

Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

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Spanish

**IICA'S EXPERIENCE IN IMPLEMENTING THE WTO AGREEMENT ON
THE APPLICATION OF SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY
MEASURES (SPS AGREEMENT)**

Information Presented by the Inter-American Institute
for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)

1. To share with the members of the WTO SPS Committee the experience obtained in the development of capabilities in IICA member countries, we describe in greater detail the activity in support of active participation in the SPS Committee.

Origin of the programme

2. The programme is a joint initiative involving the United States Department of Agriculture and IICA. Its objective is to strengthen the capability of the countries to enhance their effective participation in the SPS Committee, and the approach adopted is based on the exchange of experiences among participating countries.

3. Historical participation of the countries of the Americas in the SPS Committee has been characterized by the absence of capital-based specialists, who are largely responsible for implementation of the SPS Agreement in their respective countries. Also, it has been noted that in some countries the mechanisms for communication among institutions involved with sanitary and phytosanitary measures are deficient, or non-existent. (Graph 1)

4. Taking this institutional problem as a starting point, the programme focused on strengthening the institutional base at the national level and on fostering interlinkages between the missions to the WTO and the capital institutions.

Characteristics of the programme

5. The programme made it possible for 32 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean to send two capital-based experts to three consecutive meetings of the SPS Committee: in November 2002, April 2003 and June 2003. The programme promoted inter-institutional participation with a view to facilitating interlinkage among technical personnel in different ministries.

6. In advance of the meetings of the SPS Committee, workshops have been held to develop of capabilities at the institutional level, the objective being to foster interaction among the participating countries and the exchange of national experiences through the analysis of successful cases.

Results of the programme

7. Thirty-two countries (117 capital experts) participated in the programme. Of the beneficiary countries, 84 per cent had at least one delegate in at least two of the three meetings, thus contributing to the objective of ensuring the continuity of capital and institutional representation. (Graph 2)

8. Through the programme, it was possible to identify countries with valuable human resources open to change who, despite their limitations and little or no experience with the SPS Committee, took concrete actions in their countries.

9. The presentations made by the countries in the workshops revealed the institutional problems they face in effectively implementing the SPS Agreement, and identified the processes and actions they had undertaken to address and overcome these. Countries such as Chile, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Jamaica, Bolivia and Canada played an active part in this process, and their experiences constitute a valuable tool for the other countries.

10. As a result of the programme, and because the capital experts were present at the WTO, the following results were achieved:

Institutional coordination: The countries recognized the need for an adequate level of interlinkage among the different institutions involved in the field. Consequently, they have taken steps to begin, or improve coordination between the capital institutions and the permanent mission to the WTO. Also, they have undertaken actions to develop or strengthen the formal or informal mechanisms for internal communication and dialogue.

Bilateral meetings: Given the presence of the capital experts, the countries were able to hold bilateral meetings aimed at analysing trade-related problems, which helped participants to better understand the issues and, in some cases, to arrive at workable solutions. This experience made countries more aware of the advantages of being present at the meetings of the SPS Committee and of the opportunities they afford participants.

Regional coordination: One region in particular made interventions in the SPS Committee as a bloc, and another is considering the possibility of doing so at upcoming meetings. Also, some countries state that it may be possible to develop hemispheric positions which can be presented in the SPS Committee.

Participation in the SPS Committee: It was clear that the capital experts contributed much to the technical discussions at the WTO. Thanks to their presence at the meetings of the SPS Committee, the countries of the Americas are much more active participants in the forum than previously.

Institutional strengthening: The programme helped to foster institutional relations with the WTO/SPS Secretariat and the international reference organizations (Codex Alimentarius, International Plant Protection Convention and the World Organization for Animal Health), which provided logistic support for and contributed technical presentations to the workshops.

Future of the programme

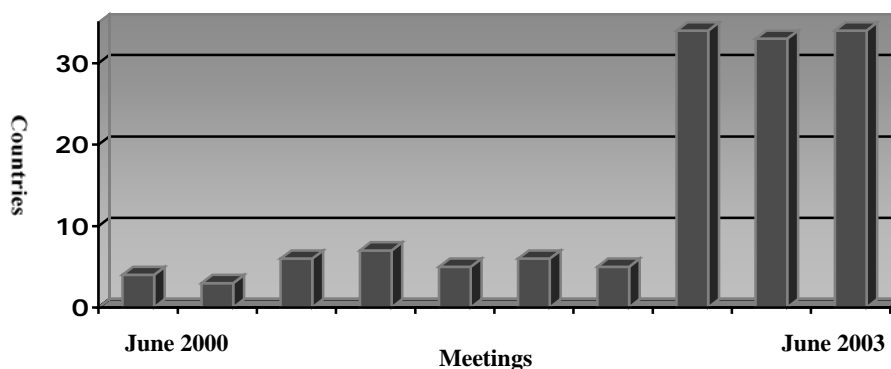
11. Since the objective being pursued is long term in nature, there will be a second stage in which the countries will be expected to be more proactive and assume a greater financial commitment. In this regard, the countries that wish to benefit from this activity, must, where it does not exist, facilitate the creation of a formal or informal committee to establish a national agenda in the SPS area and work with other sectors and institutions to analyse different technical issues.

Conclusions

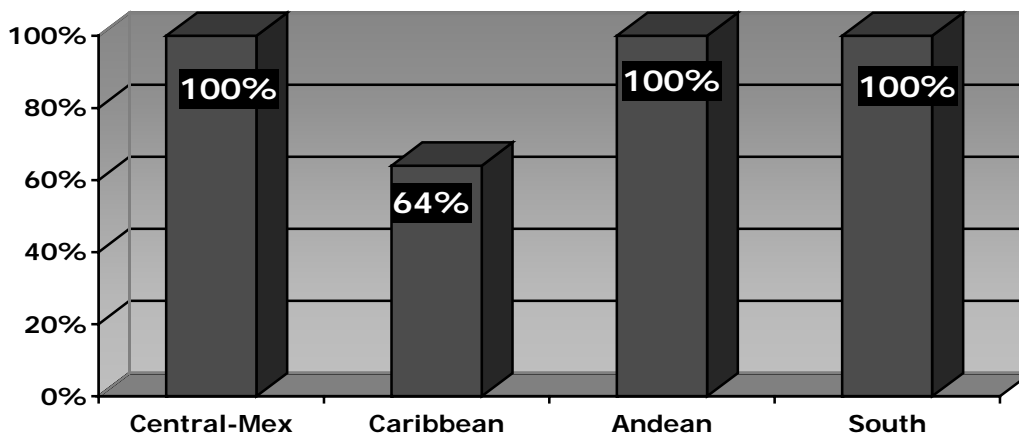
12. The success of the activity depends on cooperation and synergy among the countries, which have played a key role in providing technical cooperation, and have identified and selected the topics to be developed. The continuity of the persons participating in the activity is critical for utilizing the experience gained. This, combined with the growth of institutional knowledge which the countries will gain from this activity, will help to optimize resources. The key to enhancing the actions aimed at increasing the participation of the countries in international forums lies in being able to carry out parallel actions at the country level, aimed at developing the institutional framework needed to administer and implement the SPS Agreement.

13. Lastly, IICA wishes to recognize the contributions of the United States to the success of this initiative: specialists from the United States Department of Agriculture, and the United States Trade Representative, helped organize the workshops and prepare the technical presentations; also, the financial support provided was essential to carry out the programme.

Graph 1: Participation by the countries of the Americas in the last ten meetings of the SPS Committee with capital-based experts



Graph 2: At least one delegate (the same individual) from capital present in two or more SPS meetings



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