

**INNOVATION IN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

Submission from the Inter-American Institute  
for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)

**1. Traditional approach**

1. The lack of modernization of agricultural health and food safety (AHFS) systems makes it difficult for countries to maintain satisfactory sanitary and phytosanitary conditions and comply with international requirements. This has been most apparent in developing countries that despite having both received and earmarked resources for improving their AHFS systems, have not always realized the outcomes desired.

2. Technical assistance and investment projects are the tools used most often by countries and international organizations to promote the modernization of AHFS systems. However, the form in which such assistance has traditionally been provided and the lack of innovation, has created an imbalance between the level of development of the AHFS systems, and the demands placed on them given the current realities.

3. Traditionally, investments in AHFS systems have primarily focused on infrastructure such as the establishment of quarantine posts, the creation of diagnostic laboratories or the acquisition of equipment. This has sometimes created a vacuum in other areas such as institutional sustainability, regulatory mechanisms, and technical capacity. In addition, bilateral technical assistance has been largely based on what was available to provide rather than a comprehensive diagnosis and prioritization of a countries AHFS needs.

4. In a review of five countries in the Americas, since 1995, US\$370 million were invested in projects linked directly or indirectly with agricultural health. In spite of this investment, only one of these countries has been able to establish a free zone for a list-A disease as established by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). Moreover, these countries met only 43 per cent of the conditions outlined in the IICA study (G/SPS/GEN/214) in order to effectively apply the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures of the WTO. This is a matter of concern given the importance of the agricultural sector in their economies. For example, agricultural exports account for 70 per cent of total exports in two of the five countries.

5. In the five countries evaluated, there has also been a high turnover rate among top-level officials responsible for bringing about institutional change and implementing policies related to AHFS. Since 1995, the average tenure of a minister of agriculture has been 13 months, an animal-health director 17 months, and a plant-health director 14 months. The result has been a lack of continuity in the application of long-term policies intended to modernize the AHFS systems.

## 2. Toward a new approach

6. Certain elements required for a new approach to technical assistance for AHFS systems can be gleaned by studying specific cases in the Americas in which it has been possible to build a sustainable institutional framework, promote leadership and foster articulation between the public and private sectors. The success of these cases lies in the innovation they have incorporated in defining functions and responsibilities for the public and private sectors.

### (a) Expanded market opportunities in Sonora, Mexico

7. A balanced approach to strengthen technical capacity, regulatory mechanisms and institutional sustainability has allowed the State of Sonora to eradicate hog cholera and Aujeszky's disease in hogs.<sup>1</sup> Pork exports from Mexico have climbed from 500 tons in 1990 to 50,000 in 2000. In complying with the international standards, the State of Sonora has been able to gain access to various markets such as the United States, Canada and Japan for its pork products.

8. *The success of the AHFS systems in Sonora has been the balanced attention paid to technical capacity, regulatory mechanisms and institutional sustainability. To achieve this, both the public and the private sectors have been actively involved in planning and execution of actions. In addition, the usage of current technologies and ensuring compliance with food quality and food safety standards has enabled a level of trust and confidence in Sonoran pork exports to be established.*

### (b) Regaining markets for raspberries in Guatemala

9. The articulation of the public and private sectors along with institutional strengthening enabled Guatemala to reestablish lost markets. The alleged presence of *Cyclospora cayetanensis* in raspberries from Guatemala, and their association with outbreaks of cyclosporiasis in the United States and Canada, that initially caused important trade-related problems have been overcome.

10. *As a response to this crisis, Guatemala created the High-level Commission on Food Safety (CANIA), comprising representatives of the ministries of economy, agriculture and public health, and the production and academic sectors. The task force generated a set of joint policies from which a set of rules were adopted on sanitary and phytosanitary measures consistent with the SPS Agreement. The institutional structure of the AHFS system has been strengthened and now includes research and technical cooperation as well as other actors in the food chain. This structure now makes it possible to execute similar actions with other crops and access new markets.*

### (c) The Patagonian barrier for animal and plant health

11. A joint initiative of the public and private sector led to the creation of the Patagonian Barrier for Animal and Plant Health Foundation (FUNBAPA). Created in 1992, it is a non-profit private entity financed by the private and public sectors under guidelines established by the State. The FUNBAPA objective is to establish the necessary mechanisms and conditions in order to declare and maintain the territory of Patagonia free of all major diseases and pests harmful to animal and plant production. The foundation has carried out several successful actions to combat fruit flies and the codling worm, and to supervise and certify the quality of fruits and vegetables.

12. *The Patagonia region measures 55.8 million hectares and contains 14,903 farms/ranches. The success of FUNBAPA can be attributed to the active involvement of the private sector, which is largely responsible for its financial and institutional stability. FUNBAPA has been able to avoid*

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<sup>1</sup> The experience was useful for the eradication of Newcastle disease and avian influenza and salmonellosis.

*funding shortfalls and has not experienced a reappearance of pests or diseases that would constitute a setback in the progress already achieved. To date, FUNBAPA has been able to keep foot and mouth disease from entering Patagonia.*

(d) Executive Leadership in Food Safety series

13. Beginning in 1998, through a number of conferences and needs assessments, leaders from both the public sector, agribusiness and international organizations identified the need to promote initiatives that would enhance leadership and foster actions in order to improve the overall level of food safety.

14. *As a response to these initiatives, IICA has formulated an "Executive Leadership in Food Safety" series. The target audience are emerging leaders in the Americas. The first module was held in San Jose, Costa Rica in June 2001 with 24 countries participating. The series has three objectives: (1) Exposure to cutting edge and emerging topics in food safety in order to modernize AHFS systems; (2) Enhancement of leadership skills and abilities in order to initiate and carry out food safety policies and actions, and (3) Creation of a hemispheric network or community in order to exchange information on successful experiences in the area of food safety policies and related initiatives.*

### **3. Elements for the new approach**

15. In document G/SPS/GEN/214, IICA proposed several elements that should be considered in the planning and implementation of technical assistance for the AHFS systems. These elements were contained in the four cases cited. The first element is that *the presence or absence of financial resources does not necessarily ensure the success or failure of an initiative*. In the cases presented their success was not tied to large initial investments or loans. The second element is the need for *fluid and transparent articulation between the public and private sectors*. This makes possible consensus in prioritization of actions to improve AHFS and ensures institutional and financial sustainability in making AHFS systems a reality.

16. The next element is *"political will" across the entire food chain*. Such political will is critical in order to break the traditional paradigms, grant more functions and responsibilities to the private sector, and create the laws and regulatory mechanisms needed to modernize AHFS systems. The final element is to *strengthen the level of leadership*, which ensures the formulation and continuity of policies that are in keeping with the international context and requirements.

17. Taking these elements into consideration should assist in the international dialogue concerning technical assistance. Modernization of AHFS systems should be viewed as an investment and not as an expense. The traditional approaches to providing technical assistance and executing projects do not always achieve the desired results as intended by Article 9 of the SPS Agreement. Innovation is encouraged. In this regard, the SPS Committee should consider:

- (i) Fostering the presentation and discussion of successful cases that serve as examples of innovative approaches to achieve technical assistance.
- (ii) Developing guidelines for technical assistance and/or investment which could help developing countries channel specific requests for assistance from international organizations, financial institutions and donor countries. Such requests should be consistent with an overall approach to modernizing AHFS systems.

- (iii) Promoting greater articulation among the Secretariat of the SPS Committee, the "three sisters" (OIE, Codex Alimentarius Commission, and the International Plant Protection Convention) and observer organizations, in order to provide more timely and relevant elements that can be presented for discussion to the SPS Committee.

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