



**FOOD AND
AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION OF
THE UNITED NATIONS**

**WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION**



PEC/CRD 06

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

**FAO/WHO PAN-EUROPEAN CONFERENCE
ON FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY**

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY, 25 – 28 FEBRUARY 2002

CONFERENCE ROOM DOCUMENT

**FAO Veterinary Public Health and Food and Feed Safety Programme:
the Safety of Animal Products from Farm to Fork**

Background

The livestock sector plays an essential role in agricultural and economic development as well as in food security. Public concern about the safety of foods of animal origin has recently heightened due to problems that have arisen with outbreaks of food-borne infections (BSE, *E.coli*, *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, *Listeria*, etc.) and chemical contamination (pesticides, heavy metals, dioxins), as well as due to growing concerns about veterinary drug residues and microbial resistance to antibiotics. These problems have drawn attention to the production practices within the livestock industry and have prompted health professionals and the food industry to closely scrutinise quality and safety problems that can arise in foods of animal origin. In addition to national food safety, these issues have serious implications for international trade in livestock products and animal feed.

Programme Rationale

The FAO-AGA¹ Programme on Veterinary Public Health and Food and Feed Safety² focuses on the development and promotion of sustainable veterinary public health systems, structures and functions through the strengthening of relevant institutions including disease intelligence. Furthermore, it provides decision support for the selection of cost-effective control strategies for major zoonotic diseases and guidelines on prudent use of antimicrobials and quality control mechanisms for livestock products from stable to table. It also aims at preventing food-borne

¹ Animal Production and Health Division

² FAO Programme of work and budget 2002-2003: http://www.fao.org/pwb/2002/index_en.htm

hazards in food of animal origin by developing science-based Risk Management and Good Practices for livestock production and the feed industry.

The programme generates risk assessment procedures for traditional and new public health challenges, and guidelines for risk management and precautionary measures. The FAO Feed and Food Safety Gateway³ provides consolidated information from FAO and national and international organizations on various safety and quality issues in the whole food chain. It presents up-to-date information on news, press releases, legislation, events and special subjects of interest. A comprehensive range of publications, presentations, statistical data and details on technical assistance offered to member countries is also available at this site.

FAO Country Programmes for Capacity Building for Surveillance and Prevention of BSE and Other Zoonoses in Central and Eastern Europe

The Geographic BSE-risk (GBR) assessment as prepared by the Scientific Steering Committee advising the European Commission reveals that it is likely that BSE is present in the cattle herds of most Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) (GBR level III) even if in most of the countries BSE is not yet confirmed.

FAO has suggested that countries at risk should take the necessary precautions and implement active, as well as passive, surveillance for BSE in cattle and control measures in the animal feed and meat industries. Issues that call for attention include the production of animal feed, slaughtering methods, the rendering industry and the disposal of waste materials. Legislation to control the feed and meat industry and its effective implementation is required, as well as capacity building of government officials, private veterinarians and workers in the specialized industry sectors, information campaigns for farmers and communication strategies for all stakeholders.

Conducting risk analyses may be difficult for some CEECs. The process is technically complex and expensive. Therefore, support is required by international donors and agencies with the necessary expertise and resources. Collaboration is called for between countries with good facilities and experience in surveillance and prevention and those needing to improve their risk management system.

For this reason, the FAO Animal Production and Health Division has developed a project framework to provide decision support on legislation and technical aspects, as well as capacity building of government officials and other concerned personnel. This framework addresses comprehensively the technical assistance required to ensure BSE risk management; moreover, it ensures that countries meet the required international standards for export and have the necessary mechanisms in place to prevent the importation of hazards.

³ <http://www.fao.org/livestock/AGAP/FRG/FEEDSAFETY/feedsafety.HTM>

Competence Centres for Zoonotic Diseases

Rational management of health risks requires basic epidemiological information on the true extent of the problems, on the economic and socio-cultural risk factors and on the costs and benefits of alternative management strategies. So far, the risk management and research results are in many countries dispersed, lack comparability and usually only consider isolated aspects of the complex problem.

In an effort to harmonize research and risk management activities at national and regional level, FAO proposes to co-ordinate a concerted research and development programme through selected Competence Centres. The programme aims at promoting human resources, scientific research and information on quality and safety of animal products, with particular reference to the epidemiology of BSE and other zoonotic diseases. With FAO support, research and development programmes will be implemented by existing veterinary and food institutes in the areas of livestock production systems, animal nutrition and alternative feed resources, animal feed quality and safety, meat science, veterinary preventative medicine and epidemiology, bioinformatics and information.

FAO Programme for the Implementation of Safe Animal Feeding Standards and Good Production Practices for the Livestock Industry in Central and Eastern European countries.

The FAO Animal Production and Health Division has developed a programme which sets out to ensure good feed management and avoid disease, drug and chemical contamination, which could be hazardous to human and animal health.

Ensuring the production and utilization of safe feedingstuffs requires an integrated approach which takes into account upgrading the legislative framework and the mechanisms of effective implementation, training of officials, inspectors and workers in the feed industry sector, and communication campaigns for farmers. In addition to the need to prepare and agree on standards for safety in the feed industry, the objective is also to design and operate an effective and sustainable programme for the effective implementation of such standards. Existing decrees and regulations need to be further developed, international methods and standards introduced and a working system put into place with long-term sustainability. This is particularly complex in countries in transition with a majority of the population living in rural areas and with many small-scale producers supplying the market.

Centres for Quality and Safety of Livestock Products (the FAO-Industry Partnership Project)

The FAO Animal Production and Health Division considers that close partnership with industry is necessary to improve the safety and quality of animal food products throughout the food chain. Through partnership and participation, objective and science-based advice can be given to industries and other stakeholders to develop Good Agricultural Practices and Good Manufacturing Practices that will protect human health, animal health and the environment. The project focuses on providing capacity building, high quality technical information and support as an essential part of the process of elaborating codes of practice for the industry and the farmers. This will ensure that eventual regulations and guidelines are practicable and widely supported.

Conclusions

FAO has suggested that countries should closely monitor food quality and safety problems that can arise in foods of animal origin as a result of animal feeding systems.

Countries at risk should take the necessary precautions and implement active, as well as passive, surveillance for BSE in cattle and control measures on the animal feed and meat industries.

FAO considers that close partnership with industry is necessary to improve the safety and quality of animal food products throughout the food chain.

FAO's mandate for normative work on food and feed safety, extensive expertise in the sector at field level and its long established relationship with Central and Eastern European governments and institutions, enable FAO to successfully co-ordinate collaborative efforts to develop and harmonize risk management strategies.

+ + +