



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

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COMMUNICATION FROM THE INTERNATIONAL PLANT PROTECTION CONVENTION (IPPC) SECRETARIAT¹

I. Introduction on the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)

The International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) is an international plant health agreement, established in 1952 and revised in 1997, that aims to protect cultivated and wild plants by preventing the introduction and spread of pests.

Since its establishment, the IPPC has helped ensure food security and contributed to protect biodiversity, as well as provided the framework for facilitating safe trade by setting harmonized standards for plant health and strengthening the capacity of its 183 contracting parties to implement the Convention and its standards.

The World Trade Organization Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (WTO SPS Agreement) has recognized the international standards, guidelines and recommendations developed under the auspices of the IPPC Secretariat in cooperation with regional organizations within the IPPC framework as the ones to be followed for plant health, thus making the IPPC one of the “three sisters” under the SPS Agreement with Codex and OIE.

IPPC standards, called International Standards on Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs) are adopted annually by the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures, IPPC’s governing body. There are currently 41 adopted ISPMs, including 24 Diagnostic Protocols and 31 Phytosanitary Treatments². The Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM) also adopts recommendations, whose full list can be found here.

Another central pillar of the IPPC is supporting the implementation of the ISPMs and capacity development of contracting parties. From 1999 to 2016, projects directed by the IPPC Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation (PCE) were implemented in 114 countries, enhancing the ability of national plant protection organizations’ (NPPO) to identify strengths and gaps in their national phytosanitary systems. The IPPC presence in FAO regions is maintained and strengthened by the organization of annual IPPC Regional Workshops. Since 2003, the IPPC Secretariat has contributed to the organization of 91 Regional Workshops, which have benefitted 2303 participants from 153 countries in seven regions.

The IPPC is the leader in the global effort to promote and protect the plant health, and therefore significantly contributes to protecting food security and reducing poverty. This function is at the core of the FAO’s mandate and fundamental work. In particular, the IPPC strategic objectives contribute directly to achieving FAO’s Strategic Objectives 2 (Make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable) and Strategic Objective 4 (Enable inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems).

The IPPC also contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2015-2030, and particularly to the SDGs 1, 2, 8, 13, 15 and 17.³

¹ Document prepared by and under the responsibility of the IPPC Secretariat.

² Adopted standards page available at <https://www.ippc.int/en/core-activities/standards-setting/ispm/>

³ Ref. IPPC contributions to UN SDGs: <https://www.ippc.int/en/news/the-contribution-of-the-ippc-to-achieving-un-sdgs-for-2030-agenda/>

II. Innovation of tools

IPPC, Codex Alimentarius and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) are the three standard setting organizations (“three sisters”) recognized by WTO SPS agreement. In this framework, SPS meetings are usual fora for exchange of information, ideas and proposals. The IPPC Secretariat welcomes the practice of mutual invitations at the respective Commission meetings, and the innovative format of panel discussions with relevant stakeholders, in view of sharing and proposing best practices. The IPPC and Codex Secretariats have worked together since 2015 on the implementation of a joint Online Commenting System (OCS), a web tool providing a standardized platform for contact points to submit comments on draft standards, thus enhancing the transparency and inclusiveness of the respective standard setting processes. This tool has already been noted as a best practice by the SPS and may also fit the needs of other organizations. Both organizations have also expanded the use of the system to documents other than standards.

More broadly, IPPC and Codex Secretariats are working together and sharing knowledge on a number of innovative IT solutions, which would improve the way to develop standards, making the entire process more efficient, transparent and inclusive. To name a few: respective websites, an online registration system for meetings, online forums and polls, social media and communication tools and procedures.

One way the three sisters can contribute to establishing partnerships is to explore open standards: indeed our digital tools and contents lean towards open standards. The principle of open data and creative commons licensing of our content is fundamental, as we are creating global public goods and making our knowledge accessible and usable to all. The Open Government Initiative for the application of the Akoma-Ntoso XML scheme on legal documents is a FAO-supported project that aims at improving the access and dissemination of documents, including international standards, at present “locked” in static documentation. The IPPC Secretariat will keep looking at the progress made by Codex in this regard.

III. Innovation of processes

Our standard setting processes may benefit from a mutual review: while the IPPC Standard Setting Process might be looking for higher involvement of countries to host committees and meetings and could also benefit from Codex’s experience with commodity standards. On the other hand, Codex could look at the practice of the IPPC Standards Committee, which analyses and reviews all standards before they are approved for consultation or sent back to expert drafting groups. The establishment of a joint forum to discuss best practices in standard setting could be something valuable on all sides. The IPPC Secretariat operations are based on two pillars – standard setting and implementation and capacity development, and these are getting more and more integrated. In fact, the IPPC Secretariat not only facilitates the work of the Standards Committee and expert drafting groups, but it also supports the work of the Implementation and Capacity Development Committee (IC) by helping to identify implementation concerns during the consultation period. This strong integration is demonstrated by the establishment of a Framework for Standards and Implementation, used to record the finalized standards and implementation tools and those under development to facilitate linkages. The Framework is updated yearly, with responsibility for review and amendment resting jointly with the SC and IC and endorsed by the governing body to the IPPC, the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM). In addition, the IPPC Secretariat has established a series of good practices, including holding meetings of the two major committees back to back, having one representative of each committee attending the other one, regular mutual briefings and shared action plans. When open for consultation, every standard also includes a request for the identification of possible implementation issues.

IV. Hot topics

A dated, but very hot topic relates to the advancement of electronic certification, which the CPM has encouraged since 2011. CPM-9 (2014) approved Appendix 1 to ISPM 12 (title of Appendix and standard please). This appendix describes the format and contents of electronic phytosanitary certificates, call ePhyto, and to facilitate the exchange of information between National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPOs) and also references codes and schema that should be harmonized at the national level. To continue the development of the ePhyto system, CPM-8 (2013) established an ePhyto Steering Group (SG). The SG supported the development of an independent study on the feasibility of an electronic hub that could facilitate the exchange of information on between NPPOs around the world. CPM-9 (2014) reviewed the ePhyto Hub Feasibility Study and encouraged the SG to urgently continue its work in preparing for the development of a global ePhyto hub. As of today, a ePhyto hub is being developed, along with a internet based generic system that would allow lesser developed countries to join in on the exchange of information electronically. The IPPC Secretariat welcomes discussions in the context of the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS) on the use of electronic certificates by competent authorities and migration to paperless certification, and is willing to coordinate discussions by the three sisters on this matter. Electronic certification is to be considered one of the key elements to achieve target 17.10 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is to promote a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the WTO.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is also a hot topic of concern for Codex. AMR has become a global issue that society as a whole needs to address. The IPPC Secretariat was represented by its Senior Standards Officer in the Physical Working Group on Codex Alimentarius Work on AMR, held in London from 29 November to 2 December 2016, and to date, no known AMR that could affect humans has originated from the use of pesticides. The IPPC Secretariat suggested that there could be a possible contribution of NPPOs when pesticides are used to address phytosanitary concerns, but most of the interface would rest with national pesticide regulatory authorities. In particular, consideration should be given to NPPOs role in ensuring that the selection and application of phytosanitary measures does not contribute to increased antimicrobial resistance. The Codex task force on AMR may also need to consider if the use of some phytosanitary treatments may lead to increased antimicrobial agents in the environment.

Another important topic that has been on the IPPC communities agenda for a long time, but has seen recent progress, is the transfer of pests via sea containers. Work on a draft standard had begun but there was no consensus that a standard was needed so the CPM adopted a CPM Recommendation on Sea Containers (R-06) and a Complementary Action Plan (CAP) on sSa Containers. The recommendation encourages NPPOs and international organization to help ensure containers are as clean as possible, in order to minimize the movement of pests. The CAP includes a number of actions to help reduce the pest risks associated with the international movement of sea containers. These actions include measuring the impact of the IMO/ILO/UNECE Code of Practice for Packing of Cargo Transport Units (CTU Code); increasing awareness of pest risks of sea containers; generating information to assist NPPOs in better managing these risks; and establishing oversight and governance arrangements for their implementation. A Task Force on Sea Containers, a Sub-group of the IC, has recently been established to implement the CAP.

Finally, collaboration among customs agencies and other border agencies is crucial following the entry into force of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. A Coordinated Border Management approach, including the development of a Single Window System, will request cooperation among international organizations, as well as national agencies involved in border control, to improve compliance and help facilitate the safe entry of commodities.

V. Joint awareness raising programs

In today's world, communication and advocacy are essential to raise awareness about our organizations' mandates and objectives. By working and communicating together, we can contribute to achieving SDGs and particularly the challenge of a hunger-free world. The establishment of International Years and World Days may help operationalize the development of our partnerships. In particular, the International Year of Plant Health and the World Food Safety Day, which have recently been endorsed by the FAO Conference, will both be considered by the United Nations General Assembly for adoption. These would be capital opportunities, both in terms of awareness raising and financing of plant health and food safety services at all levels. Providing the people and all relevant stakeholders with an understanding of our mission will help build confidence among our partners to mobilize resources to help achieve our objectives.

To conclude, a successful partnership between the IPPC and Codex communities is crucial in fulfilling our mandates to protect the world's plant resources from pests and to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade. This will also contribute to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, for which strong, inclusive and integrated partnerships are needed at all levels, as described in "Goal 17: Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development" of the SDGs.

One workshop was organized in Quito on 7-8 March 2018 by the Corporación IG-DE, to address issue of concern for both the Codex and IPPC communities with the aim to strengthen and ensure cooperation on food safety and plant health matters in the Andean Community. Codex and IPPC contact points from Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru actively attended the workshop and interacted with FAO, national institutions, civil society and food producers. Participants cooperated flawlessly and shared their experiences, success stories and challenges ahead in the fields of food safety and plant health. At the margins of the workshop a photo and video mission was organized to banana, cocoa and quinoa plantations and to a sea port, while a press conference was organized by the Mayor of Guayaquil attracting over 30 journalists who reported on the workshop.⁴

⁴ Ref. <https://www.ippc.int/en/news/strengthening-cooperation-on-international-plant-health-and-food-standards-in-the-andes/>