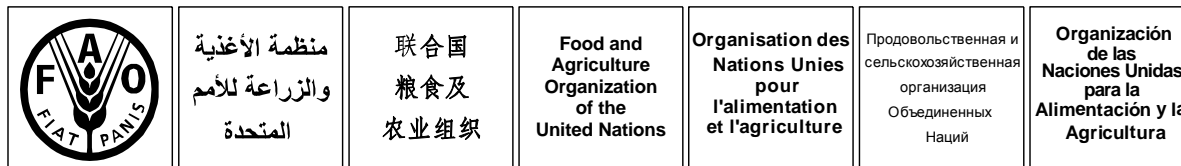


March 2012



COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Twenty-third Session

Rome, 21 - 25 May 2012

FAO's Role in International Standard Setting

I. Introduction

1. FAO plays a key role in international standard setting, most significantly in the area of the application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures. The International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) is a legally binding, multi-lateral international plant health treaty established in 1952 that aims to protect cultivated and wild plants by preventing the introduction and spread of pests (including insects, weeds and diseases). The IPPC is recognized by the World Trade Organization (WTO) as the sole international plant health standard setting body.
2. The Codex Alimentarius Commission, established by FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1963, develops harmonized international food standards, guidelines and codes of practice to protect the health of the consumers and ensure fair trade practices in the food trade. The Commission also promotes coordination of all food standards work undertaken by international governmental and non-governmental organizations. Codex is also recognized by the WTO as one of the three international standard-setting bodies for SPS measures (the World Organisation for Animal Health, OIE, is the third).
3. The standards developed by the IPPC and Codex have become the benchmarks against which national SPS measures and regulations are evaluated within the legal parameters of the WTO Agreements. This ensures that these standards are science-based reference points for WTO members should a trade dispute arise.
4. This document deals exclusively with FAO's role in setting standards for sanitary and phytosanitary measures and developing harmonized international food standards, guidelines and codes of practice. The document does not address FAO's role in setting standards, guidelines or codes of practice/conduct in other areas of FAO's mandate.

II. The International Plant Protection Convention

5. Currently, 177 contracting parties adhere to the New Revised Text of the IPPC that entered into force in October 2005. The IPPC Secretariat is provided by FAO and located in the Plant Production and Protection Division. The Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM) meets annually and the inter-sessional work is overseen by the CPM Bureau composed of representatives of the seven FAO Regional Groups. The Bureau provides guidance to the IPPC Secretariat and CPM on

This document is printed in limited numbers to minimize the environmental impact of FAO's processes and contribute to climate neutrality. Delegates and observers are kindly requested to bring their copies to meetings and to avoid asking for additional copies. Most FAO meeting documents are available on the Internet at www.fao.org

strategic direction, cooperation, financial and operational management. One of the primary outputs of the CPM is the adoption of new International Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs) or standards within the IPPC Strategic Framework.

6. Through the development of ISPMs, contracting parties share the same goal: to protect the world's cultivated and natural plant resources from the spread and introduction of plant pests while minimizing interference with the international movement of goods and people. ISPMs include:

- procedures and references;
- pest surveillance, survey and monitoring;
- import regulations and pest risk analysis;
- compliance procedures and phytosanitary inspection methodologies;
- pest management;
- post entry quarantine;
- exotic pest emergency response, control and eradication; and
- export certification.

7. The IPPC Secretariat works with a number of international partners in order to implement the CPM work programme. These include the WTO, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Current status and recent developments

8. Despite critical financial conditions facing the IPPC Secretariat, the past two years have seen some significant success. Four new contracting parties have joined the IPPC bringing the total membership to 177. Two new ISPMs were also adopted to reach 34 standards for phytosanitary measures, plus 14 phytosanitary treatments and one diagnostic protocol in total. Additional standards are presented to CPM each year for adoption. The introduction in 2011 of the IPPC On-line Comment System (OCS), which allows members to provide their comments on draft ISPMs directly to the Secretariat electronically, has been a valuable gain in efficiency and has been utilized by both developed and developing countries.

9. While the IPPC has the primary task of development of ISPMs, the CPM recently recognized that the ability to nationally implement those standards is equally important. The emphasis on capacity development is based on the implementation of the phytosanitary capacity building strategic framework adopted by the CPM. An Implementation Review and Support System (IRSS) has been established to facilitate and promote the national implementation of the IPPC and ISPMs.

10. Contracting parties are generally still weak in meeting their information exchange obligations under the IPPC. Efforts are being undertaken to correct this but this initiative is severely restricted by limited resources.

11. The IPPC has facilitated the use of the Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation (PCE) in eight developing countries over the past year. The PCE generates a snapshot of a country's phytosanitary capacity at a particular time as the basis for planning phytosanitary capacity building. The PCE also provides a national framework for strategic planning to prioritize national activities/resources. This provides the basis for dialogue with donors of development aid. The WTO's Standards and Trade Development Facility requires a PCE to be performed as a pre-condition in assessing fitness for funding of project proposals.

12. A developing issue is related to the IPPC's status as an FAO Article XIV body. Discussion is underway within FAO regarding updating operational procedures pertaining to improving the effective and efficient functioning of Article XIV statutory bodies within the overall FAO operational framework.

III. The Codex Alimentarius Commission

13. The Codex Alimentarius Commission held its First Session in 1963. The Commission is convened in the framework of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme. Its objectives are to protect the health of consumers, to ensure fair practices in international food trade, and to coordinate food standardization work undertaken by international organizations. As of January 2012, its membership includes 184 member countries and one Member Organization. It is also open to international organizations (governmental and non-governmental) which can be admitted as observers if they meet certain criteria. Sessions of the Commission and of its Executive Committee are normally held in Rome or Geneva.

14. There are currently more than 400 Codex standards and related texts on all aspects of food safety and quality, more than 3000 Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) for pesticides, 2000 maximum levels for food additives and more than 500 MRLs for veterinary drugs. These standards are a reference in international trade as the Codex Alimentarius Commission is specifically mentioned under the WTO SPS Agreement as regards food safety, while reference to international standards applies to Codex under the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade.

Current status and recent developments

15. During the 2010-2011 biennium, 33 sessions of Codex subsidiary bodies were held and the Commission adopted more than 50 standards and related texts, including several codes of practice for the prevention of chemical or microbiological contamination. The Commission operates according to its Strategic Plan 2008- 2013.

16. In recent years the systematic approach to risk analysis was completed in all areas of food safety: microbiological contamination, additives, contaminants, residues of pesticides and veterinary drugs, and the risk analysis framework is under regular review to address emerging food safety issues. In order to establish Codex food safety standards, Codex committees rely on the scientific advice provided by FAO and WHO through their joint expert committees, such as JECFA (Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives) and JMPR (Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues) as well as expert consultations.

17. In 2003, FAO and WHO established the FAO/WHO Project and Trust Fund for Enhanced Participation in Codex, funded by voluntary contributions and administered by WHO on behalf of both organizations, which resulted in a significant increase in participation of developing countries and is complementary to other technical cooperation activities.

18. The Commission will proceed with the implementation of its strategic plan and programme of work, including the convening of 35 sessions of specialized committees in the biennium. The 35th Session of the Commission will be held in July 2012 at FAO headquarters. In addition to its main task of standard-setting, it will consider general issues, such as the development of its Strategic Plan 2014-2019, the progress report of the FAO/WHO Trust Fund, and the activities of FAO and WHO complementary to Codex work. The 36th Session will be held in July 2013 in Geneva.

19. In order to ensure that Codex standards address recurring and emerging food safety issues in an efficient manner, it is essential that FAO and WHO continue to provide timely and high quality scientific advice to the Codex programme.