



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS

WORLD HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



E

Agenda item 7

PEC 01/12

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

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY, 25 – 28 FEBRUARY 2002

WORKING DOCUMENT

Draft Synopsis of Recommendations

Prepared by
the Pan-European Conference Secretariat

A. INTRODUCTION

Background

At the Preparatory Meeting on 4 May 2001 it was decided that the Pan-European Conference should supply a Final Report including recommendations for problems and concerns identified as being specific to the European region. The Conference should also indicate what follow-up activities are to be initiated to strengthen the food safety and quality situation in the European region.

It was agreed in order to facilitate the Conference progress that the Secretariat would analyze the proposed recommendations of individual conference papers and prepare a draft Synopsis.

Aims and use of the draft Synopsis

The aim of this draft Synopsis is to provide an overview of the recommendations as proposed in the papers prepared for the Conference (see Annex 1 for a compilation of recommendations and discussion points raised in the Conference papers). It was prepared with a focus on issues that are important to the European region as a whole. The draft synopsis could be a tool to structure the discussions in the Work Groups. The draft Synopsis could be considered, discussed and reviewed by each Work Group which should formulate their own recommendations. The recommendations of each Work Group will be discussed and reviewed in plenary in order to supply the final recommendations of the Conference.

B. CLUSTERS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This draft Synopsis provides four clusters of recommendations, these are:

- I. Identification of risk sources and scientific advice
- II. Regulation, control and enforcement
- III. Capacity building, education and networking
- IV. Information systems and risk communication

All the recommendations are numbered. At the end of each recommendation you will find, in brackets, the numbers of the original recommendations from the Conference papers as they appear in Annex 1. Recommendations suggested by the Conference Secretariat are numbered with a CS-number.

It should be noted that, while some of the recommendations drawn from the Conference papers have been slightly edited to make them fit into the draft Synopsis, no recommendation has been drafted in the standard format used for recommendations. Instead they are all drafted with a view to focus on the **substance** of the points to be addressed by the Conference Work Groups, leaving to the Conference the decision on the final form the recommendation should take, in particular with respect to scope, whether addressed to only Governments or all stakeholders, and to the importance the Conference wishes to attach to the proposed recommendations.

Within the four clusters a distinction has been made between **policy** recommendations and recommendations with an **operational** character: the former focuses on basic principles that could be adopted, the latter on the specific measures that are necessary for implementation of the principles.

I. IDENTIFICATION OF RISK SOURCES AND SCIENTIFIC ADVICE

Policy recommendations

1. Regional and national networks need be established and/or improved for the collection, compilation and sharing of information and data on aspects of food quality and safety, food risks and contamination and foodborne diseases to improve comparability and equivalence of policies and to support harmonization (1, 2, 26).
2. Collaboration is required to strengthen and harmonize integrated and transparent systems for surveillance, outbreak investigation, reporting systems and diagnostic methods on food safety and quality (9, 10).
3. Enhanced cooperation between the sectors of health and food production and agriculture is necessary for food safety surveillance and monitoring (9).

Operational recommendations

4. The quantity, quality and frequency of data reporting at national level and to the WHO Surveillance Programme for Control of Foodborne Diseases in Europe need to be improved (11).
5. Food microbiology data for risk assessment need to be collected to assist the Joint FAO/WHO expert consultation on risk assessment of microbiological hazards in food (JEMRA); the outcome of such international risk assessments, as well as the methodology used for these, should be used also at national level (12).

6. National capacities to perform risk assessments of chemicals in food supply should be strengthened by unbiased monitoring and other studies to determine levels and trends of chemicals in food (13).

7. Consideration should be given to harmonization across the Region, of data reporting formats for chemical contaminants in food as the first step in developing consistent and comparable assessments for both health and standards-setting purposes, e.g. Codex Alimentarius. In this regard, the GEMS/Food data structure should be considered as the default if no other format is available (14).

8. Total diet studies should be conducted at national level, to assess dietary and other exposures to toxic chemicals by the overall population as well as vulnerable groups such as children; the consumption part of such studies are expected to provide valuable information and will also be useful in microbiological risk assessment; in cases of localized contamination, duplicate diet studies need to be conducted to assess possible exposure to unacceptable levels of toxic chemicals in food (15).

9. Decision-making processes and outcomes of scientific advisory committees must be of the highest integrity: their procedures must be open, transparent and accountable, to consumers and the organizations that represent them, particularly on: the selection and appointment of members, procedures and working practices, framing the question to address and the factors to be taken into account in the decision-making process (43).

II. REGULATION, CONTROL AND ENFORCEMENT

Policy recommendations

10. As improvements of public health and international trade of food products are often hindered by discrepancies of food safety and quality policies across the Region, there is a need to increase the comparability of food safety and quality systems by implementing equivalence, transparency and harmonization of regulations and control across the Region (CS1) .

11. An integrated and multidisciplinary policy approach to food safety and quality should be applied with participation of all governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in the food chain, including animal feed, agriculture and food industry sectors and consumers organizations (36, 17).

12. Regulation and control systems for prevention of food-borne disease, reduction of food safety risks and protection of the environment should be developed (5, 18).

13. In policy making, consideration should be given to "other legitimate factors" that are of concern to consumers and that may affect consumers' health indirectly, such as ethical and religious concerns, the desire to promote more sustainable food production practices (38)

Operational recommendations

14. Endorsement should be given to the work of Codex Alimentarius as the generic instrument to promote harmonization of food safety and quality standards in the entire European region, and recommends that members increase their participation in Codex Alimentarius (CS2).
15. Food safety strategies should be risk-based, giving priority to targets and measures that have the potential to result in the greatest reductions in food-related diseases (16).
16. Coordination and cooperation of official control services should be established and/or enhanced at national and regional level (4);
17. Better control of food safety and quality in food industry should be introduced, with due consideration to internal checks considered effective by public inspectors (6);

III. CAPACITY BUILDING, EDUCATION AND NETWORKING

Policy recommendations

18. In view of the major differences in food safety and quality policies, in their application and control across the region, along with potential differences in both the level of protection of consumers' health and barriers to trade, as well as differences in the efficiency and operational costs of applied policies, intra-regional cooperation needs to be expanded in the field of capacity building, education and research (CS3).
19. European policy-makers and research institutes should strengthen their cooperation in science and development and expand scientific networks to ensure the efficient delivery of safe quality food and the effective operation of competitive markets throughout the European region (22)
20. Since multilateral and bilateral co-operation in the field of research, capacity building and education needs a secure financial basis to safeguard and promote continuous development and improvement in food quality and safety throughout the Region, Member governments and international organizations should consider investment and financial support for regional cooperation in this field (23, CS4).
21. As FAO and WHO may be considered to have a comparative advantage in facilitating the establishment of regional networks, FAO and WHO should be encouraged to jointly develop programs to facilitate and coordinate the establishment and strengthening of research and policy networks on food safety and quality across the European region (CS5).

Operational recommendations

22. Cooperation initiatives for capacity building and education should be based on international standards and scientific research (CS6).

23. Regional networks of national risk assessment bodies should be established (3).
24. Education and training about food hygiene, throughout the food chain (including catering personnel and consumers) should be improved (20).
25. Capacity building programmes based on innovative approaches in education and food production need to be established at all levels, graduate, post-graduate, executive or distant learning education (25).
26. In view of the importance of European cooperation in food safety and quality research to cope with complex cross-border food safety and quality issues and to support policy improvement and harmonization, a pan-European science and research network should be set up to support and facilitate the process of policy development and to strengthen food safety and quality knowledge across the region (26).

IV. INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND RISK COMMUNICATION

Policy recommendations

27. Observing that the quality of information and communication systems determine confidence of consumers in food products and are effective tools to solve and avoid food safety and quality emergencies across the Region, food safety and quality information should be promoted and communication between all stakeholders, including consumers should be strengthened (CS7).
28. A comprehensive, transparent and integrated approach to food safety and quality policy by open consultation and debate is needed in order to increase confidence of consumers in food products (35, 36, 37).
29. Consumer education and information on food production and safety and quality control should be reinforced to contribute to higher confidence of consumers in food products (8).
30. As FAO and WHO are best placed to initiate regional programs on food safety and quality information and communication, FAO and WHO should be encouraged to jointly develop programs to facilitate and coordinate improvement of information and communication systems in the field of food safety and quality (CS8).

Operational recommendations

31. Communication at all levels between key stakeholders in the food chain is required with the objective of improving food producers' understanding of hazards, implementation of preventive systems such as HACCP and a better understanding of their contribution in reducing specific risks at particular points of the production chain (CS9).

32. Results of all official monitoring tests (pesticide residues, veterinary drug residues and other contaminants in food, feed and drinking water), official food inspections and other official food control activities, should be made public (19).
33. An Emerging Risk Identification System based on a systematic and integrated approach involving different disciplines should be established; such a System would improve information exchange between risk managers and risk assessors within a country or between different countries based on the needs of users (risk managers and risk assessors). A European (or worldwide) Emerging Risk Identification System should enable provision and sharing of national validated (or non-validated) information on scientific research and/or exchange of scientific experts to review, and anticipate possible new or unknown food safety problems at an early stage (27, 28, 29, 30).
34. The Rapid Alert System on Food Safety Emergencies, operational in the European Union has proved to be a useful instrument to support public health, consumer protection and international food trade. Central and East-European Member countries might wish to analyze it with a view to determine whether it is useful to participate in this food safety Rapid Alert System (CS10).
35. A Biosecurity Portal should be developed that meets the needs of users for the exchange of official biosecurity information, recognizing the potential benefits of providing and sharing national information in the Biosecurity Portal as a primary mechanism for the exchange of official food safety, animal and plant health information. (31, 33, 34).
36. As a mechanism for interactive dialogue between scientists, risk managers, consumers and consumer organizations is known to contribute to better mutual understanding and risk communication, Members and Organizations involved in food production and trade should enhance transparency and pro-active communication with consumers in understanding scientific advice and in decision-making processes. (36, 39, 40)
37. The development of strong independent consumer organizations should be promoted as an essential element in public discourse and an essential voice (among others) in the decision-making process (45).
38. Government reports and submissions on policy issues to public bodies should always be published promptly when they are received and above all in time to allow other interested stakeholders to comment on them (46).
39. Members and other parties involved in food production and trade should undertake examination of the overall contribution of commercial food safety and quality claims to consumers' understanding and misunderstanding (47).

+++