



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
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NATIONAL FOOD CONTROL SYSTEMS, NATIONAL STRUCTURES FOR CODEX MATTERS,
AND CONSUMER PARTICIPATION IN FOOD STANDARDS SETTING

Comments received in reply to CL 2012/20-LAC: Chile, Colombia and Costa Rica

CHILE

Item 5: National food control systems, national structures for Codex matters and consumer participation in setting food standards

Question 1: Strengthening national food control systems

1. Please describe any significant development/actions taken in your country to improve national food control systems since the 17th Session of the Committee. These may include actions relating to:

a. National food law and regulations

There are regulations, coming mainly from the Ministry of Health, but also from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Economy. Details of the regulations can be found on the Chilean Food Safety Agency (ACHIPIA) website www.achipia.gob.cl

Most of the food regulations are contained in the Ministry of Health's Food Health Code, which can be found on the website www.minsal.gob.cl

b. Policies and strategies with regard to food safety (e.g. risk analysis)

Responsibility and coordination in this connection lie with ACHIPIA, website www.achipia.gob.cl, where details of policy and related background information may be found.

c. Food control management (e.g. food control administration structures)

Responsibility for such action for national production and imports lies with the Ministry of Health, website www.minsal.gob.cl

For farm and livestock primary products for export, except for fishery products, responsibility and actions lie with the Ministry of Agriculture's Agriculture and Livestock Service (SAG), website www.sag.gob.cl

For fishery products for export, responsibility and actions lie with the National Fisheries Service (SERNAPESCA).

d. Inspection services

The same services and authorities as mentioned in the previous point.

e. Laboratory infrastructure and activities

ACHIPIA created an Integrated System of Food Safety Laboratories (SILA), comprising a network of laboratories that carry out official control sampling. It basically consists of a unit that coordinates the interaction of the various laboratory networks currently in existence. The country has three systems of food safety control, managed by three different ministries:

1. the Agriculture and Livestock Service (SAG), under the Ministry of Agriculture, with its own 4 laboratories and a network of 17 private laboratories that are authorized by the service to carry out certain analyses.

2. the National Fisheries Service (SERNAPESCA), under the Ministry of Economy, with a network of 34 private or university laboratories authorized by the service.

3. the network of public health laboratories, under the Ministry of Health, comprising the Institute of Public Health (ISP) laboratories, the 20 environmental laboratories of the Regional Secretariat of the Ministry of Health (SEREMIS), plus 4 satellite laboratories, and also 11 recognized private laboratories.

There are thus 78 laboratories distributed throughout the country and carrying out official monitoring of food safety. ACHIPIA's role is to establish better coordination and communication among these three networks, so as to achieve mutual recognition of the results of analyses, thereby avoiding duplication.

f. Trade facilitation agreements

Chile has one of the highest numbers of trade agreements of any country. Thus today it has 22 such agreements with 59 countries, including the European Union, the United States, China, Korea, Japan, and most recently Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. Almost all these agreements contain sections on human health, plant health and other technical standards. More details on all these trade agreements can be found on the website of the General Directorate for International Economic Relations www.direcon.gob.cl

g. Information dissemination

ACHIPIA's website provides information on food issues, including: the Codex Alimentarius, national food rules and regulations, the Food Information and Alerts Network (RIAL), the Laboratories Network, national integrated programmes (including programmes on pesticides, microbiological hazards, marine toxins, dioxins, and hazard analysis and critical control points [HACCP]) and scientific coordination in connection with the recently launched Scientific Network. In addition, a monthly newsletter dealing with safety is produced, which also provides information on activities in which ACHIPIA has participated or activities that the agency considers important for the sector.

The ACHIPIA website also provides access to a library of material on food safety and to press and other publications that are considered important in the field. Lastly, there is a section of frequently asked questions on the subject.

An informative web page on the Codex Alimentarius will shortly be launched, so as to make the public more familiar with this organization, providing access to information and helping in its understanding by those who need it most – the country's consumers and producers.

The ACHIPIA website also contains the National Food Safety Policy (2009), covering the period up to 2015. This policy is the framework for action to develop an integrated, modern, national food safety system, explicitly setting out the country's objectives, strategic guidelines and priorities in this sphere.

h. Training/capacity-building

ACHIPIA has been in charge of various types of training activity, including the following:

- The central team of the Regional Advisory Commissions provides training for the staff of these commissions with regard to food safety and management.
- In the first half of 2012, the Codex Alimentarius Secretariat ran this body's first extension workshop, with the objective of bringing the work of the Codex closer to the academic community, both public and private. The intention is to foster a better understanding of the work carried out and the importance of this body for the country. In view of the success of this first workshop, a second will be held at the end of 2012, where it is planned to present the work carried out in the various international meetings of Codex committees during the year.
- The National Integrated HACCP Programme plan for 2013 includes the provision of training through videoconferencing for government technical officers with responsibilities in this connection, with the aim of harmonizing criteria and avoiding duplication.
- The Integrated System of Food Safety Laboratories (SILA) held a course-workshop on "The reliability of analytical results for food quality and safety", which was run with the collaboration of FAO and the Swedish National Food Agency (NFA) and was designed by the international expert Leonardo Merino. This course brought together experts from food safety laboratories and others working in areas connected with the laboratories of various public services such as SAG, SERNAPESCA, ISP, SEREMIS and ACHIPIA.

2. Please describe recently established mechanisms/structures for inter-sectoral/multi-disciplinary collaboration for risk assessment, risk management and/or risk communication purposes at national level (including or other than National Codex Committee) as well as the effectiveness of these mechanisms/structures

Apart from the National Codex Committee and its 15 subcommittees, there is a public-private commission coordinated by the Ministry of Health to revise the Food Health Code, and also various committees on specific food safety issues, coordinated by ACHIPIA.

ACHIPIA has recently launched groups of experts to investigate various subjects, including food quality and safety, and another group for risk assessment.

The Food Information and Alerts Network (RIAL) is in its trial phase. Details may be found on the ACHIPIA website.

3. Please provide information on initiatives since the 17th Session of the Committee at national and regional level to promote coordination of work on food standards with other international and regional organizations

While the offices of chairperson and secretary of Chile's National Codex Committee previously rotated among four relevant ministries, both these offices are currently vested in ACHIPIA, under the Ministry of Agriculture. In this period, three additional technical subcommittees have been added to those previously existing, namely the Subcommittee for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Subcommittee for Animal Feed and the Subcommittee for Processed Fruit and Vegetables.

Question 2: Strengthening Codex structures at the national level

1. Please describe any significant actions that your country has taken since the 17th Session of the Committee to strengthen Codex structures at the national level and to promote more effective participation in the Codex

Institutionalization of the Codex was improved by vesting the offices of chairperson and secretary of the National Codex Committee and general coordination in a single body, ACHIPIA.

The relationship between the National Codex Committee and the authorities is assured by the Council of ACHIPIA Subsecretaries, which acts as a channel for information to higher authorities, in order to foster knowledge of and participation in the Codex.

A manual on National Codex Committee procedures in the country was approved.

2. Please describe the structure, composition and operation of the National Codex Committee (or equivalent or similar structure), or plans for its establishment

There is a National Codex Committee, chaired by the Ministry of Agriculture through ACHIPIA, a body that also covers the office of Secretary and acts as Contact Point. The committee also includes the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Health and Economy, plus representatives from the industrial, university and consumer sectors. In addition, there are 15 technical subcommittees reflecting the country's interests and corresponding to those of the Codex committees, all with representatives of the above-mentioned sectors comprising the National Committee. Coordination of these technical subcommittees is carried out by various services of the ministries mentioned above. Thus there are Subcommittees for Food Hygiene, General Principles, Inspection and Certification, Labelling, Additives, Contaminants, Analysis and Sampling, Special Diets, Fats and Oils, Pesticide Residues, Veterinary Drug Residues, Animal Feed, Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, Processed Fruit and Vegetables, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

3. Please describe:

a. Specific actions taken since the 17th Session of the Committee aimed at strengthening the Codex Contact Point (i.e. inter-sectoral consultative processes on Codex matters, including promoting increased involvement and participation of consumers and other stakeholders)

Major follow-up has been carried out by the Secretariat regarding comments on the various documents circulated by the Codex system. This has resulted in an increase in comments on documents.

Participation in electronic groups has also increased, in compliance with a general recommendation from the National Codex Committee.

b. Current shortcomings identified for the Codex Contact Point and National Codex Committee (or equivalent or similar structure)

There was a need to systematize by establishing a procedural manual. After months of analysis, this manual was recently issued.

Actions for large-scale extension to all interested parties have been launched, with information being provided twice a year through seminars on the outcome of the meetings of the Codex Commission and various committees in which Chile has participated.

A project is being developed to establish the Codex website.

c. Identified need for capacity development to strengthen the Codex Contact Point and National Codex Committee (or equivalent or similar structure)

The procedural manual was recently unanimously approved.

The above-mentioned website will be up and running within a year.

Question 3: Scientific activities (risk-based approach) and data collection activities

1. Please describe developments since the 17th Session of the Committee regarding:

a. Areas of risk-based approach application (e.g. monitoring programmes, sampling programmes, inspection, scientific basis of food safety decisions)

In 2011 Chile's Ministry of Health issued Circular No. 16, providing guidelines for risk-based inspection of food facilities.

The circular indicates the features of the new system, in which product-based inspection is replaced by risk-based inspection, with all that this involves, highlighting some of the main aspects: prevention, commitment and self-inspection by businesses, and also the classification of food production facilities.

b. Key data collection activities ongoing to identify or monitor relevant food safety hazards and contaminants in the food supply and to identify or monitor food-borne disease and outbreaks

The information comes from the Ministry of Health's FBD surveillance system. Improvement is needed in coverage of epidemiological surveillance, and also the detection and investigation of outbreaks, notification, analysis and geographically-based differences.

c. Use of data collected through inspection and control or monitoring by institutions/agencies involved in food safety risk assessment and/or management

In order to ensure food safety throughout the food chain, constant innovation and improvement are needed in the strategies being developed. Obligatory implementation of HACCP by the food industry is one of the most relevant regulatory strategies introduced in the Food Health Code.

Question 4: Priority areas for capacity-building in food safety

1. Please describe:

a. Current priority food safety issues to be addressed nationally and regionally

A priority for the country and the region is the creation of conceptual frameworks that will allow food safety issues to be addressed in an integrated manner, including all the actors in the chain and establishing priorities in line with the situation of each country:

- establishment of priorities according to the hazards and risks found in each country.
- involvement of small producers and family farmers in actions to produce safe food.
- capacity-building in the region so that risk analysis is implemented in each country depending on the individual situation, with some needing to focus on assessment or communication and others on food risk management.

Countries that are already more advanced need to establish their risk profiles according to their priorities.

b. Current priority areas for capacity-building (ongoing and for the future)

The implementation of systems and practices to ensure the production of safe food by small enterprises and family farms.

Training of trainers concerning household safety practices, focusing on teaching in schools in order to reach households.

Training in food risk analysis, with stress on its various aspects, depending on each country's stage of development.

c. What additional support through capacity-building is required

Awareness-raising workshops on safety and nutritional quality issues aimed at regional policy-makers so that these actors can share regional experience.

Design of a workshop on safety and risk-communication issues aimed at the countries' journalists or communications managers.

It is very important to create a panel of regional experts who can transfer experience in the region and also promote exchanges in the region.

Coordination of the networks of food laboratories present in the region.

Resources need to be sought to provide support for family farming safety programmes.

Ways need to be sought to coordinate safety efforts with those of nutritional quality programmes that are being implemented in the region, e.g. "5 a day".

COLOMBIA

Item 5 – National food control systems, national structures for Codex matters and consumer participation in food standards setting

Question 1: Strengthening National Food Control Systems

1. Please describe any significant development/actions taken in your country to improve national food control systems since the 17th Session of the Committee. These may include actions relating to:

a. National food law and regulations

As part of the strengthening of the national food safety system the following standards were issued:

DECREES:

2010

- Decree 1673 of 2010, amending Article 50 of Decree 616 of 2006.

2011

- Decree 332 of 2011, establishing the technical regulations on the requirements for special poultry processing plants.
- Decree 1880 of 2011. Raw milk.
- Decree 3961 of 2011, setting forth transitional measures on plants for processing and cutting cattle, buffalo and pigs. October 2011.

2012

- Decree 917 of 2012, amending Decree 1500 of 2007, as amended by Decree 2965 of 2008, Decrees 2380, 4131, 4974 of 2009 and Decree 3961 of 2011, and issuing other provisions.
- Decree 1362 of 2012, creating the National Intersectoral Commission for Coordination and Senior Level Orientation on Slaughtering Animals Intended for Human Consumption. Official Gazette 48872 of 25 June 2012.
- Decree 1686 of 2012, setting forth the technical regulations on the manufacture, processing, hydration, packaging, storage, distribution, transport, marketing, sale, export and import of alcoholic beverages intended for human consumption.

RESOLUTIONS:

2010

- Resolution 1031 of 2010, amending Article 6 of Resolution 2997 of 2007, as amended by Article 1 of Resolution 715 of 2009. Official Gazette 47662 of 25 March 2010.
- Resolution 1057 of 2010, setting forth the technical regulations on health requirements governing honey for human consumption. Official Gazette 47662 of 25 March 2010.
- Resolution 1707 of 2010, amending Article 5, paragraph c, of Resolution 2997 of 2007.
- Resolution 2195 of 2010, setting forth the technical regulations on the requirements to be met during the process of heating low-acid and acidified foods in airtight containers manufactured, transported, sold, distributed, imported, exported and marketed for human consumption. Official Gazette 47.744.
- Resolution 3009 of 2010, setting forth the technical regulations on the health and safety requirements for meat of the Crocodylia order intended for human consumption and provisions on processing, cutting, storing, marketing, selling, transporting, importing or exporting it. Official Gazette 47.798 of 11 August 2010.

2011

- Resolution 332 of 2011, setting forth the technical regulations on the requirements for special poultry processing plants.
- Resolution 333 of 2011, Nutrition labelling.
- Resolution 1185 of 2011, amending Article 5, paragraph (c), of Resolution 2997 of 2007, as amended by Article 1 of Resolution 1707 of 2010. Official Gazette L8047 of 19 April 2011.
- Resolution 1506 of 2011, setting forth the technical regulations on labelling or marking requirements for additives used in processing food for human consumption. Official Gazette M8.066 of 11 May 2011.
- Resolution 1511 of 2011, setting forth the technical regulations on the health requirements for chocolate and chocolate products for human consumption processed, packaged, stored, transported, marketed or sold within the country or imported to or exported from it. Official Gazette 48.066 of 11 May 2011.
- Resolution 3421 of 2011, setting forth the technical regulations on the special conditions for the import of feed and food for human consumption originating in or consigned from certain prefectures in Japan as a result of the risk stemming from the accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant.
- Resolution 4121 of 2011, amending Resolution 779 of 2006, as amended by Resolution 3462 of 2008 and Resolution 3544 of 2009. Official Gazette D8.198.
- Resolution 4254 of 2011, issuing the technical regulations that set forth provisions related to marking or labelling foods derived from genetically modified organisms (GMOs) for human consumption and to identifying raw materials for human consumption that contain said organisms.

2012

- Resolution 122 of 2012, amending Resolution 776 of 2008.
- Resolution 468 of 2012, setting forth the technical regulations on the health requirements for motor ships or vessels engaged in harvesting, freezing or processing fish products and derived products and the procedure for certifying the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) system on motor ships or fishing vessels headed for the European Union. Official Gazette 48,371 of 13 March 2012.

- Resolution 683 of 2012, issuing the technical regulations on health requirements for materials, objects, containers and equipment intended to come in contact with foods and beverages for human consumption. Official Gazette 48.388 of 13 March 2012.
- Resolution 684 of 2012, defining the Protocol for Approving New Food Health Claims. Official Gazette 48.388 of 13 March 2012.
- Resolution 2154 of 2012, setting forth the technical regulations on health requirements for oils and fats of vegetable of animal origin processed, packaged, stored, transported, or marketed in the country, or exported from or imported to it, and intended for human consumption, and issuing other provisions. Official Gazette L8.516 8/8/2012.
- Resolution 2155 of 2012, setting forth the technical regulations on the health requirements for vegetables processed, packaged, and transported in the country or imported to it. Official Gazette 48.516 8/8/2012.

Current food regulations can be found on the INVIMA website, at <http://web.invima.gov.co/portal/faces/index.jsp?id=1303>

b. Food safety policy/strategy (e.g. risk analysis)

Since the introduction of the national agricultural health and food safety policy (Conpes) in 2005, the food control management system has been governed by a new organizational and operational framework, incorporating two basic principles that guide the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) system: (i) the system must encompass all of the activities in the agrifood chain, “from farm to table”, and (ii) the system must be based on a risk analysis approach.

The first principle was adopted in the system with the definition of the competencies of the different entities responsible for controlling food safety at every link in the agrifood chain, from primary production to consumption: primary production, under the supervision of the Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA); food processing, animal slaughtering, import and export of food intended for human consumption, under the responsibility of the National Institute of Food and Drug Monitoring (INVIMA); and health surveillance regarding distribution, marketing, transportation and the catering and restaurant sector, under the supervision of local authorities. These competencies were ratified through Law 1122 of 2007.

The second component, the risk analysis approach, took shape with the incorporation of its three components: (i) Risk Management, (ii) Risk Assessment and (iii) Risk Communication. Regarding Risk Assessment, in 2010 the Food Safety Risk Assessment Unit (UERIA) was created at the National Health Institute (INS) as a technical-scientific group on whose risk assessment studies managers would rely in order to develop the SPS System in the country and issue relevant measures. In addition, the Unit was to contribute to the health of the Colombian population by assessing food safety risks in the country. For Risk Management, within the food safety management system responsibility was given to the ministers of Health and Social Welfare and Agriculture and Sustainable Development, to ICA, to INVIMA, to INS and to regional health centres. This responsibility comprises: (i) food safety measures (standards, regulations), (ii) inspection, monitoring and control actions, including laboratory diagnosis, (iii) epidemiological surveillance of foodborne disease (FBD) and attention to health warnings. Lastly, responsibility for Risk Communication is shared by the assessment and management authorities referred to above, consumers and other stakeholders.

It also involves national and international consultation and notification activities related to SPS measures. In these activities, in addition to the agencies responsible for these measures, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism (MCIT) plays a key role as a SPS/WTO contact point before the World Trade Organization.

Food control management is a key component of the National SPS System, and one of the strategic guidelines of national agricultural health and food safety policy.

d. Inspection services

Food safety surveillance in the food chain is the responsibility of ICA and INVIMA, their operational agencies at the local level and regional health entities at the departmental, district and municipal level. To strengthen food inspection, surveillance and control, Article 133 of Decree-Law 19 of 10 January 2012 requires the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MSPS), within six months following the entry into force of this decree, to establish a health inspection, surveillance and control model for products under the purview of INVIMA. The model, the technical aspects of which are under construction in order for it to be issued, will coordinate all inspection, surveillance and control activities under the “farm to table” approach.

e. Laboratory infrastructure and activities

Colombian Agricultural Institute

Under the policy, it was considered necessary to strengthen and consolidate the National Reference Laboratory of vesicular diseases and plant diagnosis, improving specific techniques for diagnosing officially controlled, exotic and emerging diseases and pests and strengthening the national reference laboratories’ capacity to handle agricultural inputs.

In 2006, after the issuance of the SPS policy, some specific activities were carried out by the National Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory for different species (avian, swine, bovine, and relative to vesicular diseases in general). These activities resulted mainly from the surveillance and control of illnesses such as influenza, Newcastle disease, salmonella, vesicular stomatitis and classical swine fever, and to this end different agreements were reached with the private sector and associations. In addition, for diseases that are not officially controlled, agreements were reached with some universities including the National University and the Universidad Javeriana.

Nevertheless, the main breakthrough this year involved strengthening the diagnostic capacity with outlays for the construction of a biosafety-level animal diagnostic laboratory, enabling the safe handling of highly contagious agents such as the viruses that cause foot-and-mouth disease, avian influenza and other exotic diseases, through eradication programmes. Once ICA had issued, in 2006, a resolution establishing the mandatory registration of all laboratories in the country engaged in veterinary diagnosis of avian, swine, equine, bovine and aquaculture species, among others, the diagnosis processes were centralized.

With the restructuring of ICA, the Analysis and Diagnosis Agency was created, with two respective technical divisions for each of the components: agriculture and livestock. This agency has been responsible for executing five projects as part of the Strategic Plan of ICA for 2008 to 2012. The main progress made through these projects is described below:

LANIA - LANIP

In 2009, ICA complied with formalities for accreditation by the Colombian National Accreditation Agency (ONAC), under standard ISO 17025, of three new tests related to bioinputs, pesticides and pesticide residue to be conducted by the National Laboratory of Agricultural Inputs (LANIA). In addition, inter-laboratory tests have been implemented to evaluate the capacity for advisability of conducting certain tests in the official laboratory network. In this manner, the need to adjust a series of parameters used by analysts has been identified, as has the need to provide greater training for relevant professionals and to improve the maintenance and calibration tasks of some of laboratory equipment, principally for seed quality evaluation.

In the specific case of the National Livestock Inputs Laboratory (LANIP), a crematorium furnace has been put into operation, and in 2009, the Chemistry and Microbiology Departments were placed in separate facilities, in accordance with international standards. At the LANIP laboratory, the range of diagnostic services has been broadened in response to the timely verification of the quality of livestock inputs and food safety (standardization of methods for identifying residue in food concentrates, milk and meat, specifically mycotoxins and pathogens). Nevertheless, the laboratory still has limited analytical capacity to control pathogenic residues, microorganisms and contaminants for various foods starting at the primary production of those foods.

National Veterinary Diagnosis Laboratory and livestock diagnostic processes

In veterinary diagnosis, the National Veterinary Diagnosis Laboratory (LNDV) has successfully taken part in international tests for inter-laboratory comparisons.

The classical swine fever (CSF) test was conducted at the European Union's CSF reference laboratory in Hannover, Germany. For food-and-mouth disease, vesicular virus typing was carried out at the Pan American Foot and Mouth Disease Center (PAHO/WHO/PANAFTOSA) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which is one of the reference laboratories of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) on this disease. The salmonella serotyping test was conducted with the Dr. Carlos G. Lalbrán National Institute on Infectious Disease in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The LNDV has very successfully conducted inter-laboratory comparison tests for the veterinary diagnostic centres of ICA with regard to five techniques used to diagnose different diseases, including three officially controlled diseases. To diagnose brucellosis, Rose Bengal and indirect ELISA tests were used; to diagnose Newcastle disease, the HI test was used; and to diagnose avian influenza, agar gel immunodiffusion (AGID) tests were used. Moreover, an OIE twinning programme is currently underway with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) to diagnose Newcastle disease and avian flu. The laboratory has also broadened its repertoire of services by implementing new molecular biology tests to diagnose swine diseases.

In broad terms, LNDV has taken part in external quality control exercises with OIE reference laboratories or internationally recognized laboratories for diagnostic testing. This has led to a major breakthrough in strengthening diagnostic capacity.

Agricultural diagnostic processes

ICA has taken various steps to improve specific diagnostic activities. Connectivity has been added to the optical equipment in Cundinamarca, Valle del Cauca, Meta and Antioquia in order to support the diagnosis of pests by specialists at different agricultural diagnosis laboratories. In addition, new diagnosis techniques have been implemented relative to seeds and crops—such as palm, avocado, Tommy Atkins mango, uchuva and some cereals.

Inter-laboratory tests have also been conducted with the Phytosanitary Diagnosis Laboratories of ICA, making it necessary to improve some diagnostic methodologies and raise the level of suitability for testing, of experience for determining causal agents and of skills for applying taxonomic keys for the correct identification of those agents.

International recognition for the National Reference Laboratory

As part of the Institute's strategic plan, in strengthening diagnostic capacity an attempt has been made to gain international recognition for the National Phytosanitary and Molecular Analysis Laboratory by developing standardized, certified diagnostic processes with international recognition for more economically significant diseases and by standardizing molecular diagnostic tests for exotic pests that pose a threat to Colombian agriculture. However, the laboratory is currently in the process of being upgraded.

Authorization and certification processes: outsourcing

The strategic plan of ICA included designing a project under the responsibility of the two protection divisions in which public and private sector participation would be promoted in order to improve the coverage and timeliness of official agricultural and livestock services in terms of diagnostic capacity. The compliance authorization in SPS compliance is a response to this effort.

The main breakthrough has taken place in the System of Authorization of Brucellosis Diagnosis Laboratories. This has effectively increased the coverage and control of the disease, mainly through the Rose Bengal method and, to a lesser extent, the ELISA test. In addition, monitoring and audit processes, such as inter-laboratory tests, are frequently conducted in authorized laboratories in order to produce high-quality data. It is important to note that to date 79 inspection agencies have been authorized by ICA under the brucellosis programme and 67 have been authorized under the tuberculosis programme, reflecting significant progress in the bovine sector. Other agricultural and livestock sectors do not, however, report substantial progress in expanding diagnostic coverage for disease and pests, respectively.

On the topic of quality, it is also important to note that although all laboratories are certified for good laboratory practices, both these laboratories and authorized laboratories are in the process of receiving ONAC accreditation. Consequently, the national laboratories have taken part in the external performance evaluation programmes with national and international institutions.

In all of the aforementioned projects, the enhancement of diagnostic capacity has led to the establishment of different inter-agency agreements. For example, ICA, INVIMA and the Von Humboldt Institute have entered into agreements for the continued operation of the Genetically Modified Organisms Laboratory. In addition, the Quarantine Treatments Laboratory collective reached work agreements on applied research in conjunction with UNIDO agencies and the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development to evaluate fumigants as an alternative to methyl bromide. An agreement was also reached with the Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano on applied research on mitigating pests and a work agreement was reached with APHIS in Colombia on pest mitigation projects.

The Analysis and Veterinary Diagnosis Technical Department has helped draft agreements on technical-scientific cooperation activities, training, the acquisition of reference reagents and the conducting of laboratory tests to diagnose diseases covered by official control programmes and on laboratory tests to detect residues in veterinary drugs, among others.

The Agricultural Analysis and Diagnosis Department has carried out activities through cooperation agreements executed with universities, associations and provincial governments, at both the central level (laboratories in Cundinamarca) and the regional level.

The primary-production diagnostic capacity has been strengthened through continual training received by the Institute's in-house staff, the presence of experts, and national and international courses, which have constituted an important step forward, providing in-service training to stakeholders involved in phytosanitary, veterinary, seed, quarantine treatment and input (agricultural and livestock) diagnosis.

Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism

MCIT is responsible for regulating domestic trade and supervising the National Quality Subsystem, as set forth in Decree 210 of 2003. For this reason, it coordinates, presides over and is the technical Secretariat of the Intersectoral Quality Commission (CIC).

CIC coordinates activities carried out by public and private bodies related to formulating, executing and monitoring policies on technical standardization, drafting and issuing technical regulations, accreditation, designation, conformity assessment and metrology.

Since 2010, inter-agency efforts have been coordinated between MCIT and the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), in order to compile information to identify the metrological needs both of private laboratories that provide services consisting of measuring physical and chemical parameters as well as those of private companies with laboratories that conduct or outsource this type of measurements.

To accomplish this, MCIT identified the metrological needs of Colombian laboratories in accordance with the results of a specialized metrological survey carried out at 3,791 laboratories in 250 municipalities that conduct metrological activities in the industrial sector. The results will become an important input for the Colombian Metrology Network and for the devising of metrology policies.

The identification of institutions to carry out measurements and calibrations and the conducting of a specialized metrology survey have become the first important exercise for the country, not only because of the information gathered but also because of the number of sources consulted on metrological topics. This has thus become an additional added value of awareness raising on metrological matters in the country.

On 3 November 2011, Decree 4175 was issued, "separating some functions of SIC, creating the National Metrology Institute and setting forth its objective and structure". The Institute is responsible for coordinating scientific and industrial methodology at the national level and conducting activities that permit innovation and support the country's economic, scientific and technological development through research, the provision of metrological services, support for metrological control activities and the dissemination of measures traceable to the International System of Units (SI).

The responsibilities of the National Metrology Institute (INM) include:

- Participating in setting metrological policy and coordinating and implementing scientific and industrial metrology in the country.
- Ensuring the international traceability of national measurement standards and representing the country's interests at national and international forums on scientific and industrial metrology.
- Strengthening the metrological control activities put forth by competent authorities to ensure the reliability of measurements.

- Establishing, safeguarding and conserving the national measurement standards corresponding to each magnitude—except when it is more appropriate for another institution to safeguard and conserve the standards, in which case INM will establish the applicable requirements and, on that basis, designate the competent authority.
- Establishing and operating the scientific and industrial metrology reference laboratories needed in the country, in accordance with Government policies, and designating primary metrology laboratories as needed.
- Performing calibration services with regard to the measurement standards of laboratories, research centres, industry or other stakeholders, when requested to do so in accordance with the corresponding legally established rates, and issuing the corresponding calibration certificates and reference materials.
- Calibrating standards for legal metrology and performing assays for the approval of model or prototype measuring instruments in accordance with current standards.

In addition, through the cooperation project with the European Union named “Technical Assistance to Foreign Trade in Colombia”, ONAC has received technical assistance from an expert from Physikalisch - Technische Bundesanstalt PTB of Germany, in order to implement ISO/IEC 17011.

ONAC is currently a full member of InterAmerican Accreditation Cooperation (IAAC) and was elected to its executive committee; it went from being an affiliated member to an associate member of the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC); and it has submitted a request for peer review to IAAC.

National Health Institute

The INS unit supports public health laboratories with laboratory equipment, training, the development of new techniques and laboratory inputs. Agreements have been entered into on monitoring support provided in the form of financial resources and equipment. Foodborne diseases have not been given priority over other issues because of the need to address other important matters.

The work groups of the Laboratories Division give technical assistance to public health laboratories in the network, mainly in the form of training, new analytical methodologies and information on, inter alia, good laboratory practices, quality assurance systems, information systems and external evaluation monitoring programmes, FBDs, pathogenic microorganisms, parasites, viruses and toxic chemical substances.

Currently, approximately 10 laboratories in the network have the technical capacity to analyse biological samples in order to conduct FBD monitoring. Another 30 laboratories have this capacity, but focus on residues and are therefore more closely associated with INVIMA.

National Institute of Food and Drug Monitoring

INVIMA, as a national health authority, provides support to strengthen regional public health laboratories by carrying out different technical assistance activities and actively participating in work meetings convened by MSPS. At these meetings, the projects to invest in the network laboratories made possible with resources allocated by the Ministry in 2007 and 2008 were revised. Although the manner in which laboratories prioritize resources was not explicitly set forth, INVIMA held workshops to establish guidelines and provide orientation to laboratories on how to identify their needs and requirements for resources based on their situation and the conditions in each area of the country.

In addition, the technical assistance activities of INVIMA include providing staff training, developing new analytical techniques, implementing good laboratory practices and assigning technical tutors for the 32 laboratories in the network.

Since 2000, the Microbiology Department of the National Reference Laboratory has serotyped strains of *Listeria monocytogenes* and *Salmonella* spp. sent by the different public health laboratories in Colombia, as well as strains isolated internally in the laboratory itself. This led to the creation of a collection of native strains isolated from foods.

A review makes clear that INVIMA has the technical capacity to analyse residues, contaminants and pathogens and to carry out other analyses of foods. Since 2006, the response capacity of INVIMA has been enhanced to meet the country’s needs and comply with international conventions and signed agreements. The laboratories currently operate according to quality assurance and accreditation systems that conform to international standards requiring the possession of sufficient technological resources to meet specialized analysis requirements, such as the capacity to detect pesticide or veterinary medicine residues in food.

f. Trade facilitation agreements

Trade agreements that are currently in effect, have been signed or are under negotiation include:

- a. Existing Agreements:
- Colombia – Chile
 - Colombia – Cuba
 - Colombia – El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras
 - Group of Three (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Colombia and Mexico)
 - Colombia – Canada
 - Colombia – United States
 - CAN (Andean Community of Nations)

CARICOM (Caribbean Community)
 MERCOSUR (Southern Common Market)
 EFTA (European Free Trade Association)

b. Signed Agreements:

Colombia – European Union

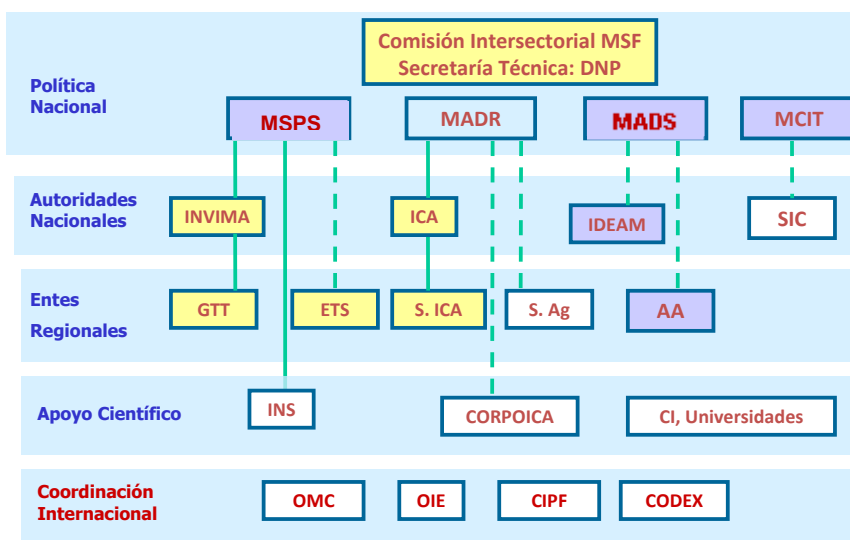
c. Agreements under Negotiation:

Colombia – Republic of Korea
 Colombia – Panama
 Colombia – Turkey
 Colombia – Costa Rica
 Colombia – Israel
 Colombia – Pacific Alliance (Chile – Mexico – Peru)

In light of these existing and proposed agreements, some of the most sensitive products have been identified, including beef, milk and milk products, as well as chicken, fish and aquaculture products and fruits and vegetables. In terms of the beef sector, health eligibility has been obtained for markets such as those of Angola, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Egypt, Peru and the Russian Federation, and steps are being taken to gain access to others including Algeria, Canada, Chile, Georgia, Israel, Mexico, the Republic of Korea, South Africa, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates and the United States. Regarding the milk and milk products sector, important markets have been opened up including those of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Chile, Mexico, Peru and the United States. In addition, efforts are underway to obtain health eligibility for the Russian market and those of the countries of the northern triangle of Central America. In the poultry sector, health permits have been obtained for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and steps are being taken to obtain eligibility for countries including China, Japan, Peru and the Russian Federation.

2. Please describe recently established mechanisms/structures for inter-sectoral/multi-disciplinary collaboration for risk assessment, risk management and/or risk communication purposes at national level (including or other than National Codex Committee) as well as the effectiveness of these mechanisms/structures

INTERSECTORAL COMMISSION ON SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES



SFS Intersectoral Commission Technical Secretary: CNP				
National Policy	MSPS	MADR	MADS	MCIT
National Authorities	INVIMA	ICA	IDEAM	SIC
Regional Agencies	Workgroups	ETS	S. ICA	S. Ag AA
Scientific Support	INS	CORPOICA	CI, Universities	
International Coordination	WTO	OIE	CIPF	CODEX

Through Decree 2833 of 2006, the Intersectoral Commission on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Commission) was created, to coordinate and provide guidance on the country's agricultural health and food safety policy. As set forth in the Decree, the Commission was composed of the National Planning Department (DNP), the ministries that make up the SPS System (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, or MADR; MSPS; MCIT; and the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, or MADS), the health agencies (ICA and INVIMA), INS and the Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies (IDEAM). In addition, producer associations may participate in the Commission as special guests, with the right to take part in discussions but not to vote.

The SPS Commission was created mainly to meet the need for a coordinating body to implement the policy according to a system-based approach.

In accordance with Article 4 of Decree 2833 of 2006, the Intersectoral Commission on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures is responsible for:

- (a) Aligning the policies of the different ministries and other agencies that make up the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures System.
- (b) Providing guidance on the formulation of national SPS policies and plans, by promoting agreements on guidelines of common concern to the different national ministries and agencies.
- (c) Supporting coordination on developing and implementing SPS.
- (d) Promoting strategies for the adaptation, coordination and institutional strengthening of the SPS System and its member agencies.
- (e) Promoting agreement on strategies for the country's participation in the different regional and multilateral forums related to SPS and in international reference agencies.
- (f) Promoting cooperation among the public sector, the private sector and international agencies through the entities responsible for executing the decree in terms of the SPS, in order to ensure fulfilment of the objectives of the SPS System.
- (g) Making recommendations on the draft versions of SPS standards that the national government is required to issue.
- (h) Considering the health-related issues that stakeholders or the Commission's Technical Secretariat submit for it to study.
- (i) Fulfilling any other duties within the purview of the coordination and orientation nature of its work.
- (j) Adopting its own internal regulations within one month of its creation.

Article 6. The Technical Secretariat of the SPS Commission is responsible for:

- (a) Providing technical support for the Intersectoral Commission on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures to fulfil its duties.
- (b) Monitoring the decisions taken by the SPS Commission.
- (c) Serving as the Secretariat of the SPS Commission, and convening meetings and preparing meeting agendas and minutes.
- (d) Preparing the technical documents that the SPS Commission, in the fulfilment of its duties, is required to consider.
- (e) Submitting to the consideration of the SPS Commission matters related to the fulfilment of its duties, at the request of stakeholders or on its own initiative.
- (f) Coordinating the technical committees, as may be required.
- (g) Fulfilling all of other duties requested of it by the SPS Commission and related to its work.

Technical Corporation Agreement No 389 of 2012 was signed in June 2012 between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and MSPS, as a component of project UTF/COL/039/COL: "Technical support for the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in the processes of implementing the observatory of food and nutritional security and actions in favour of food safety, research and social mobilization on food and nutritional security". This agreement established component 5 on food safety, which aims to achieve the adoption of the national food safety management system as part of the SPS system in Colombia, based on the risk management approach, by supporting the implementation of this system. To this end, the component has been divided into several lines of action, which are being worked on with all due rigor:

Line 1: Strengthening the national food safety management system.

Objective 1: National food safety system management structured and functioning.

Outcome 1: Characterization of the national food safety management system, and a structured, functional proposal for it.

Outcome 2: Action plan agreed on with all stakeholders in the system and follow-up conducted.

Line 2: Implementation of analysis of food safety risks based on classification of risks and setting of priorities.

Objective 1: Government professionals trained in national and international risk analysis, in accordance with the international principles, standards and guidelines of the Codex Alimentarius.

Outcome 1: Parties responsible for managing the national control system trained in risk analysis (risk management, risk assessment and risk communication).

Outcome 2: Document on successful applications of risk analysis in Colombia.

Line 3: Training in the methodology to determine the burden of disease for FBDs and construction of a methodology for determining that burden.

Objective 1: Managerial-level government professionals trained in methodologies to determine the burden of disease for FBDs.

Outcome 1: Parties responsible for managing the national control system, trained in the burden of disease for foodborne diseases methodology.

Question 2: Strengthening Codex structures at the national level

1. Please describe any significant actions that your country has taken since the 17th Session of the Committee to strengthen Codex structures at the national level and to promote more effective participation in Codex

As part of the strengthening of structures, and to promote a more effective participation in the Codex at the national level, the National Codex Committee is initiating a project that seeks to socialize Codex issues throughout the country by holding committee meetings in the different departments. The first meeting was held in the city of Tunja, in the department of Boyacá, on 13 March. Furthermore, academics have participated in the National Committee meetings, making significant contributions on the issues and proposals debated on in the committee.

2. Please describe the structure, composition and operation of the National Codex Committee (or equivalent or similar structure), or plans for its establishment

Through Decree 977 of 1998 the National Codex Alimentarius Committee (CNC) was created as an advisory body to the national Government on setting food regulations policies. CNC is a permanent technical multidisciplinary agency, responsible for considering rules and mechanisms for protecting consumer health and facilitating food trade.

OBJECTIVE

CNC is a national Government advisory body responsible for setting the country's policies relative to processes to standardize and analyse principles and procedures on which progress could be made at the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission and its subsidiary bodies.

CNC MEMBERS

- Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism (MCIT)
- Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MSPS)
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE)
- National Institute of Food and Drug Monitoring (INVIMA)
- Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA)
- Superintendency of Industry and Commerce (SIC)
- Colombian Institute on Technical Standards and Certification (ICONTEC)
- Delegate of Producer Associations (ANDI)
- Representative of Consumer Associations (CCC)

CNC SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

- National Health Institute (INS)
- Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)
- ILSI-NorAndino
- National Planning Department (DNP)
- Horticultura Moderna Internacional

FUNCTIONS

1. Advising the Government on the study of policies and plans related to food standards and analyses of principles and procedures on which progress could be made by the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission, its Executive Committee and subsidiary bodies
2. Advising the Government on the study and coordination of Colombia's participation in sessions and meetings convened by the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission, its Executive Committee and subsidiary bodies.
3. Advising the Government on the study of draft global or regional standards proposed by the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission, its Executive Committee and subsidiary bodies.
4. Reviewing measures and mechanisms for the proper dissemination and implementation in the country of food standards adopted by the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission, and proposing such mechanisms and measures to the Government.
5. Proposing the revision of Codex Alimentarius standards when appropriate.

6. Submitting to the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission proposals for national standards. In all events, the process of setting national standards should be conducted in accordance with the standardization guidelines set forth in the National Standardization, Certification and Metrology System and in coordination with the relevant agencies.

7. Preparing the annual work program and sending the relevant portion thereof to stakeholders, in order for them to be apprised and included in the annual standardization programme.

8. Advising the Government on the study of national provisions required to be issued on this matter.

Chairperson and Secretary General

Chairperson

Director of Regulation - Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism

6067676 ext. 1347 or 1440

lftorres@mincomercio.gov.co

Secretary General

Office of the Director of Regulation - Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism

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▪ **Duties**

MCIT, through its Director of Regulation, serves as the Chair and Secretary General of the Committee. In this capacity, it coordinates activities intended to ensure the efficient management of the National Codex Committee, including: Coordinating Committee meetings; promoting the conduct of the activities for which the Committee is responsible and managing essential resources for the execution and monitoring of these activities; providing information needed to draw up the agenda of upcoming Committee meetings; having available the Codex final texts (standards, codes of practices, guidelines and other advisory texts), as well as the work documents of the Committee meetings.

Technical Secretariat and Contact Point

Department of Public Health – Ministry of Health and Social Protection

3305000 ext. 1262

bolarte@minsalud.gov.co

▪ **Duties**

MSPS serves as the Technical Secretariat of the Committee at the national level. In this capacity, it performs various duties, including supporting CNC in the technical management of the various issues that are examined. It also serves as a contact point, acting as a liaison between the Codex Secretariat in Rome and Colombia, receiving all Codex final texts (standards, codes of practice, guidelines and other advisory texts) and working documents of Codex meetings and submitting country comments on Codex documents or proposals to the Codex Alimentarius Commission, its subsidiary bodies or the Codex Secretariat.

National Technical Subcommittees

The purpose of the National Technical Subcommittees is to perform the technical work needed to attend to and monitor projects and documents issued or generated by the Codex Alimentarius and that are important for the country.

Furthermore, they play an active role, ensuring that potential or preliminary draft regulations that the country needs, and that might be brought before the respective Codex Alimentarius committees, are proposed to the National Committee.

▪ **Duties**

- Holding meetings and conducting consultations as they deem appropriate, including those involving scientific research, in order to secure technical reports underpinning proposals and comments on draft standards issued by the respective Codex Committee.
- Preparing the country's draft comments on the documents of the corresponding Committee, and encouraging the different sectors that make up the subcommittee to reach a consensus on these draft comments, as well as preparing the draft response in order for it to be submitted to and approved by the National Committee and for the subsequent definition of the country position.
- Participating in international Codex meetings provided that the National Committee gives its backing to such participation and budgetary resources so permit.

General Affairs Subcommittees	Coordinating Agency
General Principles	Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism
Food Hygiene	Ministry of Health and Social Protection
Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses	Ministry of Health and Social Protection
Biotechnology	National Institute of Food and Drug Monitoring
Food Additives	National Institute of Food and Drug Monitoring
Food Contaminants	National Institute of Food and Drug Monitoring
Methods of Analysis and Sampling	National Institute of Food and Drug Monitoring
Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems	National Institute of Food and Drug Monitoring
Food Labelling	National Institute of Food and Drug Monitoring
Residues of Veterinary Drugs	Colombian Agricultural Institute
Pesticide Residues	Colombian Agricultural Institute and National Institute of Food and Drug Monitoring

Products Subcommittees	Coordinating Agency
Processed Fruits and Vegetables	Colombian Institute on Technical Standards and Certification
Fresh Fruits and Vegetables	Colombian Institute on Technical Standards and Certification
Milk and Milk Products	Colombian Institute on Technical Standards and Certification
Fats and Oils	Ministry of Health and Social Protection
Fish and Fish Products	National University of Colombia
Sugars	Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism

Task Forces	Coordinating Agency
Antimicrobial Resistance	National Health Institute

3. Please describe:

a. Any specific actions taken since the 17th Session of the Committee aimed at strengthening the Codex Contact Point (i.e. inter-sectoral consultative processes on Codex matters, including promoting increased involvement and participation of consumers and other stakeholders)

The contact point plays an essential role, serving as a liaison between the Codex Secretariat in Rome and Colombia. Consequently, the size of the staff of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection's Division of Nutritional Health, Food and Beverages, where the Codex Contact Point is located, has been increased. The purpose of this was to streamline the forwarding of all Codex final texts (standards, codes of practice, guidelines and other advisory texts) to the different entities that make up the Codex National Committee, and to expedite the sending of working documents of Codex meetings and country comments on Codex documents or proposals to the Codex Alimentarius Commission, its subsidiary bodies or the Codex Secretariat.

c. Identified need for capacity development to strengthen the Codex Contact Point and National Codex Committee (or equivalent or similar structure)

As part of the efforts to support the National Codex Committee, and with the support of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) matrix is being constructed to analyse the current situation of the Codex National Committee and identify reasons for which it needs to be strengthened. Some of these needs are described below:

- Information systems.
- Developing countries should have a larger number of representatives at Codex meetings; that is, being represented by one or two people does not allow them to defend their national interests, given that the topics are highly varied and specific and require technical expertise. Codex should consider options to increase the number of representatives of developing countries at these meetings.
- Training new members of the Codex National Committee: encouraging the productive sector, academia and consumers with ties to the entities that make up the health system and international trade to play an active role in the Codex Alimentarius.
- Establishing mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the CNC and its subcommittees as well as their work.
- Establishing strategic partnerships in the private sector and academia and with NGOs, consumer organizations and regional and local governments.
- Establishing effective mechanisms for communication, cooperation and integration between the contact points and the CNCs of the countries of the Andean region and CCLAC.
- Participating in online chats organized by CCLAC to exchange information and discuss common agendas.
- Promoting inclusion of Codex issues in relevant academic programmes at universities, and strengthening those issues.
- Holding high-level meetings to increase the awareness of policymakers and decision makers in the respective entities that make up the National Codex Committee.
- Conducting seminars for officials responsible for food control-related duties.
- Providing training for experts from the scientific community and industry who are to help prepare the written positions and, lastly,

Conducting training activities on Codex procedures intended for delegates who are to participate in Codex meetings

Question 3: Scientific activities (risk-based approach) and data collection activities

1. Please describe developments since the 17th Session of the Committee regarding:

b. Key data collection activities ongoing to identify or monitor relevant food safety hazards and contaminants in the food supply and to identify or monitor foodborne disease and outbreaks

Surveillance of foodborne diseases is the responsibility of INS, as a component of the Public Health Surveillance System (SIVIGILA). It is supported by departmental and district agencies and INVIMA, other entities in the system play a role in it, as well. INS has a protocol on surveillance and control of foodborne diseases, instruments and collection and notification procedures for cases and outbreaks of FBDs at regional health centres. These procedures take into account a large number of variables to determine disease behaviour.

Information flows from the primary data unit to the municipality and from there to national and international agencies. From national agencies, feedback is sent to the departments, and from the departments to the municipalities. In addition, information is forwarded to insurance companies.

Regarding data analysis, decisions are taken and data are analysed at the departmental or national level, according to the following FDB variables: incidence, mortality rate, case-fatality rate, breakdown of FDB cases by gender and age group, the percentages of food groups and establishments implicated, and the percentage of FDB risk factors. INVIMA or the regional health centres, depending on the responsibilities of each, carry out control actions relative to the establishments and foods implicated in FDB outbreaks.

As set forth in the 2012 action plan, the aim of the public health surveillance and control policy is to develop and operate the public health surveillance and control system as well as to provide institutional technical capacity for analysing data and producing information. In addition, an institutionalized epidemic and emergency warning and response system is to be established, allowing for the prevention of contingencies and immediate response to any that arise. Lastly, the policy calls for the Public Health Surveillance and Control Division to define, implement and assess strategies for strengthening national and subnational surveillance capacities such that they will be aligned with the national health security policy.

The system has also been buttressed by the design of surveillance protocols and notification sheets. The regional health centres continually receive training on surveillance protocols and how to deal with outbreaks. In particular, a virtual course was developed to carry out research on FBD outbreaks. No follow-up work has been carried out regarding the outcome of these training courses, although since 2012 plans to improve the support given to regional health centres have been carried out, in order to identify problems and solutions.

To strengthen active surveillance, searches have been carried out, guidelines have been defined and ongoing communication has been established, technical assistance has been provided and contact has been made directly with contact persons in the municipalities and departments.

e. Ongoing activities or interests in relevant scientific advice on risk assessment, such as risk/benefit analysis (e.g. food safety risk vs nutritional benefit)

As noted above, the Food Safety Risk Assessment Unit was established at INS in 2009 to coordinate the Risk Assessment component. Through the expert panels that it establishes and monitors, UERIA prepares risk assessments and other scientific documents requested by the manager. These expert panels are composed of professionals from different disciplines who have high levels of academic achievement and professional experience in specific areas of expertise and who are registered in the UERIA "Expert Network".

The Unit's expert panels adhere to a methodology that is in keeping with FAO and WHO guidelines, which have been implemented and advanced by the Codex Alimentarius

In accordance with the guidelines set forth in these policies, the Unit has established an annual work plan on risk assessment studies to be conducted. The work plan is agreed on with MSPS, which receives requests from INVIMA, MCIT and regional health departments. That is, risk assessment studies are carried out at the request of risk managers in the SFS system in accordance with defined and documented processes and requirements.

MSPS determines the topics, objectives and scope of the topics and, therefore, prioritizes them. The food safety risk assessment documents were the first of their kind in Colombia, and were prepared between 2010 and 2012. Other types of documents were also prepared, including scientific concept papers, systematic literature reviews and risk profiles. In terms of risk communication, methodology handbooks were drafted and meetings were held with system stakeholders.

UERIA FINALIZED DOCUMENTS 2009 -2012

Finalized Documents

Risk assessments

Identification of biological risks associated with raw bovine milk consumption in Colombia
 Identification of chemical risks associated with raw bovine milk consumption in Colombia
 Assessment of *Listeria monocytogenes* in fresh cheese in Colombia
 Assessment of risks from enterotoxigenic *Staphylococcus aureus* in non-industrial prepared foods in Colombia

Risk profiles

Bacillus cereus in ready-to-eat non-industrialized foods
Salmonella spp. (non-typhoidal) in whole chicken and in chicken parts

Systematic Literature Reviews

Fruits with an export file: sugar mango, galupa, uchuva, bananito and granadilla
 Intoxication from additives associated with food consumption
 Outbreaks associated with consumption of ciguatoxins. Descriptive analysis.
 ALITAME
 CYCLAMATE

Scientific concepts

Polyacrylamide in Panela
 Presence of melamine in liquid infant formula
 Presence of acrylamide in Panela

While participation on the expert panels is voluntary, experts are selected according to defined profiles, qualifications and requirements. Progress has been made in consolidating the Expert Network. The Unit currently has expert panels on:

- o Mycotoxins in cereals
- o Arsenic in rice
- o Campylobacter in chicken
- o Mercury in fish

The Unit has formally established the methodology to be used by expert panels in conducting risk assessment studies. The methodology is based on international principles and criteria adopted by the Codex Alimentarius and other international agencies such as the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

Cooperation arrangements or agreements have been established with specialized international agencies or with counterpart agencies in other countries. According to the members of the Unit, until now advice has been given solely at an individual level, but international agencies specialized in food safety risk assessment have been approached, such as the Chilean Agency for Food Quality and Safety (ACHIPIA), the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), EFSA and the Spanish Agency of Food Safety (AESAN).

AGREEMENTS ENTERED INTO BY THE FOOD SAFETY RISK ASSESSMENT UNIT

<i>Agreements of the Food Safety Risk Assessment Unit</i>		
Year	Agreement	Purpose
Agreements being negotiated		
2011	<i>Project INS Colombia STDF/PG319</i>	<i>Strengthening of the UERIA for Colombia, compliance with the WTO SFS Agreement</i>
2013	<i>Technical Corporation Agreement 001- INS IICA</i>	
2012	<i>Conpes 3676 Year 1</i>	<i>Consolidating the health and food safety policy for chains of bovine milk and meat for the competitiveness of the sector, improving public health and real access to domestic and international markets</i>
Finalized agreements		
2010 2011	Inter-administrative contact 081 (INS- MSPS)	Carrying out preparatory activities, designing, developing, implementing and consolidating the Risk Assessment Unit Activity: A1R1: Structuring the Risk Assessment Unit
2010 2012	ATC Agreement (Technical Assistance for Trade in Colombia)	(a) Providing technical support (b) Providing advice and technical assistance to the UERIA and to the Technical Work Group on Risk Assessment of the SFS National Commission and group of experts

Another important field in which work is being carried out to generate scientific information is primary production, through the National Agenda on Health Research. Since 2011, MADR has been consolidating the National Agenda on Science, Technology and Agricultural Innovation, with the support of the Colombian Corporation for Agricultural Research (Corpoica). This is the counterpart of the National Agenda on Science, Technology and Innovation for the agriculture sector. The Agenda has been drawn up for 38 production chains, and it is in the process of being validated with all of the stakeholders in the National System of Science and Agribusiness Technology (SNCTA). The relevant information is now available, and can be found at: www.siembra.gov.co.

Colombia's agricultural sector nonetheless lacked a specific tool for visualizing and prioritizing health problems in primary production. This meant that interventions were channelled in a manner that did not always meet the sector's most important needs, especially for products considered either to be sensitive or to be winners according to the strategies (defensive or offensive) devised in response to negotiations on gaining access to international markets.

Production chains, as the entities with knowledge of needs in terms of supply and demand, were invited to participate in the process of formulating the National Agenda on Science, Technology and Agricultural Innovation. Therefore, the results emphasize issues related to a production-oriented outlook (including, for example, genetics, physiology, cultural practices, post-harvest). The topic of health was not sufficiently incorporated, inasmuch as a country's STI needs depend on the expertise required by its health authorities (in this case, ICA) to implement the animal and plant health measures required to improve or maintain the health status of the different products.

Accordingly, MADR, with the support of CORPOICA and under the guidance of ICA, has taken the first steps to instruct, implement and administrate an STI health agenda for the agricultural, forestry and fishing sector in order to strengthen agricultural, forestry and fishing health policy. This Agenda will be dynamic, that is, it will have the capacity to adjust to needs. Moreover, it will be organic, inasmuch it will grow and will be replicated, and a functional structure will be developed, depending on needs. In addition, the Technological Development and Health Protection Division of MADR will provide resources for activities leading to the implementation of this Agenda.

Question 4: Priority areas for capacity building in food safety**1. Please describe:****a. Current priority food safety issues to be addressed nationally and regionally**

Based on institutional assessments and the evaluation of results of the national agricultural health and food safety policy carried out in July 2012, the following priorities have been established:

- Giving new impetus to the SFS Commission to ensure that it continues to be the highest authority within the SFS System and the officially recognized body for the coordination and interconnection of the entire System.
- Addressing coordination problems in the operational implementation of SFS policy. The work carried out by ICA sections, INVIMA regional work groups and regional health centres has various shortcomings, mainly stemming from the segmentation of duties and the fragmentation of surveillance along the agrifood chain.
- Continuing to strengthen the entities in these four areas (headcount, human resource training, information systems and laboratory physical infrastructure).
- Continuing to make progress on key issues regarding which the needed regulations are not yet in place. Of particular relevance are topics such as additives, residues and chemical contaminants, traceability and outsourcing.

b. Current priority areas for capacity building (ongoing and for future)

The continued strengthening of the food safety system requires that the following areas also continue to be strengthened:

- Training in risk analysis.
- Training in inspection, surveillance and control systems with a focus on risk.
- Inter-laboratory efforts with other institutions with which feedback can be provided on experiences in implementing methodologies.
- Training in determining maximum residue limit for veterinary drugs and contaminants, and in risk analysis, epidemiological surveillance and food toxicology.
- Strengthening the capacity of professionals to analyse SPS.
- Strengthening the country's technical capacity to generate scientific data.
- Strengthening control organizations with more human resources who are trained and experienced in the activities to be carried out regarding regulations, inspection and diagnosis.
- Strengthening analytical capacity in determining contaminants (pesticides, drugs, microorganisms) in primary and processed food production.
- Training in strategies related to SFS matters as they pertain to Colombia's trade agreement negotiations.
- Training in establishing maximum residue levels for pesticides and veterinary drugs.
- Strengthening the analytical capacity to determine pesticide residues and evaluate pathogens in food.
- Training in strategies for establishing the national pathogen reduction programme.
- Increased participation by consumers and academia in the work of the National Codex Committee is needed.

COSTA RICA**Item 5: National food control systems, national structures related to Codex activities, and consumer participation in food standards-setting****Question 1: Strengthening national food control systems**

1. Please describe any significant developments and methods adopted in your country to improve national food control systems since the 17th session of the Committee. These may include actions relating to:

- a. National food law and regulations.
- b. Food safety policies and strategies (e.g. risk analysis).
- c. Food control management (e.g. food control administrative structures).
- d. Inspection services.
- e. Laboratory infrastructure and activities.
- f. Trade facilitation agreements.
- g. Information dissemination.
- h. Training / capacity building.

Ans. In Costa Rica, institutional power for food control and safety lies directly with the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (the National Animal Health and Agri-Food Quality Service (SENASA)¹, the State Phytosanitary Service (SFE), and the National Council of Production); the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, and a few specific departments within them.

Since 2009, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, via the Technical Secretariat of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, jointly with the aforementioned Ministries and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the private sector and academic institutions has been driving the development and strengthening of the National Food Safety System (SNIA).

In Latin America, the FAO's Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean agreed to financially support the countries in the region, in view of the need to strengthen and define a safety policy for public and private organizations in these countries. On signing a Letter of Understanding, Costa Rica committed to the regional food safety project with the FAO, entitled *Strengthening National Food Control Systems*.

As part of this work, the following assessments were made, resulting in a series of documents:

- Compilation of assessments made on food control and management for the last 10 years.
- Situation analysis of the legal framework for food.
- Analysis of capacity building requirements in food inspection.
- Analysis of capacity building requirements in food control in official, academic and private laboratories
- Assessment of evaluation capacity building requirements in terms of information, education, and communication of food safety and quality.
- Training was provided and examples were submitted of possible economic indicators in Costa Rica to the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock in order to evaluate and quantify the impact of food safety.

The main conclusions from these assessments include:

- Costa Rica has created an action plan, agreed upon by public and private sectors, academic institutions, laboratories and international observer organizations, in response to the SNIA. The plan covers/includes:

Overall Objective:

- To establish a National Food Safety System (SNIA).

Specific Objectives:

- Update the national legal framework for food safety, clearly defining governance, competencies, and objectives.
- Set out a clear national policy on food safety to advise and direct the actions of relevant entities.
- Strengthen capacity building for food control in laboratories.
- Implement a standardized information system on food safety, which establishes further information requirements.
- Develop a communication and education strategy through an integrated national food safety policy.
- Implement a joint verification system as a coordination mechanism to improve food validation and control.

Furthermore, given the problem identified, that ***“there is no official methodology to establish economic and social indicators to be applied in a sustainable manner by the relevant authorities for food safety control”*** it has been agreed, in addition to other important activities, to establish an official methodology and to secure the commitment of the institutions to carry it forward.

- Additionally, inter-sectoral political commitment has been achieved by setting up a High-Level Committee comprising the Deputy Ministers of Economy, Health, Agriculture and Foreign Affairs and Trade, who are responsible for monitoring its execution.
- Drafting and formalization of a National Food Safety Policy (Executive Decree No. 35960-S-MAG-MEIC-COMEX, published in La Gaceta No. 84 on 3 May 2010). This Policy provides the inputs required to fully implement the SNIA in Costa Rica, which is currently in hand.

Assessment of capacity building requirements in laboratories is currently being expanded. Although there is information available on the services offered, data regarding the demand for these services needs to be expanded in order to identify the gaps between the supply and demand for analysis services.

The organic structure is based on the National Service for Animal Health and Food Quality (SENASA), Decree No. 36571-MAG, which states that the official veterinary service must meet public health requirements, through the various bodies that control the safety of products of animal origin for domestic consumption and for export, by the creation and recognition of an official laboratory and by establishing divisions in medication, quarantine, animal feed and national technical and specific support programmes. The national divisions generally comprise three departments: Registry, which is responsible for registering activities and documentation, in the case of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD); Audit, which is responsible for auditing the inspection system based on technical and operational risk; and Regulatory, responsible for harmonizing regulations with the technical procedures established in each agency.

¹ <http://www.senasa.go.cr/senasa/sitio/index.php/paginas/view/136> (this link provides information on SENASA proposal for improved food control systems)

SENASA is supported by the National Veterinary Services Laboratory (LANASEVE) and other divisions and agencies including the:

Animal Quarantine Division: responsible for inspecting the export of inedible products of animal origin, the import and transit of live animals, animal-origin products and sub-product, according to veterinary criteria, at the different entry and exit points in the country, and in accordance with current international treaties, conventions and governing laws, thereby creating a barrier to limit the spread of disease-causing agents. The Division also covers the importation of products of animal origin.

Department of Inspection of Products of Animal Origin (DIPOA): its main function is to guarantee the safety of products of animal origin throughout the chain; to monitor Good Hygiene Practices (GHP) in the domestic industry and the implementation of the HACCP system in export organizations. These functions are based on Decree No. 26559-MAG-S, which establishes a mandatory HACCP system; Decree No. 29588-MAG-S on Slaughterhouse regulations; Decree No. 18696-MAG-S on Seafood regulations, and Poultry regulations (currently in consultation with the WTO), among others. The department is also responsible for overseeing the implementation of complementary programmes such as cleaning and disinfection procedures, traceability, animal welfare, etc.

Veterinary Medicines Directorate: maintains the health records of drugs for veterinary use. This Directorate includes a Pharmacovigilance Department, responsible for the supervision of the use of these drugs in primary production to ensure they are used appropriately and do not enter the food chain due to poor implementation of withdrawal periods.

Animal Feed Division: ensures that the food intended for animal feed is safe, so that when the animal product enters the human food chain it is not going to cause disease. It is also responsible for managing facilities, such as making specific risk material available in order to pre-empt public health problems caused by "mad cow" disease.

Operations Division: in charge of supervising regional activities related to the safety of products of animal origin, veterinary drugs, regional medicines, border control points, etc.

SENASA's operations divisions are responsible for implementing the guidelines established by the national divisions.

SENASA also operates national programmes that address the needs of the country with regard to any epidemiological issues that potentially pose a risk to the population, i.e. programmes for Salmonella spp, rabies, BSE, apiculture, brucellosis and tuberculosis, aquaculture and national waste, to name but a few. SENASA has a total of 18 national programmes that provide technical support to the national divisions and establish guidelines for the regional divisions.

Guidelines are also available in relation to safety and quality:

- The use of Specified Risk Material (SRM), establishes a "SENASA Health and Quality Seal".
- The official Costa Rican Standard of biological effectiveness to register ixodidides used in cattle and test methods; establishes criteria for the classification of facilities or activities specific to granting of Veterinary Operating Certificates, technical health requirements and conditions to be met by refrigeration facilities for animal-origin products and sub-products, and the storage conditions in these facilities for said products; classifies medicines containing active ingredients ivermectin, doramectin, moxidectin and abamectin in Group 2.
- Guidelines for medium-size, advanced, and semi-industrial vessels. Must include the new Registry on temperature control in vessels for histamine-forming fish; the use of SRM is not permitted for the development of products or ingredients intended for human consumption, animal feed, preparation of fertilizers, cosmetic, pharmaceutical or biological products, or medical material.
- Set up a committee to act as the Risk Management Group for resistance to antimicrobials transmitted through food; a Veterinary Operating Certificate for vessels; establish a Health Symbol.
- Guideline for the operation of refrigeration facilities.

2. Please describe recently established mechanisms or structures for inter-sectoral and multi-disciplinary collaboration for risk assessment and management and the communication of risk at national level (included in the National Codex Committee or other mechanisms), and the effectiveness of these mechanisms and structures

Ans/. a. Under the Agreement with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the project to create a Regional Virtual School for Food Inspectors was approved. This project is managed by the IICA and financed by the Fund for the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and is commencing its implementation phase.

The project originated due to the fundamental importance of the inspection systems for food control, as consumer confidence in food supply relies heavily on their perception of the effectiveness of food control measures. Food inspection systems are therefore used to ensure that food and food production systems meet the necessary requirements in order to protect consumers from food borne hazards and to facilitate trade.

For these inspection reports to achieve optimum results, that are compatible with consumer protection and trade facilitation, they should be governed by a set of principles in both their formulation and application, such as the implementation of objective risk evaluation appropriate to the circumstances and use of risk evaluation methodologies compatible with accepted international criteria. Similarly, food inspection systems should be suitable for the intended purpose and establish clear procedures for compliance assessment, all of which is possible with trained and qualified human resources.

The Institute therefore set the goal of supporting the modernization of food inspection systems as part of its activities to globally promote agricultural health and food safety, and is working on the development of the First Regional School for Food Inspectors in the Americas, an initiative endorsed by the Central American Agricultural Council (CAC) at its session on 17 and 18 March 2011 in Antigua, Guatemala.

The Regional School for Food Inspectors is consistent with the Central American Agricultural Policy and the Central American Customs Union process, which will facilitate the implementation of standardized regulations related to inspection and food safety control, and will help achieve recognition of trade partners.

- b. The Pan American Health Organization and Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama (INCAP), in coordination with the competent authorities in Costa Rica on the issue of food safety, support the strengthening of an integrated surveillance system in Food Borne Diseases (FBD) and the implementation of a food safety communication strategy with emphasis on information and education, aimed at the end consumer. This has been achieved through workshops run by experts from the Pan American Foot-and-Mouth Disease Centre (PANAFTOSA/OPS), coordination and inter-institutional and inter-sectoral organization and, most importantly, prevailing political/technical commitment in the country. Significant results generated during the process include: the country's consensus on the problem in order to achieve an integrated FBD surveillance system; the urgent requirement for coordinated and joint actions between institutions and sectors; prioritization by developing and executing a Nation Plan for Integrated Surveillance in FBD, responding to the main points in the SNIA.

3. Please provide information on national and regional initiatives undertaken since the 17th session of the Committee to promote the coordination of work on food standards with other regional and international organizations

Ans/. In the Central American region a mechanism exists within the Central American Economic Integration System enabling coordination of various technical regulation initiatives based on Codex food standards. Actions recently approved in this framework include the Central American Technical Regulation (RTCA) of Food Additives, Good Hygiene Practice for unprocessed and semi-processed products, the updated RTCA of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and revision of the RTCA for Microbiological Criteria. Similarly, 15 technical regulation proposals are being reviewed for the dairy sector.

And finally, there is the revision of the Decree of Coordinated Verification of Inspections, which is pending signature.

Costa Rica's management of the Codex Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean has resulted in greater regional cohesion and led to the promotion of positions supported by the region and the development of new standards proposals, which require further strengthening, although there is no permanent formal process for this purpose.

Question 2: Strengthening Codex structures at national level

1. Please describe any significant actions that your country has taken since the 17th session of the Committee to strengthen Codex structures on a national level and to promote more effective participation in the Codex

Ans/. The significant measures that Costa Rica has been implementing to strengthen the Codex structures at national level and to promote more effective participation include the following:

- Establishment of a department that functions as a consolidated and institutional Secretariat within the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, comprised of five experienced professionals committed to working for the Codex.
- Creation of the "Codex Digital System" for document management and development of country positions. This system aims to establish a transparent process that encourages more active participation by the country in the drafting of national positions. The system automatically notifies subscribed members of the period in which they must respond to the request for comments by the Codex Alimentarius <http://www.competitividad.go.cr/codexalimentarius>. Note that this system will soon be activated for the entire region. This system will complement training and awareness activities for all stakeholders regarding the importance of its use and operation as well as the benefits of participating effectively within the Codex. Execution of a "General Agreement for Technical Cooperation between the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, the Ministry of Health, and the IICA" which includes as a general objective among its clauses, to "Contribute to the institutional and technical strengthening of the National Codex Committee (NCC) and its subcommittees in order to improve its management at national level and its role as coordinator of the Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean (CCLAC)", the specific objectives of which are to:
 - (i) Strengthen the NCC in order to fulfil work plans and national and international commitments.
 - (ii) Support development and implementation of a proposal to strengthen NCC management as regional coordinator of the CCLAC, under the CCLAC Strategic Plan.
 - (iii) Support development and implementation of a strategy to improve coordination of the CCLAC with the different member countries of the Latin American and Caribbean region.

This agreement has delivered training to members of the National Committee and the coordinators of the subcommittees on how to increase participation in the International Codex sessions and on national and international negotiation methods.

It has promoted the exchange of country positions which feed back into national positions, taking into consideration the analysis of other delegations when establishing positions.

It has facilitated prioritization and a negotiation strategy or regional presentation of common interest topics for CCLAC coordination in the Committee Sessions.

It has helped to strengthen CCLAC integration of countries in the Caribbean region, which was one of the management objectives of the current CCLAC coordination, having previously been identified as a weakness. This integration has been facilitated by the participation of countries from other CCLAC regions which provided technical criteria to the Caribbean discussions.

2. Please describe the structure, composition and operation of the National Codex Committee (or an equivalent or similar structure) or plans for its establishment

Ans/. The National Codex Committee for Costa Rica is composed of:

1 representative from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) - Chair; 7 representatives from the public sector (2 from the Ministry of Health, 2 from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, 1 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1 from the National Production Council and 1 representative from the Secretariat of the Technical Regulation Body (ORT); 4 representatives from the private sector (1 from the Costa Rican Chamber of Food Industry, 1 from the Costa Rican Chamber of Commerce, 1 from the Costa Rican Chamber of Exporters, 1 from the National Chamber of Agriculture and Agroindustry); 1 representative from the academic sector (National Center for Food Science and Technology/University of Costa Rica); 1 representative from consumers associations (National Federation of Consumers and User Associations [FENASCO]); and 2 Observers (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], Pan American Health Organization [PAHO] / World Health Organization [WHO]).

The main functions are:

To advise state agencies on food quality and safety priorities.

- Promote the development of international standards based on national product characteristics.
- Recommend the adoption or modification of international standards in this field.
- Review and approve observations, comments and positions issued by the country to International Committees and the Codex Alimentarius Commission.
- The Technical Secretariat, assigned to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry within the structure of the Directorate of Regulatory Improvement and Technical Regulation, specifically within the Codex Department, supports the contact point in being the communication link between the Codex Secretariat in Rome and the various presidencies of the international committees and their national counterparts, thus enabling voting in the country on various topics relevant to Codex members.

Other functions of interest include channelling and tracking information received from the Codex Secretariat and sending it to the respective national subcommittees.

Furthermore, prior to approval of the contact point or under their instructions:

- ✓ Submit the country position proposal document to the Codex National Committee for feedback and approval, and then send it to the Codex Secretariat in Rome, Italy.
- ✓ Submit the session agenda documents for feedback and observations to the coordinator of each subcommittee.
- ✓ Submit circulars in response to requests or observations.
- ✓ Once the Subcommittee returns the observations or country positions to the Codex Technical Secretariat, the document must be submitted to the National Codex Committee for feedback and approval and then send it to the Codex Secretariat in Rome, Italy.
- ✓ Send observations on the Codex documents or proposals to the Codex Alimentarius Commission or to its subsidiary bodies and/or the Codex Secretariat.

There are currently 15 active subcommittees and two action subgroups in the country. The coordination of each subcommittee lies with representatives of public institutions or private sector companies with official investiture in relation to their level of participation in representing the country, and which should coordinate the work with representatives from public, private, and academic sectors and consumer organizations and maintain close communication with the Technical Secretariat of the National Committee. Each subcommittee shall appoint a coordinator from either the public, private, or academic sector in accordance with their suitability for managing this role.

The active subcommittees are coordinated as follows:

Committee	Coordination
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Principles • Food Labelling • Fats and Oils • Codex Commission • Latin America and the Caribbean 	Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Hygiene • Nutrition and Food for Special Dietary Regimes • Food Contaminants 	Ministry of Health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pesticide Residues • Veterinary Drug Residues • Fresh Fruit and Vegetables • Milk and Dairy Products • Inspection Systems and Food Import and Export Certification • Analysis and Sampling Methods • Fish and Fishery Products 	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock
Food Additives	Puerto Rican Chamber of Food Industry (CACIA)
Prepared Fruit and Vegetables	TBD
Biotechnology action subgroup	Ministry of Health
Antimicrobial resistance	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock

The main functions of the National Codex Subcommittee are to:

- Formulate observations and comments in the documents, detail the country position in respect of the topics discussed in the Codex international committees.
- Advise the National Committee on the progress of Codex projects and recommend updates and/or positions that the country must adopt with regard to Codex information.
- Analyze and discuss projects and documents generated under the Codex Alimentarius.
- Support and monitor the adoption of international standards that promote our trade and ensure compliance.

Additionally, as mentioned in point 1 of Question 2: In order to strengthen Codex structures at national level, with regard to the significant measures our country has taken since the 17th session of the Committee to strengthen Codex structures nationally, a Codex Department has been created within the organizational structure of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, the main function of which is to implement the Secretariat of the National Codex Committee which, as mentioned, has a team of professionals dedicated to Codex issues.

3. Please describe:

a. Any specific actions taken since the 17th session of the Committee aimed at strengthening the Codex Contact Point (i.e. inter-sectoral consultative processes on Codex matters, including the promotion of increased involvement and participation by consumers and other stakeholders)

Ans/. In February this year, a two-day workshop was held on **“Strengthening the Codex Alimentarius in Costa Rica”**. The main objective of the workshop was to inform and raise awareness among the national authorities and Codex technical subcommittees of Costa Rica’s role as CCLAC coordinator, to demarcate the roles and responsibilities of national delegates and to define the participation dynamics of national delegates at the international sessions in the various scenarios within the new framework. The President of the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene and the Codex Contact Point in Brazil took part in the workshop via video conference.

b. Current shortcomings identified in respect of the Codex Contact Point and National Codex Committee (or an equivalent or similar structure)

Ans/. The main deficiency in the work of the Contact Point is because of budget cuts for the execution of their activities, owing to the Codex topic not being considered a priority by leaders in this political climate. This meant weaker participation by Costa Rica in various international meetings, impacting effective participation and representation on the issues and concerns of our sectors with regard to Codex topics. Consequently, the possibility of virtual sessions was proposed in the forums.

c. The identified need for capacity development to strengthen the Codex Contact Point and National Codex Committee (or an equivalent or similar structure)

Ans/. The team that comprises the Codex Technical Secretariat in Costa Rica is an interdisciplinary group consisting of two economists, one lawyer, two food technologists, and a business manager. The team has developed a strong cohesion, complementing the activities carried out by the Contact Point and resulting in significant national and regional progress. However, they have identified the need to improve their English language skills.

Strengthening of the National Codex Committee requires sustainability in the participation by representative members of relevant institutions and training in order to strengthen the Codex role at national level.

One of the principal requirements of the National Committee and Contact Point is to generate scientific data and information enabling the development of new standards proposals in line with the interests of the country and facilitating the creation of new national regulations.

Question 3: Scientific activities (risk-based approach) and data collection activities

1. Please describe developments since the 17th session of the Committee regarding:

a. Areas of application of risk-based approach (e.g. monitoring or sampling programmes, inspection, scientific basis of food safety decisions)

Ans/. The Control Unit of the Ministry of Health verifies compliance with the standard, proactively developing and implementing annual food control plans and programmes, and conducting reactive controls to complaints and alerts. Significant budget cuts have been made this year within the prioritized control activities including verification of compliance with the standard in pre-packaged processed meat products, dairy custards, seasonings and ready-to-eat products that require thermal treatment. We have verified compliance with the standard for aflatoxins in grains such as rice, corn, and peanuts. The annual control plans for compliance with food standards have been developed, prioritizing products defined as high-risk, for example in RTCA 67.04.50:08 Microbiology Criteria for Food Safety, and the provisions in Regulation No. 27980-S Aflatoxin Level in Corn, Rice, Beans, Wheat, Oilseeds and Legumes.

SENASA annually undertakes control programmes for residues and environmental and microbiological contaminants that may be present in domestic production. These controls are performed in export companies that process more than 60% of domestic consumer products. These samples include environmental contaminants such as cadmium, mercury, lead, arsenic, tin, dioxins and PCBs -for some types of products-, veterinary drug residues such as macrocyclic lactones, benzimidazoles, tetracycline, sulphur, chloramphenicol, nitroimidazoles etc., and microbiological residues such as *E.coli*, *Listeria*, *Salmonella*, *Staphylococcus* as well as water sampling to ensure compliance with Regulation No. 32327-S. This ensures that the products consumed at the national level comply with the standards, established values or allowed limits. Sampling is occasionally conducted on farms.

In the draft plan established for this year, it became apparent that a sampling plan or schedule would need to be included for 2013, using laboratories formalized by SENASA.

Facility inspection is performed at least once a year for national facilities, using templates to assess the implementation of Good Hygiene Practices, and for export plants at least four times a year, depending on process risk; for example, those facilities with official permanent inspections are monitored less frequently and those with veterinary drug agents are monitored more frequently in order to maintain the technical criteria that could be affected by a conflict of interest, as the agent is paid by the facility itself and the official is paid by the State.

The official inspection process is currently based on approved technical criteria according to a quality system based on Standard INTE ISO IEC 17020:2000 which claims to be accredited by the Costa Rican Accreditation Entity (ECA) for international recognition. All official inspection documents are available on the SENASA website.

Among of the prioritization criteria used is the case of facilities with more technological processes; for example, the dairy industry, which receives less visits than a sausage processing plant, as the risks are assessed every year with results obtained from external audits performed by area coordinators. All technical information on the official inspection process and its documentation system can be found on the SENASA website.

b. Ongoing key data collection activities to identify or monitor relevant food safety hazards and contaminants in the food supply and to identify or control food borne disease and outbreaks

Ans/. We are seeking to strengthen this issue through adopting a holistic and inter-institutional approach based on the national assessment of the operation of the entire national food safety system and the approved national plan. An inter-institutional and inter-sectoral committee has been formed and is further developing the issue with the aim of achieving an integrated system that factors in the epidemiological data and criteria recommended by international organizations CODEX, WHO, FDA, CDC, and the EU in order to prioritize food risk and systematically record these indicators in a database. Data are currently being exchanged between the Ministry of Health and the SENASA of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

c. Use of data collected through inspection and control or monitoring by institutions/agencies involved in food safety risk assessment and/or management

Ans/. Within the Ministry of Health the results of the laboratory analysis are submitted to the Regulation Division and sent to a team of food specialists who evaluate the risk and impact on the population targeted by the product. When the product analyzed is of animal origin, the Division notifies DIPOA so that appropriate action can be taken by head office or Regional Divisions of SENASA.

SENASA also monitors compliance with the Health and Safety Seal Guideline to ensure the proper use of food additives that are added to these products; for example, nitrates and nitrites.

In the case of facilities that produce, distribute and store food products of animal origin, DIPOA assesses the results obtained from the laboratory analysis and submits these to the facility, presenting a copy to the officer assigned for corrective and preventative measures, correct disposal of the product, restoration of sanitary conditions and control of the critical point so that once the facility receives notification it must respond to DIPOA regarding the follow-up and closing actions taken. If the actions taken are not satisfactory, we will inform the Ministry of Health with a view to issuing a sanitary order or carrying out corresponding administrative or corrective measures.

d. Mechanisms for identifying national food consumption data in relation to consumer exposure assessment for food safety hazards

Ans/. To date, the Ministry of Health does not have mechanisms for identifying and processing these data.

At SENASA, in the case of products of animal origin, in order for a facility to be able to operate and obtain a Veterinary Certificate of Operation (CVO) it must be properly registered. In this registry, export facilities must include the total annual production, as well as a control of the total production exported, as another percentage is intended for domestic consumption, and finally, the consumption per capita established by the various chambers of poultry, cattle, etc., giving an informal, indirect correlation that provides basic statistics.

e. Ongoing activities or interests in relation to scientific advice on risk assessment, such as risk/benefit analysis (e.g. food safety risk vs. nutritional benefit)

Ans/. The following training was provided under the Agreement with the IICA

- Training on risk assessment and sharing the implementation experience of Colombia on Food Risk Assessment was provided to officials from different institutions with responsibilities in food control in Costa Rica.
- SENASA recently conducted a retrospective statistical study looking at the results of mercury analysis in fish products to provide a consumer recommendation to the national population.
- Training is pending on the methodology for total dietary studies to determine MRLs, pollutants, agricultural chemicals, veterinary drug residues, etc.).

Question 4: Priority areas for capacity building in food safety

1. Please describe:

a. Current priority food safety issues to be addressed nationally and regionally

Ans/. Under the agreed National Action Plan to strengthen the National Food Safety System a series of activities related to: food control management; food inspection and verification; strengthening of the laboratories that support this control; food safety information, education and communication; economic and social indicators to better monitor progress in food safety and in the requirements for improvement or modification of the national regulatory framework are established as a priority. For monitoring and progress requirements, responsibilities and a technical support team have been established, as well as a High-Level Committee with the Deputy Ministers of the relevant ministries who will periodically meet to review progress and make the necessary decisions.

The PRACAMS project has been developed specifically for official food safety laboratories and is funded by the European Union. Its objectives include the strengthening of regional laboratories that can assist in the area of food safety. However, while we see this as an opportunity to create some of our own laboratories, the project only focuses on the stronger laboratories in the Central American region.

In order to achieve strengthened monitoring of FBD, the country agreed to establish an integrated information system for food safety that facilitates timely decision-making so that resources are managed and, hopefully, within the PROCALIDAD project funded by the European Union, such a system can be developed.

In the case of priority actions in the control of animal-origin products, SENASA observed some regional slaughterhouses that have not to date implemented an official inspection system, which directly affects decisions on whether the product is suitable or not for human consumption. SENASA believes it is important for regional slaughterhouses for cattle, swine, and poultry to have an inspection service that can provide standardized, objective, impartial, reliable, and transparent technical criteria. To this end, we looked for mechanisms to standardize staff. However, this is not sufficient to ensure that the official controls are applied across the entire country. Thus, SENASA have organized training for the national sector and standardized the technical criteria for the national industry. The training will be aimed at facilities that process cattle products.

On a national level, looking at the budget position and reality of our institutions under the joint verification decree and Action Plan for the National Food Safety System, it is apparent that the decree must be reviewed, modified and improved to highlight the national food safety policy, to clarify responsibilities and agree on a national programme to verify compliance with prioritized technical food standards between the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which as a second step provided the risk analysis criteria for health and a uniform inspection protocol.

b. Current priority areas for capacity building (ongoing and future)

Ans/. Among the priorities for current and future training, the various ministries propose, within the framework of the Cooperation Agreement with the IICA, to conduct a series of specific training sessions on areas related to risk analysis, food control systems, etc. As mentioned, it is expected that the implementation of Food Safety Inspection Schools will allow for ongoing training, enabling the relevant authorities and professionals responsible for food safety control to improve knowledge and tools for guaranteeing food safety.

c. What additional support is needed for capacity building

Ans/. Technical assistance is required for the development and implementation of an organizational structure responsible for the National Food Safety System and to propose legal reforms required to fully implement SNIA, creating a risk evaluation unit and a support unit for Codex matters in each Ministry with responsibility in these areas.