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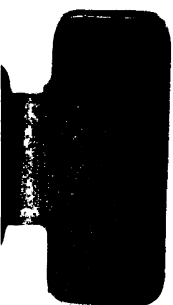


TECHNICAL CONSORTIUM AGRICULTURAL HEALTH



MODEL FOR A MODERN NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY SYSTEM

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AGRICULTURAL HEALTH**

**MODEL FOR A MODERN NATIONAL
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SAFETY SYSTEM**

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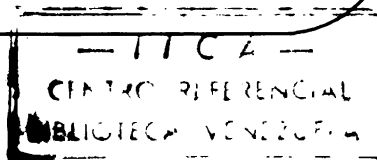
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MODEL FOR A MODERN NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY SYSTEM

FOREWORD

From November 17-20, 1998, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) convened, in San Jose, Costa Rica, a group of experts to discuss and develop a model for the structure and operation of a national agricultural health and food safety system that possesses the basic elements required to comply with commitments in this area, both at the domestic and international levels.

This document was prepared as a result of the work done by this group of experts, and drawing on the valuable comments made by many other people. It is hoped that this document will contribute to orienting the modernization of the agricultural health and food safety systems of the countries of the Americas.





THE NEW TRENDS

New agricultural production systems; increased international trade resulting from the globalization of economies and markets; greater scrutiny by the public of the quality, appearance and safety of foods for human consumption; the need to protect the environment from the inputs used in agricultural production activities; the need for reduction of public budgets, and the commitments derived from the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, of the World Trade Organization (WTO), are forcing governments to rethink their agricultural health and food safety policies and actions.

These new trends are underpinned by the concepts of:

- ↳ **A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH** to the agri-food and agricultural chain, from the farm to the final consumer, in the case of food production, or to the primary industrial processor in the case of fibers, hides and other such agricultural products.
- ↳ **CUSTOMER-ORIENTED PRODUCTION**, which emphasizes producing what markets demand rather than expecting customers to consume what is produced.
- ↳ **SHARED RESPONSIBILITY** throughout the agri-food and agricultural chain, which includes the transition from vertical official services to horizontal agricultural health and food safety systems which actively involve producers, operators of agribusinesses and food industries.
- ↳ **ATTENTION TO ISSUES BEYOND**, and not only within, **national boundaries**, which includes learning of

opportunities and threats at the international level and coordinating actions among the countries of a given geographic region in finding comprehensive solutions to common problems.

- ↳ **QUALITY ASSURANCE** of all the processes and services involved in meeting the challenges and commitments related to technological innovation, competitiveness, reliability and transparency.
- ↳ **SUSTAINABILITY** of the national systems in the long term by reducing their dependence on direct public funds, which will depend on the continuous involvement of all the actors of those systems and the implementation of mechanisms to make them self-sustaining.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MINISTRIES OF AGRICULTURE

The **Ministries of Agriculture** of the **central governments** of the countries, through their official animal health, plant protection and food safety services have the **non-delegable responsibility** to:

- ↳ **Propose** and **review legislation** related to the application of sanitary and phytosanitary measures
- ↳ **Define** and **evaluate** standards and procedures, and oversee **compliance** with same.
- ↳ **Establish** and **apply sanctions** and **fin**es for violations of standards and procedures.

- ↳ **Comply** with international **commitments** and **represent** the country before international organizations and in bilateral and multilateral agreements.

In the fields of **animal health and plant protection**, the technical actions of the ministries of agriculture have clearly been aimed at the **protection** of crops and livestock from harmful biological and chemical agents, at **improving** the situation vis-à-vis such agents, and at **regulating** the **inputs** used in agricultural production activities.

In the field of **food safety**, the ministries of agriculture have shared this technical action with the ministries of health and other institutions.

For practical purposes, the technical responsibility of the ministries of agriculture in the field of **food safety** runs from the farm to the slaughterhouse, packing plants or customs facilities, in the case of **meat products** for human consumption that are to be marketed domestically or exported.

In the case of **agricultural products** for **human consumption**, the technical responsibility of the ministries of agriculture in the field of food safety runs from the farm to the primary processor, wholesale market or customs facility, depending on whether the agricultural products for human consumption are to be marketed domestically or exported.

THE CONCEPT OF A NATIONAL SYSTEM

For some time now, some countries have been using the term **SYSTEM** rather than **OFFICIAL SERVICE** in order to reflect the involvement of agricultural producers and private-sector professionals and institutions in the field of animal health, plant protection or food safety.

Currently, the term **National System** is being more widely used in order to include all the participants involved.

The members of a **National Agricultural Health and Food Safety System** are:

- ↳ **Ministries of Agriculture and Livestock**, which are responsible for making decisions in matters related to animal health, plant protection and food safety.
- ↳ The **official national** animal health, plant protection and food safety **services**.
- ↳ The **official state, departmental, provincial and municipal** animal health, plant protection and food safety **services**.
- ↳ The associations of **producers and agribusiness operators** at the national, state, departmental, provincial and municipal levels.
- ↳ The associations of **small farmers** at the national, state, departmental, provincial and municipal levels.

- ↳ The associations of **veterinarians, agricultural engineers, food engineers, chemists** and other related professions at the national, state, departmental, provincial and municipal levels.

Other members of **national systems**, with direct responsibility for the execution of animal health, plant protection and food safety actions, are:

- ↳ Private- and public-sector **professionals** who engage in animal health, plant protection and food safety verification and certification actions.
- ↳ Private- and public-sector **laboratories** which diagnose diseases and pests, analyze residues, conduct microbiologic and toxicological analyses of agricultural products, conduct analyses to verify and certify agricultural chemicals and veterinary products, and verify and certify animal feeds, and the laboratories for quality control of agriculture products.
- ↳ **Producers and agribusiness operators** that participate in the execution of animal health, plant protection and food safety actions at the farm level and in transportation companies, packing houses and distribution centers.
- ↳ **Companies** that produce **agricultural products, veterinary drugs and animal feeds.**
- ↳ **Companies** that **import and export** agricultural products, animals and genetic materials.
- ↳ Public and private **research** institutions related to the fields of animal health, plant protection and food safety.

- ↳ **Institutions of higher education and technical schools** related to the fields of animal health, plant protection and food safety.
- ↳ The official services of **other government agencies**, such as the ministries of health, environmental protection and others, which carry out verification and certification actions in the field of food safety.

THE OBJECTIVES OF A NATIONAL SYSTEM

Within the new concept, a **National Agricultural Health and Food Safety System** has the following three fundamental objectives:

- ↳ **PROTECTION** of crops and livestock from biological, chemical and physical agents that may lead to damage and losses in terms of agricultural production, productivity and marketing; as well as the protection of the population from such agents in agricultural products for human consumption, when they pose a threat to human health and life.
- ↳ **IMPROVEMENT** of animal health and plant protection in general, and of the hygienic handling of agricultural products for human consumption throughout the agricultural and agri-food chain.
- ↳ **REGULATION** of the **inputs** used in agricultural production activities.

In order to achieve each of these objectives, a number of **functions** are carried out by the **different participants** that make up the **National System**.

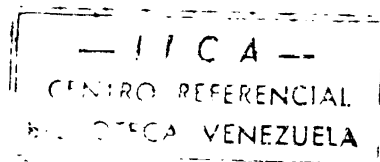
THE BASIC FUNCTIONS OF A NATIONAL SYSTEM

The concept of **functions** has been developed to integrate the contributions of non-traditional participants into the National System and place more emphasis on a horizontal, rather than vertical distribution of effort, in order to underscore the **importance of the action**, regardless of where, or by whom, it is carried out.

Given the three objectives of a **National Agricultural Health and Food Safety System**, the principal **functions** will be:

PROTECTION:

- ↳ **Epidemiological surveillance**, to detect the presence of biological, chemical or physical agents in a country, or a particular part of a country, that may pose a risk for humans, animals and plants. It may be passive, when the reports of the persons making up the national system are used, or active, when is conducted to detect and/or monitor a specific agent. Epidemiological surveillance is essential in declaring disease- or pest-free areas, and areas of low disease or pest prevalence.
- ↳ Management of **epidemiological information**, for use within the country in making decisions on actions to be



taken, as well as for complying with international commitments.

- ↳ Preparation for and implementation of **emergency quarantine** actions in the areas of animal health, plant protection and food safety, and to gain access to contingency funds available at the national and international levels.
- ↳ Access to information on **emerging or new issues related to animal health, plant protection and food safety** that could pose a risk for the country, with a view to implementing necessary preparatory or management measures.
- ↳ Execution of **risk assessment studies**, as the basis for making decisions related to the importation of animals, agricultural products or genetic materials that may pose a sanitary or phytosanitary risk for a country or a particular part of a country.
- ↳ Technical and organizational capability to carry out actions related to the sanitary and phytosanitary **verification and certification** status of animals, agricultural products and agricultural inputs **imported** into the country.
- ↳ Technical and organizational capability to carry out actions related to the sanitary and phytosanitary **verification and certification** of animals, agricultural products and agricultural inputs **exported** from the country, as well as the packing houses, cold storage plants and transportation vehicles related with those operations.
- ↳ Laboratory capability for **diagnosing** diseases and pests, **analyzing residues and conducting microbiological analyses** of agricultural products for human consumption,

and **assuring the quality** of agricultural chemicals, agroforestry products, veterinary products and animal feeds.

IMPROVEMENT:

- ↳ Establishment and monitoring of **areas free of and with a low prevalence** of quarantine animal and plant diseases and pests, including internal quarantine control measures for the protection of same.
- ↳ Implementation of systems for **hygienic handling on agriculture farms and in packing houses, in transport vehicles and distribution centers**, which includes the adoption of good agricultural practices, good manufacturing practices, good hygiene practices, bio-security measures, hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) and other similar practices.
- ↳ Implementation of systems for **hygienic handling on livestock farms in transport vehicles and in slaughterhouses, packing houses and distribution centers**, which includes the adoption of good livestock practices, good humanitarian animal transport practices, good manufacturing practices, good hygiene practices, bio-security measures, pathogen reduction programs, hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) and other similar practices.
- ↳ Implementation of **systems for the identification** of animals, as well as for the packaging and labeling of agricultural products, that will make it possible to trace the places of origin of the same, in the case of emergencies.

REGULATION OF INPUTS:

- ↳ **Registration and control** of the production, distribution and use of **pesticides, fertilizers, veterinary products, animal feeds**, and related products
- ↳ Phytosanitary **verification and certification** of **biological agents, seeds** and **plant propagation materials**.
- ↳ Sanitary **verification and certification** of **semen, embryos** and **biological agents** for the control of livestock pests.

THE ACTIONS IN SUPPORT OF A NATIONAL SYSTEM

In order to carry out these basic functions, which are the backbone of a **national system**, action will be required in the following areas:

- ↳ Update, propose and harmonize **regulations and rules** in the areas of animal health, plant protection and food safety, to comply with agreements reached at international forums, including a **notification mechanism** that will make it possible to receive and evaluate comments from the public on new instruments, and introduce necessary adjustments.
- ↳ Apply and monitor **sanctions and fines** for noncompliance with legal provisions.

- ↳ **Inform the public** regarding existing sanitary and phytosanitary measures, using the respective enquiry points, regarding changes in the national sanitary and phytosanitary situation and that of other countries, and to conduct such dissemination and promotion activities as may be required to improve the national sanitary and phytosanitary situation.
- ↳ Establish **advisory councils** or **committees** to encourage private-sector and nontraditional public-sector participation, in achieving the proposed objectives through a horizontal distribution of effort.
- ↳ Establish **training programs** for **producers and agribusiness operators** that will contribute to the establishment of disease- or pest-free areas and areas of low disease or pest prevalence, to the adoption of hygienic practices in agricultural and livestock enterprises, and to the proper handling of agricultural inputs.
- ↳ Establish **training programs** for **professionals** and **the people in charge of institutions** who will be **accredited** to carry out official duties, including the preparation of detailed manuals on the performance of such duties.
- ↳ Develop linkages with **institutions of higher education** in veterinary medicine, agricultural engineering and related fields, as well as with agricultural **technology institutions**, encouraging them to include in their curricula courses on subjects needed to execute sanitary and phytosanitary actions.
- ↳ Coordinate with official, private and university **agricultural research institutes** in conducting research

projects of topics of priority in agricultural health and food safety areas.

- ↳ Serve as Official **representative** at **international forums** (OIE, IPPC, Codex), and in negotiations on bilateral and multilateral agreements involving sanitary and phytosanitary import and export measures.

THE STRATEGY FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A MODERN NATIONAL SYSTEM

The **strategy** for **restructuring or re-engineering** an official national animal health, plant protection and food safety service, and converting it to a **modern national system** can vary depending on the **conditions in each country**.

Nonetheless, there are **strategic lines of actions** that are applicable both in a **small country** and a **large country** with a higher level of development.

These strategic lines of action include:

- ↳ The **definition** of those **functions** that can be **delegated** by the ministries of agriculture to producers, agribusiness operators, professionals, universities, private laboratories, state, departmental, provincial or municipal services, and other institutions, while **maintaining** those **functions** which are non-delegable.
- ↳ **Concentration** of the **non-delegable functions** of the ministries of agriculture in the areas of animal health, plant protection and food safety in an **efficient, operational, flexible** and **sustainable central structure** made up of

qualified technical and professional personnel who receive adequate remuneration, in order to ensure its stability. Within this central structure, great importance should be attached to the **function of auditing** the execution of functions that have been delegated to other people or entities. Respecting the laws of each country, these units can be **decentralized administratively** from the structure of the ministry of agriculture, without the ministry's losing its authority.

- ↳ **Use** of the capabilities of **national institutions** such as ministries of health, environment, etc., as needed, and of **universities and institutions of other countries** through alliances or cooperation agreements, with a view to enhancing existing capabilities in or outside of a given region.
- ↳ Establishment of **national advisory councils** on animal health, plant protection and food safety as required, involving representatives of the participating sectors of the **national systems**, which would **provide advisory services and serve as a forum for discussions** on the preparation of new, or the revision of existing, **regulations**, on the **planning and evaluation** of sanitary and phytosanitary programs, and on **priority issues** in these fields at the national or regional level.
- ↳ Establishment of **state, departmental, provincial or municipal committees** involving representatives of organizations and associations of **producers and agribusiness operators** and representatives of local governments, for **funding and execution** of priority sanitary and phytosanitary programs in each area.

- ↳ Establishment of programs to **accredit veterinarians, agricultural engineers** and other **private-sector professionals**, as well as **private-sector and university laboratories**, which perform diagnoses, conduct microbiologic and residue analyses in agricultural products and control the quality of agricultural inputs, so that they can engage in **verification** and **certification** activities delegated to them, and audited by, the ministries of agriculture.

- ↳ Establishment of **self-financing mechanisms** for the operation of the official animal health, plant protection and food safety services which will continue to be the responsibility of the ministries of agriculture or the decentralized unit created for this purpose.

- ↳ Establishment of a **quality control mechanism** to monitor all the actions executed, including the development of procedures and control manuals which will allow to audit all the processes.

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