CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION **E**

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

World Health Organization

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International Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health (IPFSAPH)

Introduction

The International Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health (IPFSAPH) was formally launched in 2004 following the recognition by a number of international organisations on the need for a single access of official information on food safety, animal and plant health. The contributing partners are the Biodiversity Clearing House (BCH), Codex Alimentarius, IPPC, OECD, OIE, WHO and WTO. In accordance with the decision taken at the 7th Session of the Codex Task Force on Biotechnology (ALINORM 08/31/34)[1] the Portal was later expanded to provide information on biotechnology.

The objective of the Portal is to facilitate trade in food and agriculture products through improved global access to relevant information.

During the early period of its operation the Portal was widely used (70.000 visitors per month in 2005). However, problems with the technical infrastructure of the portal emerged over the last few years which greatly affected its functionality and drastically reduced web traffic. FAO has, over the last 2 years, addressed the major technical problems and continues to ensure regular maintenance and upgrading, particularly in relation to the "search" function.

Current Status

IPFSAPH is currently operational and allows its users to search for cross-sectoral data. Users can look for information in five different categories: commodity, topic, country, type and source. The keyword search functions are being improved to allow more focussed searches and sorting of results by relevance or by date.

As of May 2011, IPFSAPH contains more than 30,000 records mainly from international sources including Codex standards, recommended codes of practice, laws, regulations, WTO notifications, risk assessments, maximum residue limits and Codex contact point details.

As noted above, the Portal offers a venue on biotechnology information. Under this general title there are two subtitles: "GM food safety assessments" and "Low Level Presence of recombinant-DNA plant material in food" (LLP-rDNA relevant information). Currently, under "GM food safety assessments", users can find

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[1]   Available at: http://www.fao.org/biotech/detail_event.asp?event_id=37215

official information on r-DNA plants authorised in accordance with the Codex Guideline for the Conduct of Food Safety Assessment of Foods Derived from recombinant-DNA Plants. GM food safety assessments have been uploaded by Australia, New Zealand, the European Union (including EFSA), the OECD and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is in the process of uploading their GM food safety assessments.

Currently, under the subtitle "LLP-rDNA relevant information", LLP regulations (e.g. thresholds) and related information can be uploaded, however, so far, no countries have uploaded any data. Countries are encouraged to upload this information.

The implementation of the French version of the Portal has been completed and IPFSAPH is currently available in English and French.

Future Strategy

The future strategy of IPFSAPH is to include more national data. Enhanced national official information on the Portal would give IPFSAPH a unique character. Enhanced national information would meet the needs of regulators, traders and industry because it would give them access to legislation, regulations and other relevant information of many countries within one single-access point.

The sustainability of IPFSAPH will be assured only if national authorities take the responsibility to share their national data through a self-uploading mechanism. It is a win-win situation in which on the one hand, it improves the utility of the Portal to all countries (having access to national legislation of other countries) and on the other hand, it makes the whole project more sustainable.

To facilitate the inclusion of national data, an instruction package has been developed as a tool to guide national authorities to upload their own national data into IPFSAPH. With this aim, a limited number of pilot countries have been selected where national consultants (hired by FAO) are in the process of uploading the relevant national data on food safety, animal and plant health into IPFSAPH.

Invitation

The success of IPFSAPH depends on the interest and commitment of member countries to contribute sharing their own national data and support its sustainability. Therefore, we cordially invite national governments to disseminate their own laws, regulations, standards or other official information related to the SPS agreement as well as GM food safety assessments and LLP-rDNA relevant information through IPFSAPH.

Contact

For further information, please contact us. IPFSAPH help desk is available at ipfsaph@fao.org.