



AGRIBUSINESS AND COMMERCIALIZATION PROGRAM
AGRICULTURAL HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY PROGRAM
INTER-AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR COOPERATION ON AGRICULTURE
www.iica.int

IICA Participates at FDA Hearing on the New U.S. Food Safety Law and Capacity Building Initiatives.

April 4th, 2011. IICA-Miami Office, Miami, FL – On March 30 and 31st, 2011, representatives from IICA participated at a public hearing focused on the implementation steps of the new U.S. Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) that was signed by President Obama on January 4th of 2011. The event was hosted by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the Department of Health and Human Services of the United States in College Park, Maryland, near Washington D.C., with participants from industry, academia and consumer groups, as well as international participants from various countries. Dr. Marcos X. Sanchez-Plata, Food Safety Specialist from the IICA Office in Miami and Dr. Priscila Henríquez, Specialist in Management of Technological Innovation from the IICA Office in Washington represented IICA at this hearing entitled: *Ensuring the Safety of Imported Foods and Animal Feed*. Day one of the hearing focused on *Comparability of Food Safety Systems and Import Practices of Foreign Countries*; while day two, focused on *Policies, Practices, and Programs Used by Foreign Regulators to Ensure the Safety of Imported Foods and Animal Feed, and Capacity Building Alternatives*.



A series of hearings has been organized with the purpose of supporting the implementation of the newly enacted FSMA, which, according to the hearing documents, “embodies the principle of prevention by requiring those who produce and import food to have systems of preventive controls in place and empowering FDA to hold them accountable to meet their new responsibilities.” The implementation of the new food safety law will have significant implications for agricultural producers from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), since a significant part of the new requirements directly affects the entry and commercialization of imported foods in the U.S. territory.

IICA was invited by the Technical Cooperation and Capacity Building Division and the International Affairs office of the FDA to discuss capacity-building strategies that are currently being implemented by the Institute in IICA member countries. IICA is signing a memorandum of understanding with the FDA to promote capacity building activities in LAC that will facilitate understanding of the new law by exporters in the region. According to FDA officers, one of the overall objectives of the hearings is to define a strategy to support capacity-building activities that will facilitate the implementation of the FSMA by trade-partner countries of the U.S., while facilitating its enforcement by FDA officers. Because of this, a significant portion of the hearing focused on the issue of Comparability of Food Safety Systems between countries, as a means to facilitate the implementation of this law. Some examples of comparability assessments currently under way with countries such as New Zealand and with the European Union were discussed during the hearing. In addition, a tool aimed at facilitating the process of comparability between trading partners was also presented. The tool, called ICAT, for International Comparability Assessment Tool, features a series of components for food safety control systems that will be used for comparative purposes.



Dr. Sanchez-Plata presented during the hearing some of the IICA initiatives to provide technical cooperation on food safety control systems and issues related to commercialization of agricultural products. The lines of action and individual initiatives developed by the Agricultural Health and Food Safety (AHFS) Program, and the Agribusiness and Commercialization Program (PAC) of IICA were presented at this hearing. The Performance, Vision and Strategy (PVS) tool for National Food Safety Systems and other initiatives, such as the Executive Leadership in Food Safety (ELFS) program that the institute has successfully implemented in several IICA member countries, were presented. In addition, Dr. Sanchez-Plata discussed the outcomes of the series of Export Platforms and related activities on Requirements for Exports that the PAC has implemented in several countries in the Americas and the Caribbean, in cooperation with public and private institutions.

Other forum participants included the Grocery Manufacturers Association, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Bank, and the European Union. At the end of the hearing, a panel discussion was held with all participants to explore options available to FDA to support capacity building initiatives that would facilitate implementation of the FSMA with different trading partner countries. The FDA will collect all inputs from these hearings and other comments submitted through the public hearing process until June of 2011, before making any decisions about the way forward with FSMA implementation.

The implications for agriculture and food producers in Latin America and the Caribbean are important, because the changes outlined in the new law will affect market access into the U.S. if those requirements are not properly complied with by agricultural producers and officials in exporting countries. It should be noted that the law is yet to be implemented and it could face some resistance at World Trade Organization venues, if some of the components are considered to become barriers to trade. However, it is important for IICA member countries to be prepared in case the new requirements are implemented. IICA has been working on capacity building programs related to these subjects through both the Agricultural Health and Food Safety Program and the Agribusiness and Commercialization Program. More information can be obtained at www.iica.int.

For additional information contact:

Dr. Marcos Sanchez-Plata, Food Safety Specialist: marcos.sanchez@iica.int

Dr. Ricardo Molins, Head AHFS Program: ricardo.molins@iica.int

Dr. Miguel Garcia, Head PAC: miguel.garcia@iica.int

Dr. Priscila Henríquez, Specialist in Management of Technological Innovation: phenriquez@iicawash.org