The complexities of worldwide food production systems plus the presence of new hazards associated with changes in production systems and consumption patterns have increased the need for science-based advice to support global food control systems.

We work with:
- Member Governments • Codex Alimentarius Commission • Food producers • Food processors • Industry • Consumers • Researchers • Academia • NGOs

**MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES**

Each year we convene 15 to 15 expert meetings, each one bringing 15 to 25 world renowned experts to share their knowledge and expertise. They are microbiologists, toxicologists, food technologists, nutritionists, veterinarians, epidemiologists, statisticians, food production and processing specialists, land managers, etc. In the context of a single meeting, the correct combination of experts is essential for the topic at hand, ensuring the appropriate range of perspectives and disciplines are represented. Representatives from academia and industry are also included as required through selection of experts experienced in these fields.

For example, when the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene requested scientific advice to support the development of commodity-specific annexes to the Codex of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, we brought together 25 experts from 13 countries for a meeting on Microbiological Hazards in Fresh Leafy Vegetables and Herbs. The group of experts selected included prominent scientists from public and private sectors, as well as experts from various regions.

They assessed not only the production cycle, but also looked at emerging contamination risks. This was the first public meeting held to develop commodity-specific annexes, and the experts identified gaps in existing scientific knowledge that would need to be addressed.

For more information on the FAO/WHO Scientific Advice Programme
Contact the Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division of FAO
proscad@fao.org or www.fao.org/ag/agn/agns/

A joint programme of FAO and WHO

FAO/WHO SCIENTIFIC ADVICE PROGRAMME

Science for safe food

GALE INITIATIVE FOR FOOD-RELATED SCIENTIFIC ADVICE

GFAA – a dynamic fund to mobilise technical, financial and human resources to support the FAO/WHO Scientific Advice Programme. Established to meet the growing demand for scientific advice, GFAA funding will enable us to broaden our reach and conduct in-country, regional and global assessments in support of member countries and organisations, including various UN agencies. Withdrawn funding will be recycled to other FAO/WHO initiatives in the interests of food safety and nutrition issues. Efforts to mobilise additional funding from different sources, including governmental and non-governmental organisations, is ongoing.

If you would like to contribute to GFAA contact: GFAA@fao.org

BALANCING RISKS AND BENEFITS

Assessing different types of risks in the same food

In addition to performing classical risk assessments of food safety issues, FAO and WHO have started to consider risk-benefit assessments. This is an evolving area brought about by the need for food safety regulators to weigh both negative and positive health effects associated with consumption of a specific food.

For example, a risk-benefit evaluation was recently conducted on the use of defoliants in the production of-league tender leaf tea. This exercise was conducted to evaluate the potential health benefits of defoliants in the context of the disease incidence in the defoliated leaves in order to inform the regulatory approach. The evaluation showed a clear benefit of the use of defoliants in the reduction of the incidence of nutritional diseases in tea leaves. There are concerns that residues of this chemical may remain in food. Thus, a pragmatic and stepwise approach was used to compare the potential health benefits of defoliated tender leaf tea against the potential adverse health effects of defoliated tender leaf tea.
Emerging from issues to science-based answers

The Scientific Advice Programme includes a three-step process of identifying an issue that needs our support, determining what kind of scientific advice they need, and answering the specific questions posed, review available data, prepare draft reports. When we receive requests to undertake a specific project, we convene an expert meeting to discuss and develop the scientific advice. The Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) – a permanent group of experts that monitors food safety – assesses scientific evidence and issues recommendations on food-related topics. In some cases, they also seek geographical, cultural and gender balance among the experts.

TAPPING EXPERTISE

We have close working relationships with representatives of governments, research institutions and the private sector who have expertise in food science, technology and policy. We convene expert panels to develop strategies, evaluate available evidence and propose recommendations to the Codex Committee on Food Additives (JECFA). The Scientific Advice Programme supports country-specific needs by bringing together 23 scientists from 11 countries. Although the presence of melamine in food was found responsible for consumer illness, member countries asked that a selection committee be formed, usu-