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Concept of the Virtual Food Safety Agency

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One of the main problems in both Western, but also in Central and Eastern European countries is the fragmented institutional structure and the division of responsibilities at national level.

At EU-level and in some EU countries independent new agencies were created, while existing institutions keep their present function. Keeping this in mind, we have developed a concept of a Virtual Food Safety Agency. Its main objective is to protect public health from risks which may arise in connection with the consumption of food (including risks caused by the way in which it is produced or supplied) and furthermore to protect the interests of consumers in relation to food.

The present concept is based on FAO recommendations for national food safety agencies and utilizes the resources of the World Agricultural Information Centre (WAICENT) and in the future perhaps also the resources of the developing Biosecurity Portal.

The agency we suggest is completely independent from any ministry. It will be managed by a participatory committee under a chairperson that is appointed by the government. The main tasks of the Virtual Food Safety Agency will be to collect and combine the information that is provided by the various ministries involved in the food safety topic. It will also function as a data repository for all the data which is collected by the national control and inspection authorities,

and will collect the research results of national and international sources on the topic of food safety.

Probably the most important task of the Virtual Food Safety Agency will be communication. The Agency should communicate with the general public, provide reliable information to the ministers that are, and remain, politically responsible, and to international organizations (FAO, WHO, EU, OIE). The committee will oversee the data and information collection functions and ensure the operation of the system.

Advantages may be:

- Present institutional structures remain;
- It can be achieved at lower cost than a total institutional reform
- Because of the increased coordination the food safety situation in the country will improve
- The communication with the general public is improved because reliable information is provided

I know that already many delegates have seen the poster presentation outside the Conference room. If you wish, there is also a handout available at the documents desk.

Thank you.