



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

Thirty-fifth Session

Rome, Italy, 2-7 July 2012

INTERNATIONAL PORTAL FOR BIOTECHNOLOGY RELATED DATA EXCHANGE

Background

In accordance with the decision taken at the 7th Session of the Codex Task Force on Biotechnology (ALINORM 08/31/34) and the 31st Codex Alimentarius Commission in 2008 FAO established a platform for biotechnology-related data and information sharing as part of the international Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health (IPFSAPH), which was originally developed in 2004. To date the majority of uploaded data related to GM food safety assessment come from international organizations (WTO, OECD and BCH). Only a few countries have uploaded relevant information directly to the platform. Since its establishment 8 years ago, the infrastructure of IPFSAPH has become outdated. As we are now considering the need to invest in new IT infrastructure, FAO is reflecting on how to strategically refocus the portal to meet members' current needs and ensure sustainability.

Recent developments

Globally, major developments concerning biotechnology are taking place in crop production. Many member countries recognize the importance of maintaining a list of the authorization status of biotechnology applications and relevant food safety assessment information. There are at least 20 national and supra-national official databases that collect such information. At the international level, facilitation of such data sharing promotes transparency. In order to understand the interest of member countries to upload their information into a FAO Portal, we requested member countries to respond to an electronic survey (8 May 2012).

Survey results and proposal

As of 28 May 2012, 30 countries have responded to the survey. Over 80% of the respondents confirmed their commitment to upload GM food safety assessments on the platform. Some countries reported a technical difficulty in uploading information on the existing portal (IPFSAPH). Based on this result, FAO is considering to host a simple, user-friendly database which is in accordance with the guidance on data and information sharing contained in Annex 3 of the Codex "Guideline for the Conduct of Food Safety Assessment of Foods Derived from Recombinant-DNA Plants" (CAC/GL 45-2003).

FAO would like to invite interested delegates to the 35th Codex Alimentarius Commission (2-7 July 2012, FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy) to discuss this proposal and obtain members' feedback. The question is what role should FAO play in facilitating the data sharing/ data access:

- Should FAO continue to house a database (made more user-friendly) to host relevant information?
- Should FAO establish a portal with links to existing national or regional databases?

This informal discussion will take place at the FAO booth in the *Atrium after the morning session at 12.30 hrs on Wednesday 4 July* 2012. Refreshments will be provided. We also provide a box at the FAO booth for any written comments and suggestions. Any delegate who is not able to participate in the informal discussion is invited to send comments to FAO (Leo.Hagedoorn@fao.org) by no later than 18 July.

For further information, please contact Mr. Leo Hagedoorn, the IPFSAPH administrative manager (Leo.Hagedoorn@fao.org) and Ms Masami Takeuchi, Food Safety Officer (Masami.Takeuchi@fao.org).