



# Recommendations from the Conference on International Food Trade Beyond 2000

**C**onsumers have become increasingly concerned about the quality and safety of the food supply, particularly as a result of recent food contamination problems. While global food trade can provide consumers with greater choice, and developing and developed countries alike can benefit from increased commerce, food must be safe and trade must be fair. An FAO Conference on *International Food Trade Beyond 2000: Science-based Decisions, Harmonization, Equivalence and Mutual Recognition* was held in Melbourne, Australia, from 11 to 15 October 1999. Its aim was to provide guidance to the international community on ways to address issues of food quality and safety.

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The conference was held in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). A total of 353 participants, including the representatives of 75 countries and observers from 26 international government and non-government organizations (NGOs), attended the conference.

## Objectives of the conference

The scope of the conference was extremely broad and included, *inter alia*, discussions on risk assessment, nutrition, new technologies and trade agreements. The organizers of the conference sought to achieve the following:

- identification and review of advances in food science and emerging technologies that have, or may have, an impact on food quality and standards;
- examination of the science-based factors that limit or promote implementation of food quality and safety regulations;
- provision of guidance and recommendations on future directions in food quality and safety to FAO, WHO, WTO, national governments, industry, consumers, academics and the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC);
- consideration of the implications for food quality and food standards of recent developments in nutrition, environmental concerns and cultural and consumer issues;
- preparation of strategies that allow developing countries to identify their priorities for the implementation of food quality and safety regulations within their existing resources and with technical and other assistance, so as to meet their obligations and realize the benefits under the WTO agreements on sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS) and technical barriers to trade (TBT);
- recommendations for an overall strategy through which countries may obtain harmonization, equivalence or mutual recognition related to the control of food quality and safety.

## Framework for the future

The matters discussed in Melbourne, and the recommendations that arose, could form the framework for international cooperation and consultation among governments and all interested parties for many years beyond 2000.

The full report of the conference and background papers are available on the FAO Web site at: [www.fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/economic/esn/austral/austra-e.htm](http://www.fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/economic/esn/austral/austra-e.htm). They can also be obtained by writing to the FAO Food and Nutrition Division.

# General recommendations of the Melbourne conference

The FAO Conference on International Food Trade Beyond 2000: Science-based Decisions, Harmonization, Equivalence and Mutual Recognition met in Melbourne, Australia, from 11 to 15 October 1999 and drew the attention of Member Governments of FAO, WHO and WTO to the following general recommendations:

1. The conference expressed its appreciation of the work of CAC and its fullest support to the current direction of that work. The conference stressed in particular the importance of CAC's work in providing standards, guidelines and other recommendations on consumer health protection and the facilitation of trade, and called upon Member Governments to strengthen their contributions and participation in this work.
2. Stressing the importance of consumer health protection in the work of CAC, the conference called on WHO to give greater emphasis to its work (and strengthen its involvement) in relation to CAC. The conference also called on FAO and WHO to review their current relationship under the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme with a view to establishing a more equitable arrangement.
3. The conference called on countries to adhere to the FAO/WHO Code of Ethics for International Trade in Food in order to ensure that food products exported to developing countries meet national and international requirements.
4. The conference reaffirmed its commitment to the Statements of Principle Concerning the Role of Science in the Codex Decision-Making Process and the Extent to which other Factors are Taken into Account and to the Statements of Principle Relating to the Role of Food Safety Risk Assessment.
5. The conference called upon all parties to recognize that precaution has been and should remain an essential element of risk analysis in the formulation of national and international standards, and agreed that CAC was the most appropriate forum in which to discuss this issue.
6. To improve transparency and engender commitment, governments should clearly acknowledge the role of consumers, producers and their representative bodies in the development of national and international food standards. Similarly, efforts should be made to establish national consultative structures for Codex Alimentarius that include the participation of all interested parties.
7. To ensure that adequate resources become available for implementing effective food control systems, there is an urgent need for developing countries to become aware of the economic and health benefits of such systems at the highest national political and policy levels. In implementing Codex work, FAO, WHO and funding agencies should give priority to the special needs of developing countries, including infrastructure, resources and technical and legal capabilities, when considering and elaborating Codex texts.
8. Countries should accept the challenge of strengthening the capacities and capabilities of their national food regulatory systems by devoting increased resources, improving information technology systems and participating more actively in meetings of relevant technical committees and commissions dealing with food regulatory matters.
9. Governments of member countries should take all necessary steps to apply Codex standards to all imported, exported and domestically produced and traded foods.
10. FAO, WHO, government agencies and



industry should make greater efforts to learn and respond to consumers' legitimate concerns about food safety and quality to ensure that food-related communication is a two-way, respectful, interactive process.

11. The conference recommended that Member Governments support relevant food safety research; enhance surveillance systems for, and reporting of, food-borne diseases; increase research coordination and cooperation so that risk analysis data will be more universally accepted; and contribute national data to international database systems. Competent research institutes from developing countries should be supported in their contributions to this effort.
12. Member Governments, FAO and WHO should adopt policies that are wholly consistent with the need for independent and transparent risk assessment processes, in particular in relation to the selection of scientific experts and working procedures and to the tightening of conflict of interest requirements. FAO and WHO should also provide adequate resources to expert bodies for risk assessment in order to ensure continued confidence and competence in expert evaluations.
13. WHO and FAO should establish an international expert advisory body, similar to the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) and the Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues (JMPR), to provide microbiological risk assessment support to FAO, WHO and other bodies.
14. The conference supported FAO's and WHO's efforts in exploring strategies to

collect information from all regions of the world about consumer requirements, perceptions, beliefs and motivations concerning food, nutrition and food safety so as to consider the role that food labelling and other means of communication can play.

15. FAO, WHO, WTO and other concerned international organizations, in cooperation with funding agencies and other suitable donors, should increase their technical support to developing countries' strengthening of food quality and safety assurance and control systems in order to allow them to participate actively in international food trade beyond 2000.

## Other recommendations of the conference

### Food trade and implementation of WTO agreements: equivalence and harmonization

1. The conference recognized the urgency and importance of developing Codex guidance on the judgement of equivalence, initially in a generic sense and subsequently in relation to specific topics such as equivalence of inspection and certification systems and measures to ensure food hygiene.
2. WHO and FAO should jointly establish a linkage between their food safety training and technical assistance programmes and the process of undertaking equivalence determinations in order to allow countries to be better able to undertake equivalence determinations while, at the same time, enhancing their food safety and food processing infrastructure. Components of this programme would include training on

the process of undertaking the judgement of equivalence, assessment of needs in regard to obtaining equivalence and assistance in establishing enhanced capabilities in the areas required for undertaking equivalence determinations.

### Other issues

3. In order to pursue more intensively the objectives of protecting consumers' health, ensuring fair practices in the food trade and facilitating the international trade in food, CAC should continue to elaborate food standards providing for compositional, sensory and safety criteria, and should examine and recommend ways of reducing problems of food quality and safety, reducing levels of detentions and rejections of food moving in international trade and reducing levels of food adulteration.
4. Member countries of CAC and WTO should be encouraged to strengthen their efforts to monitor the use of Codex standards, in particular with regard to identifying barriers or disincentives to their wider adoption.
5. The conference stressed that Codex standards for food quality and safety, including labelling aspects, should be carefully prepared to ensure that they are not overprescriptive and more restrictive than necessary in order to meet the objectives of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme.

### The role of science and other legitimate factors: risk analysis

6. The conference recommended that, in order to enhance the credibility and acceptability of the standards proposed

for adoption, excellence, independence and transparency should be the criteria by which scientists carry out risk assessment.

7. Relevant expert and Codex committees should develop quality criteria for the data used for risk assessment. FAO and WHO should develop guidelines on the identification and documentation of uncertainty and variability in risk assessment.
8. The conference recommended that capacities for risk assessment be strengthened at both the national and international levels and that developing countries should be assisted in developing or improving their capabilities in this field.
9. Codex committees, when referring chemical or biological agents to scientific committees for assessment, should indicate what they want clearly. Particularly for controversial agents, guidance should be provided to the scientific committee on the risk assessment policy that should be applied. Scientific committees have the responsibility of explaining clearly the basis for their assessments.
10. FAO and WHO should find ways of increasing resources for risk assessments of chemical and microbiological agents in food.
11. Among international organizations, efforts should be made to harmonize the risk analysis terms used in food safety.
12. WHO should consider updating and harmonizing all the principles of the toxicological evaluation of food chemicals (e.g. natural constituents, additives,

contaminants, residues of pesticides and residues of veterinary drugs) that are common to both JECFA and JMPR. This information should be published in a single consolidated document.

13. Expertise is needed to establish government risk analysis units that involve the universities in risk assessment and establish formal communication and coordination links among the different services responsible for coherence in the formulation of a country's sanitary and phytosanitary measures.
14. The Codex secretariat should conduct a review to determine areas where the submission of additional dietary intake data from developing countries might result in a change of already established limits. In addition, FAO and WHO should consider the provision of technical assistance to developing countries to aid the collection of dietary intake data which would not only benefit the Codex process but could also benefit national governments in making risk analysis decisions, as well as in the area of improving nutritional status.
15. Member countries that contribute scientists to FAO and WHO scientific committees should consider such technical expertise as part of their national contribution and facilitate scientists' release by, for example, compensating the contributing agency for it.
16. Member countries are encouraged to make use of advice offered by FAO and WHO scientific committees and to provide feedback as to how the committees' evaluations could be more useful to them.

### **Food safety and quality regulation and enforcement**

17. National and international food regulatory frameworks should acknowledge the prime responsibility of the whole food chain for the production of safe food by setting objectives. Operators have a major responsibility in developing appropriate means to achieve these objectives.
18. Good agricultural practice (GAP) (integrated crop and pest management) and good manufacturing practice (GMP) are encouraged by international organizations as ways of producing safe foods.
19. Codex Alimentarius should continue to work along these principles and promote the application of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles as laid down in the Codex General Principles of food hygiene. These principles should be applied to all foodstuffs, throughout the whole food chain and including feedstuffs.

### **Transparency and participation**

20. Appropriate national government bodies should prepare educational and information material that describes and explains food safety and nutrition issues to producers, processors and consumers.
21. Governments should clearly acknowledge the role of consumers and consumer bodies in the development of national and international food policies in order to improve transparency and engender commitment. Similarly, efforts should be made to establish national consultative structures for Codex Alimentarius that include the participation of all interested parties, including consumers.



#### **Other emerging food safety and nutrition issues**

22. The conference recommended that international research into emerging food-borne problems be promoted and coordinated and that the application of general principles of hygiene, as well as of the HACCP system, be promoted as a key element in enhancing the control of emerging food-borne problems.
23. It recommended that the use of information, education and communication be encouraged as a tool for the control of emerging problems.
24. FAO and WHO should gather and collate information from member countries to evaluate the true status and extent of food quality and safety problems on a global basis. They should consider the potential for setting up a worldwide register of incidents of food-related illnesses, identifying the reasons for them and any associated food control deficiencies.
25. FAO and WHO should continue to work with governments and academic institutions to develop and provide advice on scientific food-based dietary guidelines for use by medical and public health professionals, nutritionists and the public in general.

#### **Technical assistance, education and research: meeting the needs of developing countries**

26. Government assistance to developing countries should follow time-sequenced programmes in which the results of assistance are evaluated over time, and success or failure assessed to provide guidance on whether assistance should be continued or discontinued.
27. Technical assistance should be based on analysis to determine each country's capabilities and needs. Programmes should then be prioritized and national programmes should have a monitoring component and provide for progress assessments and a final evaluation.
28. Expertise is required to establish or reinforce the services for notifying sanitary and phytosanitary measures, establish procedures for the receipt and distribution of notifications from other countries, facilitate and encourage comments from national sectors, issue and promote notifications from countries, and encourage comments in domestic and international circles.
29. Developing countries should have a mechanism whereby they negotiate mutual recognition agreements with potential partners interested in their products. The mechanism should involve a central authority which would provide information about requirements sought by importing countries, make the initial approach to the importing country on behalf of the exporting country and, subsequently, assist during negotiation of the agreement.
30. FAO, WTO and WHO should continue to support developing countries through direct regional and national training, for example in the form of workshops and seminars or by electronic means, focusing on appropriate levels of protection, risk analysis, improved sanitary conditions and the development of equivalence as their principal lines of action for 2000 and beyond.
31. To reduce and minimize quality problems that hamper international food trade, thereby lowering the level of detentions and rejections, and to combat the level of food-borne hazards and resultant illness, FAO, with the support of other international organizations and industrialized countries, and as reflected in the spirit of and declarations in the Uruguay Round Agreements, should:
- provide additional assistance to governments and industries in developing countries in establishing effective national food control systems including statutory export food control and certification programmes;
  - train developing country personnel in food inspection and certification techniques, and train trainers in food safety quality systems;
  - provide increased assistance to developing countries to establish/strengthen the analytical and technical capacity necessary to ensure effective national food control systems and statutory export food control and certification programmes.
32. FAO, WHO, WTO and developed countries should consider funding activities that could lead to the provision of increased technical assistance and guidance to developing countries in establishing/strengthening national systems of food safety and quality control, including the provision of training personnel in all aspects of food control, beginning with basic food hygiene. Wherever possible, training programmes should be carried out in the language of the country.

### **Participation in Codex processes**

33. FAO, WHO and Codex should consider providing more support, including where possible financial support, for developing countries to participate more fully in the work of Codex.
34. Consideration should be given to holding more Codex Committee sessions in developing countries and to holding CAC meetings in all regions of the world so as to give each region the opportunity of participating. Consideration should also be given to avoiding the holding of concurrent working group meetings during Codex Committees.

### **General training and extension**

35. Governments, industry, farmers and consumers should be involved with the development of appropriate training packages for the safe production and handling of food, particularly for the application of HACCP or similar systems.
36. International organizations and governments, in close contact with industry and consumer associations, should develop education and training programmes to explain the importance of safe application of new technologies. Emphasis should be placed on the infrastructure required for an effective food safety programme, including trained inspectors, technically competent analysts, skilled public information officers and competent administrative staff.
37. Financial input is required from outside sources to ensure that both the quality and the quantity of training are adequate and sufficient to meet requirements.

### **Information exchange**

38. FAO and WHO should explore, within budgetary constraints, the feasibility of establishing regional centres that would provide support for such areas as food safety training programmes, including those in HACCP, and risk analysis and complex technical activities, such as risk assessment and expert assistance to countries in carrying out epidemiological surveillance. The centres could maintain food safety and quality databases focused on the national requirements of countries within the region.
39. In view of the fact that developing countries often lack up-to-date information on various aspects of food quality and safety control, consideration should be given to establishing food quality and safety information centres of excellence in each of the world's regions. These would be responsible for designing and operating Web sites providing the latest scientific information and advice on matters relating to control of food quality and safety, including risk assessment, GMPs, safety data on genetically modified organisms (GMOs), food additive use and HACCP.

### **Codex processes**

40. CAC should consider reaffirming the effectiveness of written comments, which should be fully discussed at Codex meetings, especially written comments from countries that cannot be represented at meetings. Chairpersons should ensure that all written comments received before the Codex meeting are systematically tabled for discussion, and decisions made

should be recorded in the report accordingly.

### **Coordination**

41. National committees need to be established or developed with broad sectoral representation, including the public sector, academia, producers, exporters, industry and consumers. They should have annual programmes of work with planning, monitoring and evaluation components.
42. Efforts should be made to raise the profile of each committee and highlight its achievements so that its important role may be known to the general public. This will also help it to attract national funding.

## Recommendations from the Conference on International Food Trade Beyond 2000

Global food trade can provide consumers with greater choice. Developing and developed countries alike can benefit from increased commerce, yet food must be safe and trade must be fair. An FAO Conference on International Food Trade Beyond 2000: Science-based Decisions, Harmonization, Equivalence and Mutual Recognition was held in Melbourne, Australia, from 11 to 15 October 1999. Its aim was to provide guidance to the international community in ways of addressing issues of food quality and safety.

The conference discussed advances in nutrition, food science and environmental and cultural concerns that have an impact on food regulations. It sought strategies that allow developing countries to identify their food quality and safety priorities, meet their obligations and realize the benefits of the World Trade Organization agreements on sanitary and phytosanitary measures and technical barriers to trade. It recommended ways in which countries may obtain harmonization, equivalence or mutual recognition related to the control of food quality and safety.

The Conference recommendations, presented in the article, should form the framework for international cooperation and consultation among governments and all interested parties for many years beyond 2000. The full report of the conference and background papers are available on the FAO Web site: [www.fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/economic/esn/austral/austra-e.htm](http://www.fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/economic/esn/austral/austra-e.htm) or can be obtained by writing to the FAO Food and Nutrition Division.

## Recommandations formulées par la Conférence sur le commerce international des denrées alimentaires au-delà de l'an 2000

Le commerce mondial des denrées alimentaires offre aux consommateurs un plus grand choix. Les pays tant en développement que développés peuvent tirer profit de l'essor des échanges; cependant, les produits doivent être salubres et les échanges équitables. La FAO a tenu une Conférence sur le commerce international des denrées alimentaires au-delà de l'an 2000: Décisions fondées sur des données scientifiques, harmonisation, équivalence et reconnaissance mutuelle, à Melbourne (Australie), du 11 au 15 octobre 1999. L'objectif de cette conférence était de fournir des directives à la communauté internationale quant à la manière de traiter les questions de qualité et d'innocuité des aliments.

La Conférence a examiné les progrès accomplis pour ce qui est des questions ayant trait à la nutrition, à la science des aliments, à l'environnement et aux aspects culturels ayant un impact sur la réglementation relative aux denrées alimentaires. Elle a cherché à élaborer des stratégies permettant aux pays en développement de définir leurs priorités en matière de qualité et d'innocuité des aliments, ainsi que de remplir leurs obligations au titre des accords de l'Organisation mondiale du commerce sur les mesures sanitaires et phytosanitaires et sur les obstacles techniques au commerce, et de matérialiser les avantages en résultant. Elle a recommandé divers moyens grâce auxquels les pays pourraient parvenir à l'harmonisation, à l'équivalence ou à la reconnaissance mutuelle pour ce qui concerne le contrôle de la qualité et de l'innocuité des aliments.

Les recommandations de la Conférence, présentées dans l'article, devraient servir de cadre pour la coopération internationale et les consultations entre les gouvernements et les parties intéressées pendant de nombreuses années au-delà de l'an 2000. Le rapport intégral de la Conférence et les documents d'information sont disponibles sur le site web de la FAO: [www.fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/economic/esn/austral/austra-e.htm](http://www.fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/economic/esn/austral/austra-e.htm) et peuvent être obtenus en écrivant à la Division de l'alimentation et de la nutrition de la FAO.

## Recomendaciones de la Conferencia sobre Comercio Internacional de Alimentos a partir del año 2000

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El comercio mundial de alimentos está en condiciones de proporcionar a los consumidores una mayor posibilidad de elección, y su expansión puede beneficiar tanto a los países en desarrollo como a los desarrollados; sin embargo, es preciso que los alimentos sean inocuos y que se adopten prácticas comerciales leales. Del 11 al 15 de octubre de 1999 se celebró en Melbourne, Australia, una Conferencia de la FAO sobre Comercio Internacional de Alimentos a partir del año 2000, con el fin de brindar orientación a la comunidad para abordar las cuestiones relacionadas con la calidad e inocuidad de los alimentos. La Conferencia examinó los avances de la nutrición y la ciencia de la alimentación, así como aspectos ambientales y culturales que tenían repercusiones en la reglamentación sobre alimentos. Se buscaron unas estrategias que permitieran a los países en desarrollo determinar sus prioridades en materia de calidad e inocuidad de los alimentos así como cumplir sus obligaciones y obtener los beneficios previstos en el marco de los Acuerdos de la Organización Mundial del Comercio sobre Medidas Sanitarias y Fitosanitarias y sobre Obstáculos Técnicos al Comercio. Por último, se formularon recomendaciones respecto de la forma en que los países podían lograr la armonización, la equivalencia o el reconocimiento mutuo en relación con el control de la calidad e inocuidad de los alimentos.

Las recomendaciones de la Conferencia, que se presentan en este artículo, deberían constituir el marco de referencia para la cooperación y las consultas internacionales entre los gobiernos y todas las partes interesadas a lo largo de muchos años a partir de 2000. El informe completo de la Conferencia y los documentos de referencia de la misma están disponibles en el sitio Web de la FAO: [www.fao.org/WAICENT/FAOINFO/ECONOMIC/ESN/austral/austra-e.htm](http://www.fao.org/WAICENT/FAOINFO/ECONOMIC/ESN/austral/austra-e.htm); pueden también solicitarse por escrito a la Dirección de Alimentación y Nutrición de la FAO.