
Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

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FOOD SAFETY

Submission by the World Health Organization (WHO)

The 53rd Session of the World Health Assembly, the governing body of the World Health Organization, was held in Geneva on 15-20 May 2000. The Assembly discussed the issue of food safety and adopted the following resolution addressed to both Member States and the Director-General of WHO.

The Fifty-third World Health Assembly,

Deeply concerned that foodborne illnesses associated with microbial pathogens, biotoxins and chemical contaminants in food represent a serious threat to the health of millions of people in the world;

Recognizing that foodborne diseases significantly affect people's health and well-being and have economic consequences for individuals, families, communities, businesses, and countries;

Acknowledging the importance of all services – including public health services – responsible for food safety, in ensuring the safety of food and in harmonizing the efforts of all stakeholders throughout the food chain;

Aware of the increased concern of consumers about the safety of food, particularly after recent foodborne-disease outbreaks of international and global scope and the emergence of new food products derived from biotechnology;

Recognizing the importance of the standards, guidelines and other recommendations of the Codex Alimentarius Commission for protecting the health of consumers and assuring fair trading practices;

Noting the need for surveillance systems for assessment of the burden of foodborne disease and the development of evidence-based national and international control strategies;

Mindful that food safety systems must take account of the trend towards integration of agriculture and the food industry and of ensuing changes in farming, production, and marketing practices and consumer habits in both developed and developing countries;

Mindful of the growing importance of microbiological agents in foodborne-disease outbreaks at international level and of the increasing resistance of some foodborne bacteria to common

therapies, particularly because of the widespread use of antimicrobials in agriculture and in clinical practice;

Aware of the improvements in public health protection and in the development of sustainable food and agricultural sectors that could result from the enhancement of WHO's food safety activities;

Recognizing that developing countries rely for their food supply primarily on traditional agriculture and small- and medium-sized food industry, and that in most developing countries, the food safety systems remain weak,

1. URGES Member States:

(1) to integrate food safety as one of their essential public health and public nutrition functions and to provide adequate resources to establish and strengthen their food safety programmes in close collaboration with their applied nutrition and epidemiological surveillance programmes;

(2) to develop and implement systematic and sustainable preventive measures aimed at reducing significantly the occurrence of foodborne illnesses;

(3) to develop and maintain national, and where appropriate, regional means for surveillance of foodborne diseases and for monitoring and controlling relevant microorganisms and chemicals in food; to reinforce the principal responsibility of producers, manufacturers, and traders for food safety; and to increase the capacity of laboratories, especially in developing countries;

(4) to integrate measures in their food safety policies aimed at preventing the development of microbial agents that are resistant to antibiotics;

(5) to support the development of science in the assessment of risks related to food, including the analysis of risk factors relevant to foodborne disease;

(6) to integrate food safety matters into health and nutrition education and information programmes for consumers, particularly within primary and secondary school curricula, and to initiate culture-specific health and nutrition education programmes for food handlers, consumers, farmers, producers and agro-food industry personnel;

(7) to develop outreach programmes for the private sector that can improve food safety at the consumer level, with emphasis on hazard prevention and orientation for good manufacturing practices, especially in urban food markets, taking into account the specific needs and characteristics of micro- and small-food industries, and to explore opportunities for cooperation with the food industry and consumer associations in order to raise awareness regarding the use of good and ecologically safe farming and good hygienic and manufacturing practices;

(8) to coordinate the food safety activities of all relevant national sectors concerned with food safety matters, particularly those related to the risk assessment of foodborne hazards, including the influence of packaging, storage and handling;

(9) to participate actively in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its committees, including activities in the emerging area of food-safety risk analysis;

(10) to ensure appropriate, full and accurate disclosure in labelling of food products, including warnings and best-before dates where relevant;

(11) to legislate for control of the reuse of containers for food products and for the prohibition of false claims;

2. REQUESTS the Director-General:

(1) to give greater emphasis to food safety, in view of WHO's global leadership in public health, and in collaboration and coordination with other international organizations, notably the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and within the Codex Alimentarius Commission, and to work towards integrating food safety as one of WHO's essential public health functions, with the goal of developing sustainable, integrated food safety systems for the reduction of health risk along the entire food chain, from the primary producer to the consumer;

(2) to support Member States in the identification of food-related diseases and the assessment of foodborne hazards, and storage, packaging and handling issues;

(2 bis) to provide developing countries with support for the training of their staff, taking into account the technological context of production in these countries;

(3) to focus on emerging problems related to the development of antimicrobial-resistant micro-organisms stemming from the use of antimicrobials in food production and clinical practice;

(4) to put in place a global strategy for the surveillance of foodborne diseases and for the efficient gathering and exchange of information in and between countries and regions, taking into account the current revision of the International Health Regulations;

(5) to convene, as soon as practicable, an initial strategic planning meeting of food safety experts from Member States, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations with an interest in food safety issues;

(6) to provide, in close collaboration with other international organizations active in this area, particularly FAO and the International Office of Epizootics (OIE), technical support to developing countries in assessing the burden on health and prioritizing disease-control strategies through the development of laboratory-based surveillance systems for major foodborne pathogens, including antimicrobial-resistant bacteria, and in monitoring contaminants in food;

(7) in collaboration with FAO and other bodies as appropriate, to strengthen the application of science in the assessment of acute and long-term health risks related to food, and specifically to support the establishment of an expert advisory body on microbiological risk assessment and to strengthen the expert advisory bodies that provide scientific guidance on food safety issues related to chemicals, and to maintain an updated databank of this scientific evidence to support Member States in making health-related decisions in these matters;

(8) to ensure that the procedures for designating experts and preparing scientific opinions are such as to guarantee the transparency, excellence and independence of the opinions delivered;

- (9) to encourage research to support evidence-based strategies for the control of foodborne diseases, particularly research on risk factors related to emergence and increase of foodborne diseases and on simple methods for the management and control of health risks related to food;
 - (10) to examine the current working relationship between WHO and FAO, with a view to increasing the involvement and support of WHO in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its committees;
 - (11) to support Member States in providing the scientific basis for health-related decisions regarding genetically modified foods;
 - (12) to support the inclusion of health considerations in international trade in food and food donations;
 - (13) to make the largest possible use of information from developing countries in risk assessment for international standard-setting, and to strengthen technical training in developing countries by providing them with a comprehensive document in WHO working languages, to the extent possible;
 - (14) to proactively pursue action, on behalf of developing countries, so that the level of technological development in developing countries is taken into account in the adoption and application of international standards on food safety;
 - (15) to respond immediately to international and national food safety emergencies and to assist countries in crisis management;
 - (16) to call upon all stakeholders – especially the private sector – to take their responsibility for the quality and safety of food production, including environmental protection awareness throughout the food chain;
 - (17) to support capacity building in Member States, especially those from the developing world, and facilitate their full participation in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its different committees, including activities in food safety risk analysis processes.
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