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Food
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para la
Agricultura
y la
Alimentación

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TWENTY-THIRD FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE

NICOSIA, CYPRUS, 29-31 May 2002

Agenda Item 6

FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY (Outcome of the Pan-European Conference on Food Safety and Quality, Budapest, 25-28 February 2002)

This document does not contain any additional information to that contained in ERC/02/4. However, the recommendations listed in document ERC/02/4 have been grouped below under specific headings to facilitate discussion. The numbers in brackets at the end of each paragraph refer to the numbering of the main recommendations in pages 3 to 5 of document ERC/02/4 and in the final report of the Pan-European Conference.

The Secretariat has also taken the liberty to propose to which institutions these recommendations could be addressed.

I. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressed to:

1. Policy

- 1.1 An integrated and multidisciplinary policy approach to food safety and quality should be applied with participation of all governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in the whole food chain, including primary production. (A.7)
- 1.2 As improvements in public health and international trade of food products are often hindered by discrepancies between food safety and quality policies across Europe, there is a need to increase the compatibility of food safety and quality systems by implementing equivalence, transparency and harmonization of regulations and control across Europe. (A.4)

Govs¹
NGOs²

Govs

¹ Govs: FAO and WHO Member Countries of the European Region

² NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations

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| 1.3 | In policy making, consideration should be given to other legitimate factors in addition to risk assessment that are of concern to consumers, such as ethical and religious concerns and the desire to promote more sustainable food production practices (A.9) | Govs
NGOs |
| 1.4 | In case of scientific uncertainty or where risk assessment is not conclusive, provisional risk management measures may be adopted based on the precautionary principle. (A.10) | Govs
EU ³ |
| 1.5 | Open consultation and public debate involving consumers and all other stakeholders is needed in order to increase the confidence of consumers in the safety of food and to develop a comprehensive, transparent and integrated approach to food safety and nutrition policy. (A.19) | Govs
NGOs |
| 1.6 | Information on the results of all official monitoring tests and on the outcome of official food inspections and other official food control activities, should be made public as openness and transparency builds consumer confidence. (A.21) | Govs
NGOs |
| 1.7 | The development of strong, independent consumer organizations should be encouraged as an essential element in public discourse. European countries should consider the adoption of new methodologies to gauge consumer perceptions and concerns. Interactive dialogue between scientists, risk managers, producers and consumers at all stages of the decision-making process is essential as a key to better mutual understanding of risk assessment, risk management and risk communication. (A.23) | Govs
NGOs |

II. COUNTRY ACTION

2. Food safety responsibilities and systems

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| 2.1 | To improve food safety, a clear attribution of responsibilities should be made at the national level, especially related to scientific advice, risk assessment, policy advice, policy making, risk management, regulation, control, enforcement and communication. An effective coordination system is needed. (A.12) | Govs
EU
NGOs |
| 2.2 | With particular regard to scientific advice, risk assessment and risk communication, an independent, transparent and effective national food safety authority is recommended. (A.13) | Govs
EU |
| 2.3 | Prevention-oriented regulation and control systems for reduction of food-borne disease, reduction of food safety risks and protection of the environment should be developed and coordinated. (A.8) | Govs NGOs |
| 2.4 | In some cases, there might be advantages, including economical benefits, in giving a single agency responsibility for official food monitoring and control along the whole food chain. If, however, responsibility is divided between two or more agencies, there should be very close cooperation between them. Cooperation at the regional level should also be developed and enhanced. (A.15) | Govs
EU |

³ EU: *European Union*

2.5 Official control services involved in food safety systems must be provided with the necessary resources, both financial and human, for carrying out their missions. (A.16)

Govs
EU

3. Capacity building

3.1 Cooperation on capacity building at the international and regional level should be improved and strengthened to build on national experiences and national food safety strategies, as well as to avoid duplication of work. The initiative under development by FAO, WHO and OIE, in collaboration with the World Bank and WTO related to capacity building in food safety, animal and plant health should be further developed. (A.11)

Govs
EU
NGOs
IAGs⁴

3.2 FAO, WHO, EC and other European donor countries should explore the possibility of assisting with capacity building and education initiatives in those Pan-European countries with special needs. (A.24)

Govs
EU
IAGs

3.3 Improved education and training in food hygiene should be used to increase the competence of the workers and effectiveness of inspectors throughout the food chain. Education of consumers should begin at school. FAO, WHO, and regional bodies such as the European Commission, should encourage member states to inform consumers by assisting with education initiatives for all stakeholders in the food chain and public awareness campaigns. (A.18)

Govs
EU
NGOs
IAGs

3.4 Pan-European cooperation needs to be expanded in the fields of policy, research and education in view of the major differences in food safety and nutritional policies, in scientific knowledge and in the level of protection of consumers' health. As a basis for capacity building efforts in this area, European authorities and public and private research institutes should strengthen their cooperation and expand scientific activities, information networks and risk management strategies. Methodologies to anticipate and identify emerging risks at an early stage should be developed. (A.17)

Govs
EU
NGOs
IAGs

4. Risk analysis

4.1 The need for effective and independent risk assessment was stressed. In cases where there are minority opinions, these should be mentioned in the risk assessment report and the degree of uncertainty equally addressed. Risk assessment should be carried out in an independent, open and transparent manner and should also address new or unforeseen risks. (A.14)

Govs
EU
NGOs
IAGs

4.2 Food safety strategies should be risk-based, giving priority to problems that pose the largest threats to health and to measures that have the potential to result in the greatest reductions in food-related diseases. (A.5)

Govs
NGOs

4.3 Prevention-oriented regulation and control systems for reduction of food-borne disease, reduction of food safety risks and protection of the environment should be developed and coordinated. (A.8)

Govs
EU
NGOs

⁴ IAGs: *International Agencies (FAO, WHO and others)*

- 4.4 Enhanced cooperation between the health, agriculture, fisheries and food production sectors is necessary for food safety surveillance and monitoring. (A.3)
- Govs
NGOs
IAGs

III. INTRA-REGIONAL COOPERATION

5. Strengthening co-operation in the field of policy and science

- 5.1 Pan-European cooperation needs to be expanded in the fields of policy, research and education in view of the major differences in food safety and nutritional policies, in scientific knowledge and in the level of protection of consumers' health. As a basis for capacity building efforts in this area, European authorities and public and private research institutes should strengthen their cooperation and expand scientific activities, information networks and risk management strategies. Methodologies to anticipate and identify emerging risks at an early stage should be developed. (A.17)
- Govs
EU
NGOs

- 5.2 In order to avoid duplication and waste of resources, cooperation between national, regional and international experts and advisory bodies in the area of food safety should be intensified. (A.6)
- Govs
EU
NGOs
IAGs

- 5.3 Collaboration is required to strengthen and harmonize integrated and transparent systems for surveillance, outbreak investigation, reporting systems and diagnostic methods on food safety and quality (A.2)
- Govs
EU
NGOs

6. Improving risk communication networks

- 6.1 The Rapid Alert System for Foodstuffs, operational in the European Union, has proved to be a useful instrument to support public health, consumer protection and transparency in international food trade. Other European countries are encouraged to participate in this system considering the benefits and obligations linked to such participation. (A.20)
- Govs
EU

- 6.2 Methodologies to anticipate and identify emerging risks at an early stage should be developed.(part of A.17)
- Govs
EU
NGOs

- 6.3 Regional and national networks need to be improved and/or established for the collection, compilation and sharing of information and data on aspects of food quality and safety, food risks and contamination and foodborne diseases to improve comparability and equivalence of policies and to support harmonization. These networks should be linked, coordinated and open to all European countries. (A.1)
- Govs
EU

- 6.4 FAO and WHO should facilitate setting up regional programmes on food safety information and communication with standardized information. Such programmes should be developed in co-operation with consumers, industry and the relevant authorities (A.22)
- IAGs
Govs
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