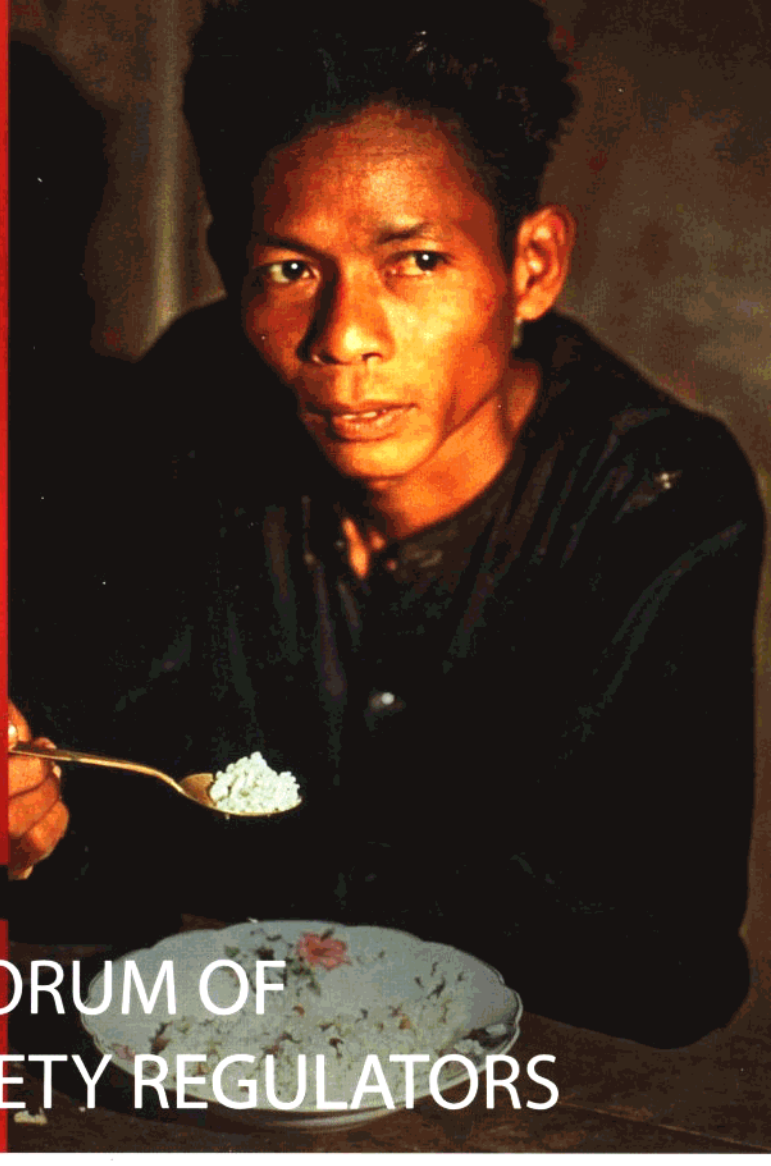

2nd FAO/WHO

GLOBAL FORUM OF FOOD SAFETY REGULATORS

12–14 OCTOBER 2004
BANGKOK, THAILAND

Building effective food safety systems

PROCEEDINGS OF THE FORUM

532

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The Joint Secretariat of the FAO/WHO Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators wishes to express its sincere thanks to all those who contributed towards the success of the Second Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators, in particular to the authorities of the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand for their most efficient organization of the Forum and their warm hospitality; to the Governments of Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, United Kingdom, United States of America and the European Commission for their financial and in kind contributions which facilitated the organization of the Forum and the participation of many developing countries that would not have otherwise been able to participate in the Forum. Technical support received during the preparatory stages is equally acknowledged. The Joint Secretariat also expresses its gratitude to the Chairs and Vice-Chairs for their dedicated hard work and the exceptional manner in which they conducted the meeting; to the topic and theme presenters for their outstanding presentations and interventions during the debates of the Forum, and last but not least, to the members of the press for their excellent coverage of the event.

FOREWORD

The 1996 World Food Summit Rome Declaration reaffirms the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger. The World Food Summit Plan of Action recognises that: "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life". Ensuring the quality and safety of food is therefore an essential consideration in any food security programme.

The Fifty-third World Health Assembly (May 2000) adopted a resolution calling upon WHO and its Member States to recognise food safety as an essential public health function, with the goal of developing sustainable, integrated food-safety systems for the reduction of health risk along the entire food chain. The resolution also asked WHO to encourage evidence-based strategies for the control of food-borne diseases and to provide guidance in prioritizing such strategies.

FAO has always given high priority to programmes and activities dealing with food quality, safety and consumer protection. WHO has also had a continuing commitment to the fundamental principle that ensuring food safety is an essential activity and an integral part of any public health programme.

On many occasions, FAO and WHO Member Countries expressed their desire for fora to be held, outside the existing negotiation meetings, where they could exchange information and experiences on food safety issues that are of national and trans-national importance.

The Communiqués of the Okinawa (2000) and Genoa (2001) G-8 Summits encouraged FAO and WHO to organize periodic international meetings of food safety regulators to advance the process of science-based public consultations. Following the successful First FAO/WHO Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators held in Marrakesh, Morocco, in January 2002, under the general theme of *"Improving Efficiency and Transparency in Food Safety Systems – Sharing Experiences"*, FAO and WHO convened the Second Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators in Bangkok, Thailand, from 12 to 14 October 2004, with *Building effective food safety systems* as the main theme. The Forum was most generously hosted by the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand and was supported by the Governments of Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, United Kingdom, United States of America and the European Commission. It provided the opportunity for food safety regulators from all parts of the world to meet together outside the usual negotiating circles to exchange information and experiences on important food safety issues and promote partnerships and cooperation among all food safety regulators and stakeholders for the benefit of safer food for all.

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INTRODUCTION (Agenda Item 1)

1. The Second Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators (GF-2) provided an opportunity for food safety regulatory officials from 90 countries to exchange experiences and also discuss actions to improve collaboration on food safety. The Forum was also attended by 10 international governmental and non-governmental organizations and observers having an interest in food safety matters. The list of all participants is attached as Appendix I.

2. Mr Apichart Pongsrihadulchai, Secretary-General, National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards of Thailand extended a most cordial and warm welcome to the participants. He expressed his hope that GF-2 would create better and closer relationships between countries (Appendix II).

3. Ms Kerstin Leitner, Assistant Director-General, Sustainable Development and Healthy Environments, World Health Organization (WHO) welcomed the participants and thanked the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand for hosting GF-2 and the donor countries for their financial support. She reminded delegates of the high incidence of food-borne diseases in both developed and developing countries and their impact on public health systems and economic productivity. The speaker acknowledged that national food safety systems are increasingly utilizing a food chain approach to address food safety issues. She also mentioned several major initiatives in which WHO was involved, together with FAO and other international organizations, such as the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) and the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) (Appendix III).

4. Mr Hartwig de Haen, Assistant Director-General, Economic and Social Department, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) highlighted the importance of the adoption of internationally agreed standards. He underlined that the resulting increase in cost of compliance required a great deal of capacity building and that in order to meet these demands, FAO has been involved in a variety of initiatives. These included the International Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health, the STDF and, often in cooperation with WHO, the organization of regional food safety conferences and the provision of tools and guidelines. He emphasized that the holistic food chain approach was the most effective way to address food safety problems (Appendix IV).

5. The Forum was opened by H.E. Chaturon Chaisang, Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand. He referred to the First Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators (Marrakesh, Morocco, 2002) and the FAO/WHO Regional Conferences on Food Safety for Europe and for Asia and the Pacific. He indicated that Thailand's initiative to host GF-2 was reflective of the Government's emphasis on food safety, as 2004 had been named "Food Safety Year" in Thailand. He then drew the attention of the participants to some key issues and underlined that a strong political commitment was needed to implement a clear and effective national strategy (Appendix V).

ADOPTION OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA (Agenda Item 2)

6. The Forum elected Mr Apichart Pongsrihadulchai, Secretary-General, Thai National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards, and Mr Pakdee Pothisiri, Secretary-General, Thai Food and Drug Administration, as co-Chairmen. The Forum further elected Mr Steve Hathaway of New Zealand and Mr Alex Seremula of the Republic of South Africa as co-Vice Chairpersons.

7. Mr Pongsrihadulchai formally opened the Forum and the participants adopted the Provisional Agenda of the Forum (Appendix VI). He drew the participants' attention to the Concept Paper, emphasizing that the Global Forum was not intended to lead to recommendations, but rather to a clarification of issues and that the Forum Proceedings would summarize the main issues discussed.

KEYNOTE ADDRESSES (Agenda Item 3)

8. Mr Richard Fadden, President of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, presented the first keynote address on *Building effective food safety systems: application of risk analysis* (Appendix VII). Mr Fadden recalled the current and future challenges to food safety and globalization. He outlined that the Canadian response to these challenges was based on the risk analysis approach developed by Codex, dividing responsibilities between Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Mr Fadden stressed the importance of collaboration between federal, provincial/territorial authorities and all stakeholders in the food system and the importance of a strong governmental role in ensuring the safety of the food supply. Citing the example of the recent discovery of a BSE case, he demonstrated the Canadian risk analysis approach including a new risk assessment for food safety and animal health and regular communication with stakeholders and foreign governments.

9. Mr Stuart Alexander Slorach, Acting Director-General of the National Food Administration in Sweden and Chairman of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) presented the second keynote address on the *Complementarity between CAC normative work and the Global Fora* (Appendix VIII). He recalled the different kinds of texts elaborated by Codex, namely standards, guidelines and codes of practices. The speaker noted that while the Global Fora focus on information exchange and experience sharing, Codex activities consist mainly of normative work, but also include the exchange of information and promotion of capacity building. Hence, such Global Fora should facilitate consensus building in Codex negotiations. It was noted that both the SPS and TBT Agreements refer to international standard setting bodies with Codex being the main player in the food area. He suggested some questions for discussion concerning the areas respectively covered by Codex and the Global Fora as well as the way they can help developing countries to build effective food safety systems. Finally, he urged the participants to participate actively in the Forum discussions.

10. In order to focus the Forum discussions under the main theme of *Building Effective Food Safety Systems*, two sub-themes had been identified to meet the needs expressed by developing and developed countries, including: *Strengthening Official Food Safety Control Services* and *Epidemio-surveillance of Food-borne Diseases and Food Safety Rapid Alert Systems*. Under each sub-theme, some specific areas of concern were further discussed, all of which were introduced by working documents presented by food safety experts and further discussed in plenary.

11. Two workshops, one for each sub-theme, were organized to identify and promote partnerships in these fields based on the discussions in plenary and relevant Conference Room Documents provided by countries and international organizations.

STRENGTHENING OFFICIAL FOOD SAFETY CONTROL SERVICES (Agenda Item 4)

12. The theme paper, presented by Mr Paul Merlin on behalf of the Joint FAO/WHO Secretariat of the Forum (the Secretariat), described the different elements of a national food control system and discussed three possible types of organizational structures for national food control systems, namely a multiple agency, single agency and integrated systems.

13. He then presented key management elements of food safety control services that would improve their effectiveness, including task definition and harmonization, effective supporting legislation and crisis preparedness. Finally, specific issues of developing countries for which technical assistance would be useful were raised, such as weak basic infrastructure, a fragmented food processing industry, dual standards for export and domestic markets and a lack of resources for official services.

Follow-up Discussion:

14. Several delegations from developing countries re-iterated that continued technical assistance was needed to improve their food safety systems and thanked FAO and WHO for their past support. The importance of strengthening national food control systems to address the needs of the domestic consumer, rather than only to improve food exports, was noted.

15. Other specific concerns raised regarding aspects of food safety control services are included in the discussion portion of the relevant section of these Proceedings.

Defining the responsibilities and tasks of different stakeholders within the framework of a national strategy (Agenda Item 4.1)

16. The topic paper presented by Mr Alan Reilly, Deputy Chief Executive of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, outlined the importance of sharing the responsibility for food safety among all stakeholders involved in the production and marketing of foods, in light of decreased consumer confidence in food safety. It was emphasized that while government and regulatory agencies must work to ensure that consumer's health and interests are adequately protected, consumers must also play a role in ensuring the safety of the food they consume.

17. The speaker noted that effective food control at the national level can be undermined by the existence of fragmented legislation, multiple jurisdictions, and inconsistencies in enforcement and weaknesses in food surveillance and monitoring. Responsibilities should be shared by national governments, farmers, food processors and manufacturers, food retailers, caterers and consumers.

18. The speaker emphasized that the development of effective national multi-disciplinary, inter-agency networks utilizing the food chain approach can be hampered by disagreements regarding areas of competence of national authorities.

Follow-up Discussion

19. Several delegations noted the importance of the involvement of all stakeholders, including consumers and industry, in effective national integrated food safety systems and informed the Forum of various actions taken by governmental authorities and international agencies to engage these groups in food safety matters.

20. The following points emerged from the discussion:

- Countries must address consumer interests and enable consumer participation, both in training and in decision making activities, in the development or re-organization and implementation of national food safety systems.
- It is important to gain political commitment to ensure food safety along the entire food chain. This can be achieved by establishing high level food safety advisory bodies.

- National and sub-national interaction and coordination is important in the implementation of a national food safety strategy.
- When countries are able to develop and implement effective and comprehensive national food safety strategies, the regional or international sharing of these policies with other food safety regulators allows countries to better garner the political will to advance food safety.
- Educating and involving farmers in the production of safe food is also important.
- Consumers should be educated in hygienic handling and proper cooking of food, as well as in the importance of making wise nutritive food choices to protect their own and their family's health. Proper food labelling can also assist in protecting consumer health, both in the areas of food safety and nutrition. The current global epidemic of obesity requires interventions by all stakeholders to promote healthy lifestyles and healthy diets.

21. The participants were informed that the WHO Five Keys to Food Safety are an example of a source of the basic information the consumer needs to protect themselves and their families from food safety outbreaks.

Legal basis for food safety official and non-official control (Agenda Item 4.2)

22. Mr Alex Seremula, Deputy Director of the Department of Agriculture in the Republic of South Africa outlined the legislative framework that governs food safety control in that country. The speaker gave a detailed account of the various departments involved in food safety, their respective roles and mandates, as well as the relevant private sector food quality assurance and certification schemes operating in that country. He explained that despite the complexity of the system and the large number of players involved, its coordinated implementation is still able to ensure food safety from farm to fork.

23. He noted the value of the co-existence of private sector standards, such as ISO standards, with official standards. He emphasized that countries cannot base their arguments in international trade disputes on these private standards, but need to utilize officially recognized standards.

24. The delegate of the Netherlands highlighted the legal basis of the food safety system of the European Union. In the past decades, legislation in the field of food safety has been largely harmonized across the EU, which has led to uniformity of requirements for countries exporting to the EU Member States. The speaker noted that emergencies related to food and food production that have occurred in the past 15 years have urged the European Union to strengthen their food safety systems in order to protect consumers. These hazards comprise food-borne diseases, zoonoses, residues of unwanted substances in food and dangerous animal diseases.

25. The EU "White paper on food safety" establishes the current food safety policy in the European Union and is based on the risk analysis approach. In this framework, the EU General Food Law of 2002 has led to the establishment of the European Food Safety Authority and several legal measures to be enforced by the Member States. Some of the key elements are 1) the responsibility of producers for safe food and 2) the task of the Government to check that this responsibility is adequately met. It was noted that traceability throughout the entire food production chain is also an important tool to strengthen consumer confidence.

26. The speaker highlighted the challenge of developing a more holistic approach to dealing with food risks by comparing different risks while retaining optimal consumer protection. It was noted that a balance should be found between dealing with microbiological risks and risks of chemical residues. The speaker emphasized that food safety requirements in the European Union are the same for local producers as for countries exporting to the EU Member States.

27. The speaker emphasized that industrialized countries must be aware of the constraints of developing countries in exporting to industrialized countries as developing countries do not always have adequate production and control facilities to comply with international or EU food safety standards. Accordingly, technical assistance, capacity building and partnerships are important instruments to support countries with specific needs.

Follow-up Discussion

28. Several delegations informed of actions taken recently to strengthen and streamline their food control services, including identification of the role of the various agencies involved, as well as the coordinating mechanisms established to reduce duplications and eliminate gaps. They noted that developing countries face serious difficulties because of the lack of resources, physical as well as human, necessary to carry out the relevant food control tasks. They stressed the need for an aggressive strategy in favour of consumer awareness so that consumers can play a proactive role in fostering improvement in food control services.

29. The following points emerged from the discussion:

- Private standards such as the EUROPGAP scheme, introduced by retailers, are often stricter than EU or Codex standards, and could therefore act as a technical barrier to trade;
- Partnerships between food control agencies in developed and developing countries help reduce the differences in food legislation;
- The application of the principle of "as safe as possible" and that of "as safe as necessary", as a basis for food safety decisions, reflect different philosophies in the expression of the appropriate level of protection;
- Food exports, including food aid, to countries which do not have the capacity to control their quality and safety need to be in conformity with the regulations of the exporting country.

30. The participants noted the need to conduct an analysis of the food safety situation in African countries and to use such an analysis to assess their needs in capacity building and technical assistance. They were informed of an FAO and WHO plan to carry out this analysis in connection with the joint Regional Conference on Food Safety for Africa, scheduled to take place in 2005.

Training personnel of official food safety control services (Agenda Item 4.3)

31. Mrs Claire Gaudot, Scientific Adviser of the Permanent Representation of France to FAO outlined the training of official food safety control services personnel. She began by reviewing the context in which official control services operate, with rapid and significant changes that call for constant adjustment in the ability of food safety control personnel.

32. The speaker emphasized the importance of distinguishing the three types of training: pre-recruitment training, which should cover the full range of ability required at recruitment, post-recruitment occupational training given before taking up duties and staff development or further training. Training needs should be defined through multi-factor analysis of the context in which control personnel operate.

33. It was noted that training is an essential tool for building the capacity of control authorities and for managing human resources. It requires a specific policy and proper resources. The speaker noted that the organization of a national or regional training mechanism needs to reflect the mandates and responsibilities of official control services. The training programme should cover

all aspects relating to the activity of official food safety control service personnel, including knowledge, experience and self-management skills.

Follow-up Discussion

34. The discussants stressed the strategic value of training for implementing effective food safety control systems and criticized the lack of resources made available by governments. Several delegations noted that the absence of local expertise meant that training had to be sought outside the national context, incurring high costs and limiting resources for local experts. The delegations called for the support, especially from FAO and WHO, of initiatives to develop training opportunities, including basic training, for food safety control personnel. It was also stressed that the growing focus on shared responsibility needed to be accompanied by the training of producers and consumers through their respective associations, in order to help them to shoulder their new responsibilities.

35. The representative of the European Commission informed the Forum of the proposal to set up a European training centre for official food safety control officials. This centre was to be run by the Food and Veterinary Office based in Dublin, Ireland, and would be open to inspectors from EU Member States as well as those from developing countries exporting to the Community (3000 trainees scheduled for 2006). The representative of the IAEA drew attention to Conference Room Document 22 on activities in food safety training proposed by the Joint FAO/IAEA Division of Nuclear Techniques in Food and Agriculture.

How official services foster and enforce the implementation of HACCP by industry and trade (Agenda Item 4.4)

36. Ms Sirilak Suwanrangsi, Minister Counsellor, Royal Thai Embassy, Tokyo, Japan, presented the principles governing the role of governmental agencies in the implementation of HACCP by the private sector using examples from the Thai experiences in this area. She emphasized the vital role the Government has in supporting HACCP implementation through cooperation of all sectors in the food chain including industry associations, academia, individual processors and producers, suppliers of raw materials, exporters and importers. Government agencies have strategic roles in the implementation of HACCP as well as operative roles on assessment of effectiveness and compliance.

37. She also noted that, in fostering HACCP implementation, it is vital that governments have sufficient capabilities to perform the tasks. Governments should allocate resources and when necessary, reorganize the works and work forces to support the industry. HACCP generic models, hazard identification and control guides could be provided to enhance the development and to ensure uniformity and scientific integrity. Schemes for recognition of the HACCP system, such as audit and certification, would enhance effective implementation and market access.

38. She added that HACCP is one risk management tool. HACCP alone cannot resolve food safety problems, and should be complemented by other control measures such as monitoring programmes at primary production for agriculture chemicals, pollutants, contaminants and natural toxin, traceability and labelling.

39. She concluded by noting that the HACCP programme should be kept simple and based on science and international standards. Countries should share experiences and collaborate in training. FAO and WHO can assist in training and make available relevant information. Assistance to small scale entrepreneurs and the lesser experienced countries should be focused.

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Follow-up Discussion:

40. Several delegations described similar positive experiences in governmental support to HACCP implementation. There was general agreement that small scale producers have particular needs in terms of HACCP implementation due to the often limited human resources available in these enterprises. Difficulties in conducting proper hazard analysis, as well as auditing were mentioned as other areas of concern.

41. Several delegates thanked the international organizations for their support in introducing HACCP in their country and urged countries with a long experience in HACCP to support them by sharing their experiences.

42. There was discussion about the use of certification schemes with a general agreement that these are mostly used for market access and provide only one piece of evidence that a proper and efficient system is in place.

43. The representative of the FAO Secretariat announced the current development of an FAO/WHO guidance document to support HACCP implementation in small scale businesses and suggested to the delegates, in particular from developing countries, to participate in its elaboration by taking part in the E-forum organized by FAO for this purpose.

Food Import/Export Control and Certification (Agenda Item 4.5)

44. The presentation by Ms Karen Stuck, Assistant Administrator of the Food Safety Inspection Service, United States of America focused on the purpose of import controls, principles for designing an import control programme and the tools available for carrying out import control programmes.

45. The speaker noted that the SPS Agreement permits countries to establish their own level of protection provided the standards are based on science, applied consistently and are transparent. The speaker outlined the tools available for import control programmes which include equivalence determination, audits, port-of-entry inspections, automated systems to facilitate rapid clearance and statistically-based random sampling.

46. A paper on Food Export Control and Certification was presented by Ms Shashi Sareen, Director, Export Inspection Council of India. The speaker noted that while most governments focus on import systems only, food export control and certification such as that implemented by India plays an important role in assuring food safety and quality.

47. Advantages of the food export certification include reduction of the time required to test food imports, minimization of import rejection, decreased duplication, cost effectiveness, reduced variation of food products, and improvement of the exporting country's image. India has developed rules for export certification and implements these rules for several commodities. Ms Sareen outlined the challenges faced by developing countries when exporting to major importing markets and made suggestions on actions needed to overcome them.

48. Mr Henri Belvèze, Deputy Head of Unit, European Commission, presented Conference Room Document 28 on *Practical considerations of the operation of the EU import/export controls.*

49. As part of its gradual integration, the European Community has enacted detailed legislation for the control of foods imported from third countries. Regulations on the import of

products of animal origin were the first to be put in place, covering aspects relating to public health and animal health. They place primary responsibility for inspection and certification on the competent authorities of the exporting country, in follow-up to an evaluation mission of the Commission's Food and Veterinary Office (FVO). With the exception of plant health regulations applying to selected fruits and vegetables, import regulations for foodstuffs of non-animal origin are at a less advanced stage of Community harmonization. However, on 1 January 2006, new regulations will be introduced that will reinforce the integration of the food import control system and reduce the area of competence remaining under national legislations.

50. The speaker noted that controls envisaged in community legislation are made by the inspection services of the Member States under the supervision of the FVO. They can take place at the border or at destination, depending on the foods imported. The nature and frequency of actual material controls, basically in laboratory analysis, are determined by the level of risk and the results of previous controls of products of the same origin. The special needs of developing countries, if they are to adapt to the new conditions of 2006, will be taken into account by the Commission, especially as regards time frames, training and technical assistance.

Follow up Discussion

51. Several countries commented that while the WTO allows for a determination of equivalence, this concept is often difficult to implement. It was pointed out that a standard coding system and common language would facilitate food trade and import assurances. Several delegates commented that Codex standards should be expanded to cover all food safety needs (e.g., limits on microbiological contamination) and be more detailed. Also, the issue of food quality should be given due consideration as a large proportion of food import rejections are caused by quality deficiencies.

52. It was noted that food safety authorities should also be held to a standard of performance as a consistent standard of performance for food agencies will increase trust and confidence in the safety of exported products. Other delegates noted that infrastructure development in countries would contribute to facilitating food trade. Some delegations emphasized the moral and humanitarian responsibility of countries, especially those which food may be transported through, to assist in coordinating and monitoring of the safety of food imports in order to protect consumers in a country where the food safety programmes have been disturbed due to a major crisis.

EPIDEMIOLOGICAL SURVEILLANCE OF FOOD-BORNE DISEASES (fbd) AND FOOD SAFETY RAPID ALERT SYSTEMS (Agenda Item 5)

53. The theme paper, presented by Dr Peter Karim Ben Embarek on behalf of the Secretariat, argued that due to the globalization of the food supply and the fbd, there is a need for global fbd surveillance. Such global surveillance networks must be based on data generated and shared from national surveillance systems. He highlighted that the objectives of surveillance are to inform response systems, allow informed interventions, and provide a basis for efficient risk based strategies to lower the burden of disease.

54. It was emphasized that the vast challenges in implementing global food-borne disease surveillance and food safety rapid alert systems, including the large variety in countries' capacity to detect, investigate and mitigate food-borne diseases, necessitate international cooperation and assistance. The speaker then described the role of international organizations such as FAO and WHO in developing such networks.

55. The speaker outlined the International Health Regulations (IHR), which now cover only three diseases (cholera, plague and yellow fewer) and are undergoing revision to include all events of international public health importance. These events include infectious and non-infectious diseases and unacceptable level of micro organisms, toxins and chemicals in foods. The revised IHR will also provide guidelines for implementing surveillance systems. In addition to these and other international requirements, such as the WTO SPS Agreement, the speaker then briefly noted the ongoing integration of existing and new surveillance, alert and response systems in FAO and WHO. For example:

- Global Alert and Response System
- Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network
- Global Public Health Information Network
- Global Chemical Incident Alert and Response System
- Global Salmonella Surveillance system
- INFOSAN

56. The presentation was followed by a live video conference on INFOSAN moderated by Dr Kerstin Leitner, WHO, with food safety authorities from Australia, Canada, Jordan, Spain, Uganda and the USA and Mr Mike Ryan, Director of Alert and Response Operations, WHO, Geneva.

57. INFOSAN (the International Food Safety Authorities Network) will serve as a vehicle for food safety authorities and other agencies involved in food safety to share information and experiences. INFOSAN Emergency, embedded in this network, will link official national contact points to address outbreaks and emergencies of international importance.

58. The video conference served to 1) highlight the important aspects of INFOSAN related to food-borne disease surveillance; 2) demonstrate the potential for real-time discussion between food safety regulators; and 3) show the importance of interaction between surveillance personnel and food safety regulators.

Follow-up Discussion:

59. The participants congratulated WHO and FAO on this initiative and requested more information on becoming a member of INFOSAN. The Secretariat noted that countries may have numerous focal points based on the number of relevant agencies in those countries. However, for sake of efficiency, there will only be one officially designated INFOSAN emergency contact in each country.

60. Information on registration with INFOSAN is available from the following internet site: http://www.who.int/foodsafety, or E-mail address: foodsafety@who.int.

61. Some delegates noted several areas where FAO/WHO could take the lead role in guiding member countries at the regional level including: 1) strengthening capacity for surveillance and response of food-borne diseases through networking; 2) harmonizing the various systems of food-borne diseases surveillance; 3) enhancing surveillance along the entire feed food chain including risk analysis and 4) providing assistance in training and capacity building programmes for development of technical expertise.

Food Contamination Monitoring and Food-borne Disease Surveillance at National Level (Agenda Item 5.1)

62. The topic paper was presented by Dr Danilo Lo Fo Wong, Danish Zoonosis Centre. He outlined the general purpose of food-borne diseases surveillance: to establish a baseline, to measure the burden of food-borne diseases, to monitor trends and patterns in endemic diseases, to detect and investigate outbreaks, to initialize targeted action, to evaluate interventions and help prioritize efforts and resources. Surveillance is a prerequisite for qualified feedback to stakeholders. He further described the different types of surveillance systems. These can be passive or active, syndromic or laboratory based, general or sentinel, continuous or intermittent, disjointed or integrated. In general, the intensity of surveillance is dependent on social, practical and financial parameters. He illustrated these principles by describing the Danish national integrated *salmonella* surveillance model. The successful implementation of this system can be accredited to the close cooperation between the public and private sector and between medical and veterinary epidemiologists and microbiologists. The system is based on integration of data from animals, food and humans, enabling the attribution of human cases of salmonellosis to specific foods through genetic finger-printing of relevant strains from all three sectors. Similar typing systems are being developed for other important food-borne pathogens.

Follow up Discussion

63. Delegates commended Denmark for its achievements in developing such an efficient system. However, several delegates noted the high cost of such a surveillance system and expressed the need for support to developing countries to establish food-borne disease surveillance systems. Other delegates referred to similar systems to the one presented by the speaker. In some instances, it was noted that having access to industry data was a major difficulty. It was stated that the system could not be used to evaluate transmission of pathogens from humans to animals.

64. To those who were concerned about the cost of the Danish system, the speaker, while acknowledging the high cost of the system, argued that other less costly surveillance systems, based on the same principles could be - and were being - established also in developing countries. Their level of sophistication would then match available resources. More than necessarily looking for new resources, the real issue was to use existing resources to focus testing strategically in relevant sectors and then ensure central compilation of data. Some of the developing countries participating in the Global WHO Salm-Surv Network were starting to move in this direction.

International Cooperation on Food Contamination Monitoring and Food-borne Disease Surveillance (Agenda Item 5.2)

65. The topic paper on international cooperation on food contamination monitoring and food-borne disease surveillance was presented by Mr Robert Brackett, Director of the Center of Food Safety and Applied Nutrition at the US Food and Drug Administration. The speaker pointed out that over the past two decades, the food supply has become truly global. With the globalization of the food supply, food-borne illness has become a global issue that demands international cooperation to address food contamination.

66. The speaker stated that surveillance data, integrated with and compared to epidemiological data, allows for more rapid detection of food-borne illness and trace back to identify implicated lots of food.

67. The speaker described the robust monitoring and alert system that exists in the United States of America for protecting consumers and suggested that the elements of a successful national monitoring system could be applied internationally. The speaker acknowledged that several regional and international surveillance and alert programmes have been developed to accomplish this goal. He recommended that WHO, together with FAO, serve as the focal point of a global food safety surveillance system.

Follow-up Discussion

68. Several delegates asked questions regarding the need for active surveillance and establishing priorities on what should be monitored. The speaker explained that passive surveillance systems do not give an accurate measure of the true burden of food-borne disease and that food-borne disease surveillance systems should target the largest public health problems.

69. The speaker encouraged all countries to initiate food-borne surveillance programmes. He cautioned that once surveillance begins, countries may experience the paradox of success, i.e., a successful surveillance programme will find more cases of food-borne disease so it may appear that the problem of food-borne disease is increasing. Finally, the speaker encouraged countries to tailor their risk communication messages to fit the needs of their country.

Dealing with emerging risks related to the environment and new technologies (Agenda Item 5.3)

70. Mr Alexander Haslberger, Professor at the University of Vienna, presented a paper prepared on behalf of the FAO/WHO Secretariat which focused on the possible consequences of emerging technologies used in food production. The speaker noted that evidence has shown that new technologies used in food production often improve food security, but may also result in adverse environmental effects and raise ethical and food safety concerns. In addition to genetic modification (GM), the modern methods cited also include the induction of unspecific mutagenesis and marker directed breeding.

71. The speaker emphasized that the relevant Codex texts, as well as the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety provide international guidance and regulation for the safety of GM foods and for related environmental safety. He underlined the importance of a thorough molecular characterization of GM organisms, improved models for the assessment of gene flow and further research into subsequent risk management options. The speaker asserted that special attention is needed in the assessment of local agro-ecological conditions influencing the environmental safety of living modified organisms. He also drew attention to the consequences of environmental responses to agricultural practices which may have consequences for human health and development, such as within the food chain. It was emphasized that ethical considerations should also be included when evaluating all the aspects associated with the safety of modern food production technologies, including agro-ecological and socio-economic factors.

Follow-up Discussion:

72. Delegations expressed their views on this topic, with some noting the current initiatives in their country relating to environmental issues and concerns with the safety of food produced by modern technologies. The Chairman of the Codex Alimentarius Commission announced the re-establishment of the Codex Intergovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived from Modern Biotechnology and that the Government of Japan would send out a circular letter to Codex Member countries to solicit priorities for new work for the Task Force. Delegations were encouraged to submit their proposals at that time.

73. The following points emerged from the discussion:

- Genetic modification of organisms can be compared in some ways to the natural evolutionary changes of genes in nature;
- The issue of intellectual property rights related to GM foods must be considered;
- The safety of GM products should be assessed on a case-by-case basis;
- The co-existence of GM and non-GM crops should be minimized;
- Traceability/product tracing, labelling and post-market monitoring of GM foods are important;
- Governments must consider the ethics of testing the safety of GM foods.

74. An observer emphasized the necessary elements of national capacity needed to regulate GM foods, including mandatory environmental assessment, mandatory human safety evaluation, science-based food safety standards, post-market monitoring, mandatory labelling, traceability requirements, stakeholder input from the initial phases and strict liability provisions. The observer noted that many countries lacked some or all of these elements, and as they also have other priorities competing for limited resources for food safety, they must be allowed to prioritize these resources nationally and not be pressured regarding their position on GM foods.

Prevention and response to intentional contamination (Agenda Item 5.4)

75. A paper on intentional contamination of food was presented by Dr Jorgen Schlundt, Director, Food Safety Department, WHO. The speaker noted that while WHO work related to intentional contamination has been ongoing for some time, the importance of these issues has increased since the terrorist attacks on the United States of America in 2001. The malicious contamination of food for terrorist purposes was cited as a real and current threat, and it was noted that deliberate contamination of food at one location could have global public health implications.

76. The Fifty-fifth World Health Assembly in May 2002 requested WHO to provide tools and support to Member States to increase the capacity of national health systems to respond to such events. It was underlined that outbreaks of both unintentional and deliberate food-borne diseases should be managed by the same mechanisms.

77. The speaker asserted that sensible precautions, coupled with strong surveillance and response capacity, constitute the most effective way of countering emergencies, including food terrorism. It was emphasized that consideration of deliberate acts of food sabotage should be incorporated into existing programmes for controlling the production of safe food as the strengthening of such programmes will both increase Member States' capacity to reduce the increasing burden of food-borne illness and help them to address the threat of food terrorism. The speaker highlighted that prevention, although never completely effective, is the first line of defence and that the key to preventing food terrorism is establishment and enhancement of existing food safety management programmes and implementation of reasonable security measures. It was noted that WHO has developed a guidance document on the subject for governments as well as for industry and provides advice on strengthening national systems to respond more efficiently to potential food terrorism. The speaker stated that WHO can also coordinate existing international systems for public health disease surveillance and emergency response, including food terrorism. Finally, the representative from WHO underlined the importance of the new international network, INFOSAN Emergency, aimed at informing Member States and supporting international response in the event of an outbreak.

78. Mr Leslye Fraser, Director, Office of Regulation and Policy at the US FDA Center of Food Safety and Applied Nutrition provided the Forum with an update on the implementation of

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