WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

G/SPS/GEN/237
12 March 2001

(01-1179)

Committee on Sanitary and phytosanitary Measures Original: English

REPORT BY THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Meeting of 14-15 March 2001

I. JOINT ACTIVITIES WITH FAO AND OIE

A. JOINT FAO/WHO EXPERT COMMITTEE ON FOOD ADDITIVES (JECFA) SUMMARY 1998-2000

1. During the period 1998-2000 five meetings of JECFA were held:

- 50th Meeting, Rome, Italy, 17-26 February 1998. ***Veterinary drugs***
- 51st Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, 9-18 June 1998. ***Food additive***s
- 52nd Meeting, Rome, Italy, 2-11 February 1999. ***Veterinary drug residue***s
- 53rd Meeting, Rome, Italy, 1-10 June 1999. ***Food additives and contaminant***s
- 54th Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, 15-24 February 2000. ***Veterinary drug residue***s
- 55th Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, 6-15 June 2000. ***Food additives***

(a) Evaluation of Food Additives and Contaminants

2. The 51st , 53rd and 55th JECFA assessed over 600 food additives including approximately 560 flavoring agents and five contaminants: lead, methylmercury, zearalenone, cadmium and tin, and conducted intake assessment on five specific food additives.

3. They updated principles governing the toxicological evaluations of food additives and contaminants, assessments of intake, and the establishment and revision of specifications.

4. They evaluated the safety-in-use of certain substances used as food additives for use as enzyme preparations, flavoring agents, food colours, glazing agents, preservatives, sweetening agents, thickening agents and miscellaneous food additives. New or revised identity and purity specifications for the additives JECFA evaluated were published as Food and Nutrition Paper no 52, as Addenda 6, 7 and 8.

5. They reviewed a WHO Expert Report on the scientific criteria for including and/or excluding specific food and food products as food allergens at the request of the Codex Committee on Food Labelling and considered allergenicity of peanut and soya bean oils.

6. Finally, the JECFA began the process of drafting specific heavy metals limits for food additives (e.g. lead, arsenic) in place of the general heavy metals limits. Specifically, at the 55th JECFA, new limits were proposed for organic and inorganic phosphate emulsifiers.

(b) Evaluation of Veterinary Drugs

7. Regarding residues of some veterinary drugs in animals and food, three meetings were held. The 50th, 52nd and 54th meetings evaluated thirty (30) veterinary drugs, thirteen (13) for the first time. Drugs evaluated included anthelminthics (6), antimicrobials (11), antiprotozoals (3), glucocorticosteroids (1), insecticides used as veterinary drugs (6), animal production aids (2) and tranquilizers (1).

8. JECFA established twelve (12) acceptable daily intakes (ADIs), including two group ADIs. For one substance, an ADI "not specified" was allocated. Twenty-nine (29) temporary MRLs on three substances were not maintained. JECFA recommended 169 maximum residue limits (MRLs), of which 35 are temporary MRLs.

9. In addition, JECFA made substantial progress in harmonisation with JMPR for those substances used either as a pesticide or as a veterinary drug, including new or revised definitions regarding the matrix or product to which an MRL applies. Two residue monographs for certain residues of veterinary drugs in food were published as part of the Food and Nutrition Paper series 41.

B. JOINT FAO/WHO MEETING ON PESTICIDE RESIDUES (JMPR)

10. During the period 1998-2000 three meetings of JMPR were held:

- 1998 JMPR, Rome, Italy, 21-30 September 1998
- 1999 JMPR, Rome, Italy, 20-29 September 1999
- 2000 JMPR, Geneva, Switzerland, 20-29 September 2000

The 1998 JMPR evaluated 28 pesticides, including one new compound and 18 complete re-evaluations, for toxicology or residues or both, within the Periodic Review Programme of the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues (CCPR). The 1999 JMPR evaluated 30 pesticides, including one new compound and 12 compounds that were completely re-evaluated. The 2000 JMPR evaluated 20 pesticides, including one new compound and 10 compounds re-evaluated. It also evaluated one contaminant (DDT).

C. MICROBIOLOGICAL RISK ASSESSMENT

11. Risk assessment of microbiological hazards in foods has been identified as a priority area of work for the Codex Alimentarius Commission. In response, FAO and WHO have jointly launched a programme of work with the objective of providing expert advice on risk assessment of microbiological hazards in foods to their Member countries and to the Codex Alimentarius Commission. To implement this programme of work, FAO and WHO have convened the following major meetings:

(a) Joint FAO/WHO Hazard Characterization Workshop

12. The primary purpose of this workshop was to begin a process for the development of a practical guidelines document on hazard characterization of microbiological hazards in food and water. In order to do this, the workshop compared and reviewed the approaches used in hazard characterization for several pathogens *(Salmonella* spp., *Listeria monocytogene*s, enterohaemorrhagic *Escherichia coli, Cryptosporidium parvum* and Norwalk-like viruses). Comparing the approaches used for these pathogens formed the basis for the discussions and provided a means of illustrating the weaknesses and benefits of the approaches currently used. Based on this information, the workshop formulated general principles and guidelines for hazard characterization. The first draft of these guidelines was presented to the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on Risk Assessment of

Microbiological Hazards in Foods, that took place in July 2000, for review and comment. This document will be further reviewed before finalization.

(b) Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultations on Risk Assessment of Microbiological Hazards in Foods

13. In March 1999, FAO and WHO convened an expert consultation in Geneva, addressing for the first time the issue of risk assessment of microbiological hazards in foods. The consultation developed an international strategy and identified mechanisms required to support risk assessment of microbiological hazards in foods.

14. As a follow-up to that consultation and in response to the request of the 32 nd Session of the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (Washington, D.C., 29 November- 4 December 1999), which had identified a list of pathogen-commodity combinations on which expert risk assessment advice was required, FAO and WHO organized another expert consultation in Rome in July 2000. The work focussed on the first two pathogen-commodity combinations identified as priority issues by the 32 nd CCFH – *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat foods and *Salmonella* Enteriditis in eggs and *Salmonella* spp. in chicken (broilers). The work carried out included hazard identification, hazard characterization and exposure assessment. The final part of the risk assessment, risk characterization, will be carried out this year.

15. The 33rd Session of the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (Washington, D.C., 23-28 October 2000), considered the report of the Expert Consultation. The Committee identified questions to be raised by risk managers to risk assessors of the Expert Consultation in relation of the two pathogen-commodity combinations, and suggested priorities for the next FAO/WHO Expert Consultation.

16. In continuing their work on risk assessment of microbiological hazards in foods, FAO and WHO will embark on a series of activities to address risk assessment of *Campylobacter jejuni/coli* in broilers and *Vibrio* spp. in seafood in 2001. This will involve the development of technical documentation on risk assessment of this pathogen - commodity combination and the convening of a joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation in July 2001.

D. JOINT FAO/WHO EXPERT CONSULTATIONS ON FOODS DERIVED FROM BIOTECHNOLOGY

17. In 1999 FAO and WHO decided to organize, in parallel to the work of the Codex Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology, a series of expert consultations on the safety of GM foods, recognizing the increasing interest in this issue among their member countries. Since the closure of the First Session of the Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology, FAO and WHO have organized two joint FAO/WHO Consultations.

18. The Consultation held in Geneva from 29 May to 2 June 2000, hereinafter referred to as "2000 FAO/WHO Joint Consultation", dealt with scientific principles for the evaluation of safety and nutritional aspects of GM foods and concentrated on the notion of substantial equivalence.[1] The 2000 FAO/WHO Joint Consultation prepared also replies to specific questions raised by the Task Force on Foods Derived form Biotechnology at its first session.

19. The Consultation held in Rome from 22 to 25 January 2001, hereinafter referred to as "2001 FAO/WHO Joint Consultation"[2], addressed specifically the question of allergenicity of GM foods and

[1] WHO 2000: "Safety aspects of genetically modified foods of plant origin".
[2] FAO 2001. "Evaluation of Allergenicity of Genetically Modified Foods".

modified the decision tree for the assessment of the allergenic potential of foods derived from genetically modified crop plants which had been adopted by the 2000 FAO/WHO Joint Consultation.

E. SELECTION OF EXPERTS

20. To further improve the transparency of the selection procedure of experts who attend expert consultations, FAO and WHO jointly established a new procedure. In the field of microbiological risk assessment and safety assessment of genetically modified foods, FAO and WHO established rosters of experts (biotechnology and microbiological risk assessment) from which individuals would be selected to serve at expert consultations. In order to establish the rosters, FAO and WHO issued a "Call for application to the roster", which described the essential qualification of the applicants, selection procedure for the roster and other relevant information. The rosters are posted on the respective WHO and FAO websites.

F. JOINT WHO/FAO/OIE TECHNICAL CONSULTATION ON BSE, PUBLIC HEALTH AND TRADE

21. A joint WHO/FAO/OIE Technical Consultation on BSE, Public Health and Trade will be held at OIE Headquarters, Paris, France on 11-14 June 2001.

22. In preparation of the Consultation a joint informal meeting of WHO, FAO and OIE was held on 21 December 2000. At this meeting participants concluded that while there are no new breakthroughs in science, there is a much higher level of awareness of the issues and high levels of concern from the public, and that these forces are driving country needs for evidence-based, independent information and advice to create good policy.

23. The Consultation will work towards clear and workable recommendations for countries, particularly developing countries, to:

- protect their human populations from vCJD;
- protect their livestock populations from BSE; and
- prevent global spread of BSE and vCJD through appropriate (inter)national and regional actions.

A previous WHO Consultation was held on Public Health Issues related to Human and Animal TSE's on 2-3 April 1996 to review new acquired findings (nvCJD). Since 1992, the OIE has developed a specific chapter on BSE in its International Animal Health Code. Both the report of the WHO Consultation and the OIE Code Chapter provide recommendations for the protection of public health. The planned Consultation will review, discuss and synthesize current knowledge on pathogenesis, epidemiology, distribution, likely source of the epidemics, prevention and control of BSE/vCJD.

24. The principal goal will be to provide better information to countries that are trying to decide what to do within their own borders to avoid risk to their human and animal populations. A secondary goal is to provide a forum for the review of some of the most compelling problems in BSE control internationally.

25. In addition to subject area specialists from various disciplines, national authorities, international organizations and institutions, NGO's and other stakeholders involved will be invited to participate.

II. WHO ONLY ACTIVITIES

A. WHO STRATEGIC PLANNING MEETING ON FOOD SAFETY

26. The World Health Assembly (WHA) in May 2000 recognised food safety as a priority area of WHO and identified future areas of work on food safety. This reflected global concerns about food safety and its significance as an essential public health function. The Resolution on Food Safety (WHA 53.15) requested the Director General to convene a strategic planning meeting, involving food safety experts, to assist in the development of *WHO Strategy on Food Safety*.

27. Following the resolution, WHO convened a Strategic Planning Meeting on 20-22 February 2001 and discussed WHO's future strategy on food safety. WHO Secretariat will prepare a *WHO Strategy on Food Safety*, which would be presented to the WHA in May 2001.

B. WHO CONSULTATION ON METHODS AND PRINCIPLES FOR THE MONITORING OF ANTIMICROBIAL USAGE IN FOOD ANIMAL PRODUCTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN HEALTH

28. In concurrence with recommendations from the WHO Consultation on the Medical Impact of the Use of Antimicrobials in Food Animals, Berlin, October 1997, many international bodies have identified surveillance of antimicrobial consumption in food animals as a indispensable 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.

29. 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. The above-mentioned Consultation will focus on this issue, it will be held in Oslo, Norway, 10-13 September 2001.

30. Objectives are 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.

31. Existing data on the consumption of non-human antimicrobial usage, national experiences and approaches in the setting up of antimicrobial usage surveillance systems will be reviewed.

32. The WHO Collaborating Centre for Drug Statistics Methodology and pharmaceutical industry representatives will participate in the Consultation. Recommendations and/or guidelines that can assist countries' in their endeavours to establish national monitoring programs will be developed.

C. WHO CONSULTATION ON PRE-HARVEST FOOD SAFETY

33. A WHO Consultation on Pre-Harvest Food Safety, with the participation of OIE and FAO will be held in Berlin, Germany on 26-28 March 2001.

34. It will focus on activities and measures related to farm-animal production, which contribute to the protection of human health from diseases transmitted to humans via food products originating from these farm animals. This will include meat in particular as well as other products that are not subject to additional food processing steps. The Consultation will constitute part of WHOs activities to develop sustainable and integrated food safety systems for the reduction of public health risks along the entire food chain, from primary producer to the consumer.

35. In addition to veterinary, medical and academic participants, various international organizations and institutions, which have both interests and important activities in the area of pre-harvest food safety will be invited to participate. Recommendations will be discussed, developed and finalized during this Consultation.

D. INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATION REVISION

36. The Executive Board of the World Health Assembly was briefed on the changes and intended direction for the revision of the International Health Regulations in January of this year. There was agreement in principle with the direction proposed by the Secretariat. There is obviously a great deal of work to do to move from the new concepts to a regulatory text, but WHO can now begin testing the new approaches and protocols, in direct collaboration with the Member State experts who have agreed to be part of the extended revision team. Their input will be critical, as they represent the end users of the Regulations, and will be impacted most directly by the changes. There are obviously other international stakeholders in this exercise, and the SPS Committee and the United Nations Agencies like the International Civil Aviation Organization and the International Maritime Organization are good examples. For this reason WHO would like to keep the Committee informed of our progress, and we will seek the advice of the Committee Members as part of our testing and verification process.

37. Because of the extensive consultation required, the revised date for submission of the final IHR draft to the World Health Assembly is 2004. The IHR will provide the legal framework for the Global Public Health Security concept, and it is an integral part of this larger initiative. Interim agreement will be sought from future meetings of the Executive Board and the World Health Assembly for pivotal aspects of the IHR, and a series of drafts will be prepared for Member State review well before final submission. Further reports will be provided to the SPS Committee as these aspects are tested and clarified.

Contact Points at WHO

Dr Jorgen Schlundt
Coordinator, Food Safety Programme
World Health Organization
Email: schlundtj@who.int
Tel: +41-22-791-3445
Fax: +41-22-791-4807
Address: 20 Avenue Appia, CH-1211, Geneva 27, Switzerland

Mr William Cocksedge (regarding the International Health Regulations)
International Health Regulation Project
Department of Communicable disease surveillance and Response
Email: cocksedgew@who.int
Tel: +41-22-791-2729
Fax: +41-22-791-4198
Address: 20 Avenue Appia, CH-1211, Geneva 27, Switzerland