

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



JOINT OFFICE: Viale delle Terme di Caracalla 00100 ROME Tel: 39 06 57051 www.codexalimentarius.net Email: codex@fao.org Facsimile: 39 06 5705 4593

Agenda Item 6 d)

CX/EURO 00/9

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEX COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR EUROPE

Twenty-second Session
Madrid, Spain, 3 – 6 October 2000

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MELBOURNE CONFERENCE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM OF RAPID ALERT

PAN EUROPEAN RAPID ALERT SYSTEM FOR FOOD (Prepared by Netherlands)

Introduction

Since 1979 the European Community (EC) has a Rapid Alert System for Food. Last year at the FAO Conference on International Food Trade Beyond 2000, held in Melbourne, Australia in October 1999 the need for an International Food Safety Rapid Alert System has been raised in several presentations. During that Conference the EC Representative presented a paper on this issue, based on a proposal of the European Commission as well. Moreover, the second ASEM Seminar on SPS, held in November 1999 in China, emphasised the importance of a clear communication system in case of serious safety problems, such as the EC Rapid Alert System for Food.

The development of a global Rapid Alert System for Food constitutes a real challenge and can only be addressed on a long term basis. However, a structure on a Pan European level could be developed on the short term and could be an interim step to a global system. The basis for such a structure could be the EC Rapid Alert System for Food.

EC Rapid Alert System for Food

This system is a structure by which Members of the E.E.A. (European Economic Area) and the European Commission exchange rapidly information about problems concerning food. The aim is to protect the health of the consumers. The scope of the system is limited to those food products, which pose a risk to health that goes beyond the territory of a single Member State. Member States notify the Commission about foodstuffs which pose a serious risk to the health and safety of consumers. Subsequently the Commission informs the Members about products which might endanger the health of the consumer. Lastly, action may be taken by the Commission and/or a Member State. The system is based on principles as reciprocity, accuracy and certainty. Reciprocity: countries wishing to participate in a Rapid Alert System for Food must be able to provide the same kind of information which they will receive from this system. Accuracy: the information sent through the system must be accurate and well defined.

It must contain the description of the product involved allowing an easy identification of affected batches and of the origin of the product (name and address of the manufacturer, or code and identification number) in order to assure the tracing of the product. Certainty: the notification of a hazard through the Rapid Alert System for Food must be based on objective information. The

exact nature and extent of the hazard (concentration of a contaminant, level of microbiological contamination, etc.) must be precise.

The present legislation (Council Directive 92/59/EEC) does not foresee the opening of the system to Non-Members. Nevertheless, the proposal (Com 2000/139 Final-2) to modify the present Legislation foresees the opening of the system to third countries or international organisations, based on agreements including reciprocity (Article 12 para 4 of the proposal)

Pan European Rapid Alert System for Food

There is a fundamental difference between the EC Rapid Alert System for Food and a to be developed Pan European Rapid Alert System. In the EC the Rapid Alert System is based on Community legislation. Member States are obliged by law to notify and to take corrective measures, while the European Commission administers the system (as Contact Point) and may also take measures, as required. In a Pan European region any action would be based on intergovernmental co-operation. This basic condition limits the possibilities of a Pan European Rapid Alert System and necessitates a modest start of such a structure.

Proposal

A nucleus Pan European Rapid Alert System for Food could start with two elements:

1. to broaden the Contact Point at the European Commission in Brussels;
2. to limit the system at the beginning to an exchange of information.

In order to be feasible, a Pan European Rapid Alert System for Food must be based on the principles of reciprocity, accuracy and certainty, which underpin the EC Rapid Alert System for Food.