



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
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FAO/WHO GLOBAL FORUM OF FOOD SAFETY REGULATORS

Marrakesh, Morocco, 28-30 January 2002

FAO/WHO CONCEPT PAPER GLOBAL FORUM OF FOOD SAFETY REGULATORS

Purpose: To convene, on a regular basis, Global Fora of Food Safety Regulators to promote the exchange of information on approaches and experiences in dealing with current food safety issues of potential importance to public health and international food trade to advance the process of science-based public consultations and to facilitate capacity building, particularly in developing countries.

Background: The proposed Fora would respond to the Communiqué of the Okinawa G-8 Summit which encouraged FAO and WHO “to organize periodic international meetings of food safety regulators to advance the process of science-based public consultations.”

In the international arena, the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) is, and will continue to be, the primary international body for food standard setting. It is important that the proposed fora do not duplicate Codex work and direct their attention to those issues, which would complement Codex. Capacity building of national food safety systems and programmes is one of such issues. Other issues include public perception of science-based food safety regulations, transboundary consequences of food safety emergencies, integrated approaches to food safety enhancement and coordinated resource mobilization.

FAO governing bodies, at global and regional levels, have given high priority to the work of the CAC and to FAO’s programmes and activities in the field of food quality, safety and consumer protection. They urged FAO to continue to provide the necessary technical advice and support in this field to developing countries, to enhance their capabilities in ensuring safe food supply and promoting international food trade.

The 53rd World Health Assembly (WHA) held in Geneva in May 2000 clearly demonstrates its commitment to the overarching principle that food safety is an essential public health function. The resolution adopted by the WHA calls upon both Member States and WHO to become involved in a range of multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary actions to promote the safety of food at the international, national and local levels. The need to cooperate and communicate with the agricultural sector to assure the safe production, harvest and storage of food commodities was also identified in the light of several recent episodes which have raised the perception of food safety concerns among consumers.

Participants: Regulatory authorities responsible for food safety mainly but not limited to Ministries of Health and Agriculture from FAO and WHO member countries. This will include representatives of independent food safety agencies and other ministries with responsibilities for food safety. INGOs representing industry, producer, trade and retail associations and consumer groups would play a useful role in discussing certain issues and should therefore be involved.

Partners: The Fora would be held jointly between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization. Other international organizations, *including* OECD, OIE, UNEP, UNICEF, UNIDO, WTO, the World Bank and other development agencies would be invited to participate as observers.

Description: The Fora would be structured as 3-4 day meetings with plenary sessions, workshops, working groups, group discussions as appropriate, to address, under a central theme, specific topics, balanced to include the interests and views of both developed and developing countries. It would provide the possibility for country groupings or regions to identify and address regional concerns.

Reporting: The Forum is not expected to report to either FAO or WHO or to governments; FAO and WHO will instead issue a summary report and arrange for the publication of the proceedings. However, governments and international organizations would be encouraged to make full use of the proceedings in promoting food safety.

Budget: The budget for the organization of the first Forum should include costs of preparing the necessary documentation in the official languages of both FAO and WHO as well as the cost for the actual convening of the Forum (meeting room cost, interpretation cost, logistics cost). It should also include support to the participation of delegates from developing countries.