

**Regional Meeting on
Modernizing food Control Systems in SAARC Region,
December 10-11, 2002, Kathmandu**

**Sponsored By ILSI, FAO and ILSI-India
in association with ILSI South Asia Nepal Committee**

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Harmonization of Food Regulations

The last Regional meeting held in December 2000 had agreed that a comparative study be made of the different food regulations currently applicable in member countries of the SAARC region, so that they could be harmonized utilizing the Codex Standards as benchmark. On the basis of the decision the following groups/classes of food were allotted to each of the following countries for such comparative study:

Fish and fishery products:	Bangladesh
Cereals, pulses and legumes:	India
Processed fruits and vegetables:	India
Milk and milk products:	India
Fats and oils:	Nepal
Meat and meat products:	Pakistan
Herbs and spices:	Sri Lanka

The delegates of Bangladesh and Pakistan refer to the situation in regard to regulation of fish and fishing products, and meat and meat products in their countries, respectively. No comparison was made with regulation of these products in other SAARC countries. It was agreed

that the two countries would complete the comparative studies within the next three months and send the information, to FAO Rome and ILSI-India, for further action. It was also agreed that ILSI-India would consolidate the information and circulate it to all the focal points.

Focal points in India (Dr. S. R. Gupta), Nepal (Dr. Tika B Karki), and Sri Lanka (Mr. S Nagiah) presented the comparative studies on cereals, pulses and legumes, process fruits and vegetables, milk and milk products, fats and oils, and herbs and spices.

The meeting complimented the presenters for the excellent work done by them. It noted that there were some gaps in the tables, which will be needed to be filled, and also there was need for information to be reached to be checked for accuracy. On the basis of the discussion the meeting agreed to the following plan of actions:

1. Each country to check the information contained in each table and complete or update the information vis-à-vis its regulations. The task must be completed by January 2003.
2. While correcting the tables international terminology of Codex should be used where applicable e.g. acid value for FFA or RI for BR reading.
3. Harmonize the number of parameters in standards to the extent possible with Codex.
4. To facilitate harmonization, each country should send comments on its willingness to accept Codex standards where available.
5. Corrected and completed tables with comments on the above parameters should be sent to the concerned focal points by end January, 2003 with copies to FAO Rome and ILSI- India.
6. Steps should be taken to bring the focal points of different countries (coordinators) at a meeting at least once four months so that the process of harmonization can be completed by the end of December 2003.

- 7 The Focal points should send information on horizontal standards like contaminants, food additives, pesticide residues, and labeling to ILSI-India for initiating comparative study and elaborated proposal for common harmonized regulations.**

On the modernization of food control system, the meeting agreed that the existing food laws and regulations governing food safety in most countries of the region were outdated. The advancement in science and the upcoming WTO make it imperative that these food laws and regulations are revised and updated. The work underway by FAO, WHO and Codex, offers a suitable framework for the required updating in this area.

The implementation of food safety laws and regulations in member countries was found to be lacking the required focus and in most cases led to multiple responsibilities to various agencies. The meeting recommended the creation of an autonomous food control body in each country, to provide focus for policy direction, monitor, and coordinate the activities of various agencies and organizations assigned the task of implementation. Such an organization/body could then form the focal point for regional and global harmonization.

In the area of Capacity building, the meeting made the following recommendations:

- 1. Each country in the SAARC region should identify those institutions, which have recognized expertise in areas related to food safety, food control and capacity building, and to establish a directory of such institutions for dissemination among all concerned agencies.**
- 2. FAO and ILSI-India should consider developing the necessary materials and implementing "Training of Trainers" (TOT) courses in areas of major importance for capacity building such as: food inspection including import/export inspection and certification, Codex, food analysis, food control management, etc.**
- 3. Industry associations with support from Governments should develop "web-based interactive courses" on pertinent subjects**

related to food quality assurance (HACCP, GMPs, GHPs, GAP) and encourage the use of these courses through proper incentives.

- 4. Focal points should forward within reasonable time to FAO/ILSI-India details of experts in food safety related fields, in a format prepared by FAO/ILSI-India. FAO/ILSI-India should prepare Directory of these experts for distribution in SAARC region.**
- 5 SAARC Secretariat may be approached by FAO/ILSI-India to sensitize the Governments in the region about the urgent need to strengthen the country focal points and provide the necessary political and logistical support to modernization of food control system and the harmonization process.**