

**FAO AND CODEX ACTIVITIES IN RISK ANALYSIS AND FOOD**

Statement by the Codex Representative at the Meeting of 29-30 March 1995

**Introduction**

1. FAO's Food Quality and Standards Service is pivotal to the provision of technical assistance to developing countries in relation to food in the context of the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the SPS Agreement). The SPS Agreement specifically requires in Article 5 that members are to assure their sanitary and phytosanitary measures are based on an assessment of the risks to human, animal and plant life and health, taking into consideration the risk assessment techniques developed by the relevant international organizations, available scientific evidence, economic considerations and related cost-effective approaches to limit risk, while at the same time having the objective of minimizing negative effects on trade. It is therefore important that countries, particularly developing countries, have the tools to appropriately apply the three elements of risk analysis, namely risk assessment, risk management and risk communications, when applying SPS measures.

2. As science continues to provide new knowledge as to the world around us, so too has it identified new hazards against which protection is necessary. Biological systems are in a continuous state of flux, as are systems of production, processing and marketing. Sanitary protection in a manner that permits the widest possible trade in food is a dynamic process which requires continuous review and constant change in assessment and the approach to be taken to minimize risk. It is important that risk assessment methods and techniques continue to evolve to keep pace with new scientific information and ever changing systems.

**The Codex Alimentarius Commission and Risk Assessment**

3. The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) has long assessed the risks associated with food consumption to meet its primary mandate, namely to protect consumer health and safety and to facilitate international trade in food. To this end, the CAC, in its role of establishing food standards, guidelines and recommendations, obtains expert advice from such long standing expert scientific evaluation committees as the FAO/WHO Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives, Contaminants and Veterinary Drug Residues (JECFA) and the FAO/WHO Joint Meeting on Pesticide Residues (JMPR). These two independent scientific bodies review and assess the safety issues of additives used in food, drugs in animals and pesticides used for plant and animal production. Both committees have applied risk assessment techniques in their deliberations, decisions and recommendations to CAC.

4. The Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems has confirmed that a risk-based approach should be used in the development of national food import inspection systems. Such an approach will target problem areas more effectively and provide greater consumer protection than systems based purely on random inspection procedures. Detailed protocols have yet to be developed.

5. In 1991, FAO, in cooperation with WHO, held the Joint FAO/WHO Conference on Food Standards, Chemicals and Food Trade. This conference recommended that JECFA, JMPR and all relevant Codex Committees continue to base their evaluations on suitable scientific principles and ensure consistency in their application of risk assessment. In 1993, a review of the risk analysis procedures used by CAC and its advisory and subsidiary bodies was undertaken for the Commission. The review recommended strengthening the quantification of risk and stressed the need for decision making criteria in risk analysis and the harmonization of risk analysis methods. In June 1994, the Executive Committee of Codex specifically requested the sponsoring organizations, FAO and WHO, to provide additional expert advice and guidance on the application of risk analysis and risk management to food standards and food safety issues.

### **An Expert Consultation**

6. As a follow up to the request of the Executive Committee of Codex, a joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on the Application of Risk Analysis to Food Standards Issues was convened in Geneva from 13-17 March 1995. The objectives of this consultation were to recommend to FAO, WHO, the CAC and the member countries the most appropriate approaches to the application of risk analysis and risk management to food standards/food safety issues. Further, it was requested to provide an applied approach to risk analysis suitable for early adoption by FAO, WHO, the CAC, and the advisory and subsidiary bodies of the CAC.

7. Twelve (12) experts were invited in their personal capacity from Brazil, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden, Thailand and the United States; fifteen (15) consultants, temporary advisers and observers, including representatives from the WTO, the International Office of Epizootics (OIE) and the joint Secretariat to the expert committees participated in the consultation.

8. The recommendations of the Expert Consultation included:

- that exposure assessment be an integral part of Codex risk assessment procedures for food additives and for chemical contaminants in food;
- that where risk management issues intrude in risk assessment that the decision making process be transparent;
- that methodology used for estimating exposure to pesticides residues in food be reviewed to make it more accurate;
- increased use of the quantitative risk assessment paradigm in considering exposure to residues of veterinary drugs in food;
- a risk analysis approach to controlling biological hazards in food;
- that the awareness of risk managers of the uncertainties in risk estimates be heightened, and that they be made aware of the need to manage the model in the most effective manner;
- that the use of safety factors be critically reviewed; and
- that risk assessment methodology is developed for biological hazards to enable application of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point based systems to food control.

9. The Report of the Session, to be published as a joint FAO/WHO publication, will be available by early May 1995. The recommendations of the Expert Consultation will be taken to, and considered by, the CAC when it meets for its 21st Session in July 1995. The report is also expected to be widely disseminated to governments of member countries to serve as a guide in their risk analysis and management decisions under SPS and to improve the safety of food in international trade while minimizing any negative effect.

### **The Future**

10. Presently, FAO has under consideration the need for a further Expert Consultation to extend the issue of risk analysis beyond risk assessment to the areas of risk management and risk communication. FAO expects a decision to proceed will be taken soon. It also has under review the need for sponsoring regional and national training workshops in the risk assessment, risk management and risk communications areas.