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CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
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World Health
Organization

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

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The International Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health (IPFSAPH)

INTRODUCTION

1. The International Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health (IPFSAPH, www.ipfsaph.org) was set up in 2004, following a request by members to have simplified access to validated official information relating to food safety, animal and plant health. Reliable information on standards, regulations, scientific evaluations, along with supporting data, is valuable to members so that they can make decisions on trade-related issues or prepare appropriate regulations or measures. Thus, IPFSAPH was launched to allow authoritative searching for current standards, regulations and other relevant official materials from a single access point and a simple platform for information sharing.¹ As of June 2010, IPFSAPH indexes almost 50,000 records collected from over 50 different official data sources. More background information about IPFSAPH can be found in the information paper circulated during the Codex Alimentarius Commission, 32nd Session, 2009 (CAC/32/INF/12 available at: ftp://ftp.fao.org/codex/CAC/CAC32/if32_12e.pdf).

NEW PORTAL FUNCTIONS

2. **GM food safety information in IPFSAPH:** The food safety assessments approved by national authorities, following the *Codex Guideline for the Conduct of Food Safety Assessments of Foods Derived from Recombinant-DNA Plants* (CAC/GL 45-2003), and already submitted to IPFSAPH through various channels are now fully searchable using a link located on the home page of IPFSAPH. These records are collected in cooperation with the OECD BioTrack database, an interoperable central database containing food safety assessments relating to foods derived from recombinant-DNA plants. In addition, the infrastructure for manually adding food safety assessments in situations of low-level presence of recombinant-DNA (LLP-rDNA) plant materials in food has been added to IPFSAPH. The major focus of work throughout 2010 is to encourage members to upload their national LLP-rDNA regulations, notifications and other relevant information into IPFSAPH, as requested by the 7th Session of the Codex ad hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology (Chiba, Japan, 24–28 September, 2007, the report available at http://www.codexalimentarius.net/download/report/693/al31_34e.pdf).
3. **Simplified use of IPFSAPH:** The focus of IPFSAPH has been streamlined so that its two basic functions, namely Searching, and Registering and Sharing, are more apparent from the home page. Basic design modifications have been implemented with a view to making IPFSAPH more convivial and intuitive. The home page was redesigned in order to help users conduct both simple and advanced searches.

¹ Cf. CAC/26 INF/6 (2003), available at ftp://ftp.fao.org/codex/cac/cac26/if26_06e.pdf, for more background on the rationale for IPFSAPH.

- a. **Search:** Searching has been simplified to return data in strictly chronological order, most recent first, using full-text searches; by “searching within results” it is then possible to narrow down the number of records returned to those most relevant for a particular user. All searches are directly accessible from the home page by entering any group of words; there is a direct link to click to go to the Advanced Search page, where the user may click on already-defined keywords to narrow the results from the outset by commodity, topic, country, source of information, type of information, and within given dates.
- b. **Register and start sharing:** User registration has been simplified, and the number of professional affiliation choices has been increased. Users who wish to share information may now choose from these categories: *Academic affiliation, International organization, National authority, National government, Non-governmental Organization, Private industry, Regional body, and Other.*

Sharing official information from national sources (national governments and national authorities) provides benefits to users of IPFSAPH and they are encouraged to actively participate by uploading their own documents in a simple and easy manner. No special computer expertise is required for registered users to upload their information (either “Documents” or “Contacts”; all steps are clearly explained on IPFSAPH pages) with the simplified online forms. Countries which make available their standards, regulations, and other formal texts relating to food safety will benefit through increased visibility. With an increase in transparency, it is also possible to anticipate some reduction in the effort required to monitor and control trade at national points of entry, and should help increase the number of accepted shipments into that country. While IPFSAPH offers a useful compilation of material representing the international regulatory framework on food safety, animal and plant health, IPFSAPH will only be truly successful with national participation through making relevant regulations and formal texts available for access by trading partners.

- c. **Manuals and user guides, help:** The user guides have been revised to provide easily accessible tutorial-style guides to help users autonomously navigate IPFSAPH. FAO plans to provide all relevant documents in English, French and Spanish in 2011; currently the English version is available. The IPFSAPH help desk is always available at ipfsaph@fao.org.

IPFSAPH: A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

4. FAO provides the infrastructure for the database on food safety, animal health and plant health by building and maintaining IPFSAPH and by making its use as simple as possible through online guidelines and user manuals; technical assistance may also be provided upon request. As the next step, FAO invites all members to participate by first registering as users online at IPFSAPH and then sharing their national information by uploading relevant national documents, such as regulations, safety/risk assessments, notifications and so on. Finally, we would like to invite all Codex Members to use the up-dated version of IPFSAPH and to provide FAO with feedback (until 31 August 2010) to a questionnaire to be sent in due course, so that real user input can be taken into consideration in order to improve the usability of this tool.

INVITATION

5. All delegates at the Third-third Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission are invited to attend the demonstration of IPFSAPH to be scheduled during the Commission session. The exact time and location will be communicated in due course.

CONTACT

For further information, in particular for help with registering and uploading documents, please contact us at: ipfsaph@fao.org.