



Director of Agricultural Health of IICA discusses current influenza outbreak with CAS Ministers

The Southern Agricultural Council (CAS) welcomed the Director of Agricultural Health and Food Safety at its sixteenth meeting, held in Paraguay.

Asuncion, Paraguay, 30 April 2009 (IICA). The Director of Agricultural Health and Food Safety (AHFS) of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Ricardo Molins, discussed with the Ministers of Agriculture of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Bolivia and Paraguay the facts and the myths surrounding the “North American influenza” or human influenza H1N1.

This information was reported by the press service of the Southern Agricultural Council (CAS). Molins participated in the XVIth Meeting of the CAS, for which IICA serves as Technical Administrative Secretariat.

During his intervention, Molins explained the genetic composition of the virus: it has a human influenza A segment, which is what allows humans to be their host, a bird flu segment, three segments from various swine flus (North America, Europe, Asia). “It is what the experts call a globalized flu, genetically speaking”, he said.

He said that in his opinion, “it is highly likely that the virus has been going around for some months and that it did not necessarily originate in Mexico”. However, given the fact that the first reported cases were in the northern part of the American hemisphere, the United Nations and the World Health Organization are recommending that we call this flu ‘North American flu’. He recalled that a similar phenomenon had existed in 1918, referred to as the Spanish flu, and in 1979, there was what came to be known as the Hong Kong influenza.

The Director of AHFS of IICA said that the reference to the virus as swine flu had affected the pork meat and pork derivatives market. For example, sales in Mexico had dropped 30 % and several countries had closed their markets to these products, which was causing major losses for producers.

On this note, Molins recalled that the virus was not caught from eating pork, but was transmitted from person to person. He also stressed the importance of taking extreme precaution with regard to biosafety measures and reinforcing the epidemiological surveillance of sanitary services on hog farms.

Finally, Molins recalled that the North American flu had a low mortality rate: whereas the avian flu had a 50 per cent mortality rate, that rate was only 10 per cent in the case of the North American flu.

For further information
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