



Thirty-sixth Regular Meeting of the Executive Committee

Agricultural Health and Food Safety

Information Document no. 02 (16) Original: Spanish

San Jose, Costa Rica
23-24 August 2016



Agricultural Health and Food Safety

Background and issues addressed

One of IICA's priorities, established in its 2014-2018 Medium-term Plan, is to increase the capabilities of the public and private sectors to ensure agricultural health and food safety and thereby improve productivity, competitiveness and food security. To that end, IICA supports the countries' efforts to promote agricultural health and food safety (AHFS).

The Institute identified three priority areas: the countries' limited participation in standard-setting forums on sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS), with consequences that affect both local and international trade; the fact that national AHFS services are not equipped to meet international obligations or respond to problems and initiatives in the agriculture sector; and, new and ongoing threats that put the countries' sanitary status and consumer health in jeopardy, and reduce production, profitability and food safety and, as a result, food security and market access.

The general objective of the AHFS Area is to promote a productive, profitable and competitive agriculture sector that supplies safe food via local, regional and global markets by implementing appropriate sanitary and phytosanitary measures. To achieve this objective, the AHFS Area has divided its work into four areas: strengthening capabilities for the effective implementation of the Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and member countries' active and effective participation in international SPS forums; modernizing national AHFS services so they are equipped to meet market requirements and users' needs; strengthening the capabilities of member countries' national services for dealing with emerging issues and emergencies; and supporting the adoption of good practices and the application of science to raise agricultural productivity.

Principal achievements in AHFS, 2014-2016

IICA's capacity building efforts were designed to enable public institutions in more than 25 countries to participate effectively in the Codex Alimentarius. The activities implemented included 11 capacity building workshops for the national Codex committees of Paraguay, Honduras, El Salvador, Belize, Ecuador and Peru and, working with Chile, in Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Saint Lucia and Suriname; six Codex colloquia (two in Costa Rica and one each in Chile, Colombia, Uruguay, and Mexico) to discuss proposed standards for review by nine different committees, and to seek joint positions for the CCLAC countries and between the CCLAC and the U.S.; two colloquia involving the CCLAC and CCAFRICA, in which more than 45 countries and 121 delegates took part; and support for the participation of representatives of countries in the Americas in 17 meetings of Codex Alimentarius committees, mobilizing 110 delegates from 28 countries.

Under the agreement with FAO/IPPC for the review of standards, IICA helped 30 Latin American and Caribbean countries to play an effective role in the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures. The Caribbean SPS Project also supported the effective participation of the CARIFORUM countries in the SPS Committee.

The AHFS Area helped strengthen agricultural health and food safety services through the application of its Performance, Vision, and Strategy (PVS) tools in Saint Kitts and Nevis, El Salvador, Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Colombia. Thanks to these efforts, various national plant health, veterinary and food safety services have established priority actions and drafted action plans.



IICA strengthened the capacity of public and private institutions to respond to the requirements of markets and users' needs related to the protection of human health, by means of activities such as the following: 10 course-workshops on the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) in Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Santiago and Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, Peru, Paraguay, and Colombia. Organized by IICA, USDA and USAID, with support from counterpart public institutions, these events were used to train more than 1000 representatives of the public, productive and academic sectors. Thirty-two assessments were carried out in 10 countries to establish the business sector's level of preparedness for complying with proposed requirements under the FSMA.

Furthermore, staff of government services (70 in the Central Region, Colombia, Belize and the Dominican Republic; and 25 in Bolivia, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador) received training that equipped them to organize teams for responding to health emergencies through incident command systems (ICS). Twenty technical officers in three countries (Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador) enhanced their expertise for drawing up lists of quarantine pests.

With regard to the implementation of good practices and the use of science to improve productivity, more than 150 public regulators in CARIFORUM countries received training in priority topics such as regional salmonella surveillance and risk management; foodborne disease surveillance; risk communication; antimicrobial resistance (AMR); inspection of meat and chicken; the One Health Leadership Series; highly pathogenic avian influenza; and plant quarantine. The AHFS Area spearheaded the creation of a Regional Virtual School for Food Inspectors in Central America and the Dominican Republic; roughly 600 food inspectors embarked on the training course in 2015.

The direct recipients of the information that IICA distributes on biotechnology and biosafety numbered more than 2400. At the national level, the AHFS Area worked with a number of institutions, including the University of Costa Rica; the National University of Colombia; the National School of Journalists and the Office of Agricultural Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Panama; the IPTA in Paraguay; RedBio in Peru; and the Ministry of Health in Venezuela.

Looking to the future

Through the AHFS Area, IICA will continue to strengthen its member countries' capacity to participate in forums related to the establishment and implementation of SPS standards, taking into account the importance of private standards and the modernization of safety systems. The strengthening of the institutional framework will be a key focus, with efforts to modernize technical and institutional aspects of national AHFS services. Priority will be given to improving prevention, response and management processes related to emerging issues such as antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and animal and plant health emergencies. Finally, technical cooperation on AHFS will aim to boost the countries' capabilities for the regulation, as well as responsible and appropriate use of agricultural inputs and products of science such as veterinary drugs and agrochemicals, and the responsible use of biotechnology to improve primary productivity, promote trade, and contribute to public health and the environment.