expert Consultation on 24-28 September 2001 in Geneva, Switzerland to consider the scientific aspects of safety assessments of foods derived from genetically modified microorganisms. The findings of this Expert Consultation will be published shortly and will also be provided to the Working Group of the Codex *ad hoc* Intergovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology (4-8 March 2002, Yokohama, Japan) which is drafting the Proposed Draft Guideline for the Conduct of Safety Assessments of Recombinant-DNA Microorganisms in Food.

(b) WHO Research Consortium on Modern Food Biotechnology and Health and Welfare

28. The 53rd World Health Assembly (May 2000) recognized that the application of gene technologies to food is an important health issue and resolved that WHO should strengthen its capacity to provide a scientific basis for decisions on the effects of genetically modified (GM) foods on human health and welfare. Following from this World Health Assembly resolution, starting end-2001, WHO will be commissioning a research consortium to establish a knowledge base to assist Member States, international standard-setting bodies and other stakeholders to achieve consensus on appropriate modes of application and risk assessment of foods produced using gene technology. The research consortium will identify and recapitulate current knowledge on the potential risks and benefits of modern biotechnology, considering both direct and indirect effects. Areas covered will include current and future application of gene technology to food production, issues of food safety, access and technology transfer, socio-economic costs/benefits, civil society implications and, to a certain extent, environmental impacts.

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WHO Food Safety Related Web Sites

Food Safety: <http://www.who.int/fsf>

Foodborne Disease surveillance: <http://www.int/salmsurv>

Veterinary Public Health and Zoonosis: <http://www.who.int/emc/diseases/zoo/>

Chemical Safety: <http://www.who.int/pcs>
