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VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH: PROGRESS REPORT ON THE SECRETARIAT'S COMPLIANCE WITH THE MANDATES OF THE PAHO GOVERNING BODIES, 2004-2005

The Veterinary Public Health Unit (VP) is part of PAHO's Area of Disease Prevention and Control (DPC) and consists of the coordinating office at Headquarters in Washington, D.C., two Pan American centers—INPPAZ and PANAFTOSA—and the veterinary public health advisers in the Member States. It works in the areas of zoonosis prevention and control, food safety, and the eradication of foot-and-mouth disease, pursuant to the mandates of the PAHO Governing Bodies and advisers. It does so in keeping with the United Nations' objectives for its agencies and the needs of the countries and through strategic partnerships with other international agencies. Its regional advisory forums such as RIMSA, COHEFA, and COPAIA provide the needed political support for initiatives in the Region.

From 2003 to 2005, efforts intensified to effectively integrate the health and agriculture sectors, both public and private, into the framework of the principles defined in the Millennium Development Goals and the priorities set by the Governing Bodies of PAHO. In addition, national and regional veterinary public health policies to foster human development and sustainable economies have been strengthened, with a view to improving the living conditions of populations, which is the ultimate objective of its actions.

The countries reaffirmed their commitments to eradicate foot-and-mouth disease and eliminate human rabies transmitted by dogs in the Region, a goal that has nearly been met in this period. Progress continued in consolidating national food-safety programs. Joint activities began with other areas of PAHO and international and national agencies for local development, as did a comprehensive strategy for human and animal health with a focus on the countries' rural areas. Also, emerging zoonoses called for special attention and have been added to the agenda of new challenges to be addressed in the next biennium. Better information management and institutional communication were considered indispensable to the actions taken in the past two years.

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Structure, Priorities, and Regional Mandates of the Veterinary Public Health Unit of PAHO/WHO

1. The Veterinary Public Health Unit (VP) is part of the Area of Disease Prevention and Control (DPC) of the Pan American Health Organization, which is the Regional Office of the World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO). It consists of the coordinating office at Headquarters in Washington, D.C.; the Pan American Institute for Food Protection and Zoonoses (INPPAZ) in Buenos Aires, Argentina; the Pan American Foot-and-Mouth Disease Center (PANAFTOSA) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and the Veterinary Public Health advisers in the Member States. Pursuant to the mandates of the PAHO Governing Bodies and advisers, the Unit provides technical cooperation to the Member States in three main areas: zoonoses prevention and control, food safety, and eradication of foot-and-mouth disease.

Table 1. Structure and Human Resources of the Veterinary Public Health Unit

Location	International Professionals	National Professionals	Technical and Administrative Staff	Total
Washington Headquarters	3	-	2	5
PANAFTOSA	10	9 *	73***	92
INPPAZ	6	7 **	24	31
Countries	6	7	-	13
Total	25	23	99	141

* 2 UN staff

** 1 UN staff

*** 18 UN

2. The Unit's goal is to help reduce morbidity and mortality from the principal zoonoses and foodborne diseases (FBDs), as well as the socioeconomic impact of foot-and-mouth disease. Its main objective is to strengthen the capacity of the Member States to prevent, control, and eradicate these diseases.

3. The Region of the Americas has political forums such as the Inter-American Meeting, at the Ministerial Level, in Health and Agriculture (RIMSA), which places special emphasis on collaboration and coordination between the health and agriculture sectors, with strong private-sector participation. Equally important are regional technical bodies such as the Hemispheric Committee for the Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (COHEFA) and the Pan American Commission for Food Safety (COPAIA), in which ministers and private-sector representatives take part. These forums provide political and technical support for the Unit's activities and allow the countries to

collectively assume commitments and share responsibilities for adhering to the fundamental principles set forth in the Millennium Development Goals.

4. The technical cooperation activities of the Unit are in keeping with mandates issued by PAHO's Governing Bodies. The principal regional mandates of the current programs are:

- the Regional Program for the Elimination of Human Rabies Transmitted by Dogs;
- the Hemispheric Plan for the Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease;
- the Regional Program for Technical Cooperation in Food Protection.

5. Pursuant to these mandates or the additional monitoring mandates of these programs, the Unit coordinates the technical-cooperation activities made operative through the Pan American Centers, INPPAZ and PANAFTOSA, and the consultants in the countries.

Unit Strategies

6. The current focus of PAHO technical cooperation objectives is to address the unfinished agenda, protect the achievements obtained, and face new challenges. Other strategies are cooperation centered on priority countries and the establishment of strategic partnerships.

7. In compliance with PAHO's technical cooperation focus, the Veterinary Public Health Unit is already working in this direction, concentrating its efforts on addressing part of the unfinished agenda in the six countries where cases of human rabies transmitted by dogs continue to occur. Furthermore, protecting the achievements in the other countries is a priority, since the existence of human rabies cases in the Region is unacceptable. Ensuring the gains made by countries free of foot-and-mouth disease is one of the Unit's goals to promote economic development. Cooperation to enable countries to set up food safety programs is a priority that should be urgently addressed to reduce the population's risks of contracting foodborne diseases and promote tourism and the food trade. New and emerging zoonotic diseases such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE; also known as "mad cow" disease) and avian influenza pose new challenges for technical cooperation, given their serious repercussions for public health and trade among the countries.

8. The PAHO strategy to promote partnerships with other international and national entities includes specific agreements on veterinary public health. The agreement with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) establishes activities for rural communities. Cooperation projects with the International Office of Epizootics (OIE) address issues such as foot-and-mouth disease, monitoring for BSE, the

International Zoosanitary Code, and animal health. For surveillance of zoonoses—such as equine encephalitis—the Unit has strengthened its ties to the Regional International Organization for Plant Protection and Animal Health (OIRSA). With the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Inter-American Network of Food Analysis Laboratories (INFAL) is being organized and epidemiological surveillance of swine fever is being conducted. In addition, technical cooperation agreements have been reached with national agencies such as the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) on strengthening animal health and food safety programs to facilitate the food trade; with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to improve surveillance of FBDs; and with Brazil's National Health Surveillance Agency (ANVISA), the Colombian Livestock Institute (ICA), and Chile's Agricultural and Livestock Service, to carry out specific food safety and animal health projects.

9. PAHO promotes integration between health and agriculture sectors in both the public and the private spheres, consistent with the principles established by the United Nations Organization (UN) for its specialized agencies, and jointly with other international entities in public health matters. In this context, the Unit focuses on core issues for strengthening national and regional veterinary public health policies, for human development, and for bettering families' economic situations to help improve the living conditions of populations.

10. Given the nature of its activities, the Unit works in various ways on matters related to the UN Millennium Development Goals. It fights poverty and hunger in populations by developing the rural environment, working to eliminate foot-and-mouth disease and other diseases with an economic impact that are present in the food chain. In these past two years, the Unit has become more directly involved in the Productive Municipios Initiatives for local development and the fight against poverty in rural areas. Other issues such as the reduction of communicable diseases—rabies and other zoonoses with an impact on public health—also are linked to the quality of life of the populations and these Goals.

11. The Strategic Plan for the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB) 2003-2007 brings together the Bureau's values, vision, mission, and functions, and it highlights the Bureau's priorities and the variables related to socioeconomic, environmental, and political change and their impact as relevant factors for public health. Moreover, the current and emerging trends behind these changes have led to actions to promote veterinary public health. The Unit works according to the Strategic and Programmatic Orientations (SPO) defined each quadrennium by PAHO, considering the complexity of political and economic factors, their interrelationship, the needs of the countries and the Region, and the technical expertise needed to deal with intersectoral issues.

12. To help strengthen veterinary public health actions in the countries, PAHO supported the creation of the Inter-American Society for Veterinary Public Health (SISPVET) at the 19th Meeting of the Pan American Congress on Veterinary Sciences (XIX PANVET) in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2004.

Hemispheric Program for the Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease

13. Pursuant to Resolution RIMSA R.13, which endorsed the March 2004 recommendations of COHEFA 9, the Hemispheric Conference on the Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease was held, organized in conjunction with the USDA, in Houston, Texas. This special Conference—which resulted in the Houston Declaration—reaffirmed the commitment of countries both with and without foot-and-mouth disease to eradicate this disease from the Hemisphere. In keeping with one of the Conference’s recommendations, the Inter-American Group for Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (GIEFA) was created with the objective of following up on the plan of action for the final phase in the eradication of foot-and-mouth disease. The event was attended by a large number of agriculture and health ministers, producer representatives, international cooperation agencies, observers for direct agents with a role in the agricultural production chain, and public and private agencies, both regional and global.

14. To provide support to GIEFA’s work, the 1st Special Meeting of the Hemispheric Committee for the Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease was held in Brasilia on 1 December 2004. The meeting approved the 2005-2009 Plan of Action of the Hemispheric Program for the Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (PHEFA), which will be presented to COHEFA 10 and RIMSA 14, and issued recommendations for the continuation of COHEFA’s and GIEFA’s work with the Secretariat ex officio of PAHO/PANAFTOSA.

15. Eradicating foot-and-mouth disease in endemic South American countries is essential for the economies of these countries, mainly those that export meat and other animal products, and for ensuring the availability of animal protein for human nutrition. Activities in South America are reflected in the absence of the disease in approximately 247 million head of cattle (77%) on more than 50% of the continental land area. Furthermore, the eradication of foot-and-mouth disease would be included as an in-depth contextual topic for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goal to fight poverty and hunger, mainly in rural areas (Table 2).

Table 2. Foot-and-Mouth Disease Situation in the Americas

Current Situation	Regions, Countries, and Areas
Disease-free without vaccination	North America, Central America and the Caribbean, Chile, Guyana, French Guiana, Argentina south of the 42nd parallel, the Choco area in Colombia, and southern Peru
Disease-free areas and countries with vaccination	Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina north of the 42nd parallel, 16 states in Brazil, the Chiquitanía in Bolivia, and the Atlantic Coast and Amazon region of Colombia
Countries with outbreaks in 2004	Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela

Source: PANAFTOSA/OPS Situación de los Programas de Erradicación de la Fiebre Aftosa, Sud América 2004

16. PANAFTOSA is recognized by the OIE and FAO as a center of reference on vesicular diseases for the American Hemisphere. Twelve official laboratories are devoted to diagnosis and/or vaccine control and research and are linked to PANAFTOSA as a reference laboratory of the OIE and FAO in order to meet the international requirements outlined in sanitary standards and imposed by the global market.

17. In some Andean countries—mainly Ecuador and Venezuela—as well as the Amazon region of Brazil, progress is still needed to control this disease. This need could be considered an item on the unfinished agenda. In light of the recent events in its Amazon region, the Brazilian government decreed the eradication of foot-and-mouth disease a priority. PAHO is working with the Andean Community of Nations to promote programs in this subregion. Given the potential economic effects on importing and exporting countries—effects that could prove disastrous for Latin American countries—the eradication of foot-and-mouth disease is not only a PAHO mandate but a Unit priority. Cooperation activities related to this priority should be intensified in the next two years with the participation of the countries and through partnerships with other international entities equally interested in this issue.

Elimination of Human Rabies Transmitted by Dogs

18. The elimination of human rabies transmitted by dogs is a mandate of the Organization that the Unit has been carrying out since 1983, when the Regional Program for the Elimination of Human Rabies Transmitted by Dogs was established jointly with the countries. This Program is executed and financed by the countries and receives

technical cooperation from PAHO through the veterinary public health advisers in the countries, PANAFTOSA, and Headquarters.

19. The Program has made significant progress, with a 91% reduction in human cases and a 93% reduction in canine cases between 1982 and 2003. The goal was to eliminate the disease by 2005, and it will come close to being reached, since 20 cases of human rabies transmitted by dogs were reported in six countries in 2004 (Bolivia, Brazil, El Salvador, Haiti, Paraguay, and Venezuela). In the past three years, Haiti and Bolivia, which are part of the Organization's group of "key countries," have been among the countries with the highest number of cases of human rabies transmitted by dogs.

20. For the countries that have succeeded in eliminating the circulation of the rabies virus among the canine population, cooperation activities are aimed at protecting achievements in eliminating the disease. This group includes the Southern Cone, most of which is free of canine rabies, all of Chile and Uruguay, most of Argentina and Paraguay, all of Southern Brazil plus São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Also in this group are Panama and Costa Rica, as well as several departments in Peru and several states in Mexico.

21. Human rabies transmitted by wildlife, especially by bats, has assumed greater epidemiological importance. Because of its characteristics, it can be understood as a challenge to be faced through the Unit's cooperation. Still, it cannot be considered a new disease. The number of human rabies cases transmitted by bats increased in 2004 owing to significant outbreaks in Brazil (22 cases), Colombia (14 cases), and Peru (8 cases), surpassing the number of cases of human rabies transmitted by dogs for the first time in the history of the Regional Program for the Elimination of Rabies, established in 1983. In 2004, cases of human rabies transmitted by bats accounted for 66% of all cases, and those of rabies transmitted by dogs, for 29%, compared with 65% of all cases transmitted by dogs in previous years.

22. Human rabies transmitted by bats demands more complex control strategies than those used against human rabies transmitted by dogs. In general, the areas affected are remote, often in jungle regions, where people have no way of reaching health services. Preventing these outbreaks requires the development of joint strategies among the health, agricultural, and environmental sectors, *inter alia*. Risk situations must be foreseen and integrated preventive action taken. To implement this type of technical cooperation, new strategies leading to intersectoral action must be attempted, as indicated by each country's particular circumstances.

23. In 2004, in conjunction with the Rabies Control Directors of the countries of Latin America, PAHO conducted a study titled "Elimination of Human Rabies Transmitted by Dogs in Latin America," which analyzes the epidemiological situation and the measures taken to control the disease. The study laid the technical foundations

for the review of the Regional Rabies Control Plan, which is being carried out by the Committee of National Rabies Control Directors in conjunction with PAHO. This study was one of the recommendations made by the 10th Meeting of Directors of National Rabies Control Programs of Latin America (REDIPRA 10) organized by PAHO in 2004, in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and by the 15th International Conference on Rabies in the Americas (RITA 15), where PAHO, as well as the host country, the USDA, and the CDC presided over the organizing committee.

Food Safety

24. Food safety is one of the priorities of the WHO General Work Program 2002-2005 and of PAHO's Strategic Plan 2003-2007. The 53rd World Health Assembly and the 44th PAHO Directing Council, both held in 2003, reiterated the importance of this issue. In addition, it is one of the institutional mandates, through the Regional Food Protection Program, and one of PAHO's technical cooperation objectives related to the unfinished agenda and the Millennium Development Goals.

25. The 3rd Meeting of COPAIA, held in Washington, D.C., in 2003, reviewed the progress of the Regional Food Safety Plan. It also made recommendations to RIMSA 13 and to the Governing Bodies to continue technical cooperation in this area, pursuant to the needs of the countries expressed through the Veterinary Public Health Unit at Headquarters and by INPPAZ and the veterinary public health consultants in the countries. It is important to note the better coordination attained with WHO's food safety area and the harmonization achieved in the targeting of technical cooperation activities at the regional and global level.

26. The period 2002 to 2004 witnessed a major mobilization of extrabudgetary resources and partnerships with WHO headquarters and other entities, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); the Brazilian Government, through ANVISA; the United States Agency for International Development (USAID); and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), for technical cooperation in the following areas: a project in coordination with the WHO Food Safety Department (WHO/FOS); financing from the Arab Gulf Program for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND) for community participation and education for implementation of the healthy market strategy in Bolivia, Guyana, Haiti, Paraguay, and the Dominican Republic; the validation and evaluation of a WHO food safety manual in coordination with the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama (INCAP); a joint CDC/PAHO pilot project on epidemiological surveillance of FBDs in Jamaica; an agreement with USAID to modernize food safety legislation in the countries of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM); a project with ANVISA on training staff members in

modern food-inspection systems; and improved surveillance of some foodborne diseases in countries of Latin America—a joint CDC and PAHO/WHO project.

27. In 17 countries, intersectoral food safety coordination can be said to have advanced toward the harmonization of food legislation, regulations, norms, and standards. Five countries are now using the Regional Information System on Food Regulations (LEGALIM) to update and harmonize their legislation.

28. Through coordination with WHO/FOS, a proposal was made and a guide was prepared for the creation of a global network called the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN). WHO began implementing the network in October 2004. Through February 2005, a total of 20 PAHO and 136 WHO Member States have officially registered in INFOSAN and have designated emergency contact points. The project to modernize food safety, animal health, and plant health legislation in the CARICOM countries has also contributed to the development of legislation harmonized with international standards, under intersectoral coordination, and attuned to the institutional capacity to adopt and apply it.

29. Regarding surveillance of FBDs, the work is based on local experiences and the coordination of networks such as the Regional Epidemiological Surveillance System for Foodborne Diseases (SIRVETA), with the participation of 20 countries of the Region; the Global Salmonella Surveillance Network; and PulseNet—in coordination with the CDC and Argentina's National Institute for Infectious Diseases—currently made up of countries.

30. For the modernization of food inspection systems, a training package was developed and numerous courses have been taught. In addition, a technical publication on the application of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP), Good Production and Manufacturing Practices (GPP/GMP), and standard operating procedures for cleaning and disinfection (SSOP) has been distributed. The AGFUND-financed project for the implementation of healthy markets is under way; its basic purpose is to promote the use of WHO's five key to safer food. Risk analysis training programs are being implemented.

31. To strengthen diagnoses in food analysis laboratories, INPPAZ has worked to consolidate the Inter-American Network of Food Analysis Laboratories (INFAL), established in 1997 and currently made up of 55 laboratories in 22 countries. INPPAZ is giving distance-learning courses on organization and management based on the ISO 17025 standard to support the network.

32. Regarding the management of food safety programs, countries have been encouraged to participate in the activities of Codex Alimentarius; to this end, the

FAO/WHO Trust Fund has been used to finance part of the travel expenses of staff members. At the global level, the Fund, which commenced operations in March 2004, supported the participation of staff members from 75 countries in 2004, including 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. In response to the recommendations of the Pan American Commission for Food Safety (COPAIA), INPPAZ, in conjunction with some universities in the Region, prepared a distance-education program for food safety managers, which is expected to begin in the second half of 2005.

33. To strengthen consumer education activities, use of the five keys to safer food has been promoted in collaboration with WHO, with an emphasis on their inclusion in primary- and secondary-school curricula. Outreach activities through INFO-PANALIMENTOS and the broad distribution of informative materials produced jointly by FAO and WHO, have continued.

Emerging Zoonoses

34. Emerging zoonoses are included among the priority objectives of PAHO technical cooperation as new challenges. Approximately 75% of emerging diseases in humans are of animal origin or are associated with animal populations. Hence, zoonoses should be regarded as a relevant issue for international public health. Currently, emerging zoonoses in their different manifestations are also increasingly important in the Americas as a public health issue and from a social and economic perspective.

35. Outbreaks of new diseases affect relationships between countries, due to their public health implications; they also affect international livestock and food markets, often resulting in the closing of export markets. Moreover, they directly affect populations by imposing changes in habits and creating potential panics, because of the news in the international media. Media reports on outbreaks of disease often have a social and political impact disproportionate to technical and scientific considerations. Zoonoses can also be used as agents of bioterrorism, an issue that gained currency on the international political agenda after the 9-11 attacks in the United States. When coverage of these matters is part of the daily news reported to the public, the extent of the economic damage is unforeseeable.

36. Interdependence among and mobility within societies create formerly unimaginable areas of risk, as occurred with the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), a new disease, possibly with an animal reservoir. Thousands of tourists changed their plans out of fear of a little-known disease, adversely affecting the tourism industry.

37. In 2004, a new need emerged that demanded technical cooperation in veterinary public health: avian influenza, a zoonosis potentially hazardous to public health. The Unit analyzed conducted needs analysis in order to intensify PAHO cooperation in this area in the Region. In a joint effort with the Communicable Diseases Unit of the Area of Disease Prevention and Control (DPC/CD), the Unit should produce a regional action plan to address this disease.

38. In the last decade, bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or “mad cow disease,” terrified the public and disrupted beef markets in Europe. A case in Canada in 2002 and one in the United States in 2003 were reported on television news programs, once again putting BSE in the spotlight in the U.S. and international media. Through PANAFTOSA, PAHO has been cooperating with the countries to enable them to diagnose the disease and strengthen surveillance systems.

39. PAHO is participating in the review of the International Health Regulations, which include the concept of “disease of international concern”. This will probably alter and expand technical cooperation requirements, including those for the diagnostic verification. The Veterinary Public Health Unit is part of a task force created at PAHO under the coordination of DPC for the review of these regulations.

40. New zoonoses undoubtedly pose challenges for international agencies in different dimensions—political, technical, and scientific. This scenario of emerging zoonoses implies changes in perceptions as well as in international health surveillance and trade standards and in the relationship between humans, animals, and the environment. It also points to the need for growing awareness by populations of the real risks of zoonoses and the relationship between animal health and human health. The development of education, information, and communication strategies at the national, regional, and international level is one of the urgent needs in this area. Planned mass media activities can minimize the risk of panic among the public, which most often is poorly or insufficiently informed about zoonoses and their risks.

41. Sectoral structures in health and agriculture by themselves will not be enough to deal with new zoonoses; the social sectors are key actors in these areas. The countries of the Region must also be politically and technically prepared to shoulder new responsibilities, just as international agencies must improve their response capacity through cooperative programs. Given these growing needs, PAHO is supporting the countries in the development of surveillance systems for several of these diseases, sending reagents and samples for diagnosis and setting up information systems. Nevertheless, much remains to be done, chiefly in the area of diagnosis, one of the most important components of epidemiological surveillance.

42. Following 9-11, it has become more difficult to ship samples of pathogens and donations of reagents for certain diseases, because they can be considered bioweapons. This hinders horizontal cooperation among the countries of the Region. PAHO is working on creating networks through its Collaborating Centers and on identifying reference centers for various zoonoses. In all these actions, the Unit is acting interprogrammatically, especially with DPC/CD on surveillance issues, and with the Essential Medicines, Vaccines and Health Technologies Unit of the Area of Technology and Health Services Delivery (HRT/EV) on quality laboratory systems.

43. Because of the global and intersectoral nature of emerging diseases, there is a need to integrate work with other international agencies such as the OIE and FAO to establish information and surveillance networks along the lines of the Global Alert and Response Network (GOARN) and INFOSAN.

Other Zoonoses

44. In addition to these recent diseases, other zoonoses that were not totally eliminated still remain. Some, such as plague, brucellosis, and bovine tuberculosis, can be controlled. As conceived by PAHO's strategies for action, this situation might be considered a priority technical cooperation objective to address the unfinished agenda. Several of these diseases, such as bovine and caprine brucellosis, bovine tuberculosis, hydatidosis, and cysticercosis, still pose important public health and socioeconomic problems. The control and eradication programs that the countries are promoting are in various stages of execution and in some countries.

45. Information about brucellosis in the Americas, in its reservoirs and in humans, remains deficient. In Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Paraguay, and Bolivia, *B. melitensis* is endemic in areas inhabited by indigenous populations living in extreme poverty. In northwestern Argentina, along the border with Paraguay and Bolivia, the historical infection rates in women and children are 54% and 32%, respectively. To act in this area, the Unit is putting together a local development project to obtain funds.

46. A study on the influence of the production system in determining the patterns of this zoonosis made it possible to develop a comprehensive intervention model to control and eliminate the risk to humans, but it is now necessary to revive interest among public and private stakeholders to implement the model. It should be noted that with PAHO technical cooperation, several countries are making progress in controlling brucellosis and tuberculosis through specific projects financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). These include Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru. Others, using their own resources and with PAHO cooperation, have also developed their own approaches for controlling and eradicating these diseases. Included in this group are Colombia and Mexico.

47. Nor have there been substantive changes in the epidemiological situation of bovine tuberculosis. Only limited information is available in Latin America on the frequency of tuberculosis in humans originating from infected cattle. PANAFTOSA provides the countries of the Region with standard bovine PPD so that official national control laboratories can test the potency of their supplies.

48. South America is among the areas of the world with the highest prevalence of hydatidosis. The disease is endemic in the province of Buenos Aires and the Mesopotamia and Cuyana regions of Argentina, in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, in Regions 6 and 7 of Chile, in Uruguay, and in the central highlands of Peru. The strategies for controlling the disease include canine deparasitization, health education, supervision of the slaughtering process, and control of the canine population. Application of these measures by the countries has made it possible to reduce the prevalence of the disease. However, in a number of areas there is no active participation by the community and no coordination between health and agriculture. RIMSA 7 issued a mandate to develop "strategies and action plans for the elimination of hydatidosis in the Southern Cone, the Andean Area, and other regions." This mandate was ratified by the Pan American Sanitary Conference in 2001. In July 2004, PAHO/Uruguay (the hydatidosis Focal Point) brought together the countries of South American subregion—Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay—for a constitutive meeting to formulate a Project for Hydatidosis Control. A meeting was held in March 2005 in Santiago, Chile, to decide on the final form of the Project.

49. The abundance of vectors and the vulnerability of certain communities in subtropical and tropical areas set the stage for the transmission of zoonoses such as leptospirosis, leishmaniasis, rickettsiosis, and arbovirus to humans. In 2004, the Unit organized a consultation of experts on rickettsiosis to raise awareness of these diseases and make recommendations to the countries of the Region. Twenty-nine experts from seven countries were present at the consultation. In that same year, with the support of the Unit and DPC/CD, the PAHO Office in Mexico organized a consultation on leptospirosis. An expert consultation on visceral leishmaniasis is scheduled for 2005. To address arbovirus diseases, a person from Central America was trained at the University of Texas in 2004 with resources from the RIOPPAH and the support of DPC/VP and DPC/CD.

Local Development

50. To bring about intersectoral integration, PAHO proposes the "Local Development: Productive and Healthy Rural Communities" strategy for rural areas where small, family-type livestock producers predominate. The objective of this strategy is to contribute to the social and economic development of municipios participating in the projects, through increased production, trade, distribution, and consumption of good

quality food of animal origin. In turn, it is hoped that this will offer new possibilities for better life options to rural populations, which account for nearly 23% of the Region's total population. These options include the productive-economic dimension of agricultural activities and human and animal health, with job creation and income generation for the construction of sustainable economies in the Region. The priority is rural areas, but the project may also include urban or periurban areas in which food is scarce.

51. The rural dimension in question is more than agricultural land. Its complexity involves environmental, cultural, security, and industrial and commercial production issues—in short, the range of activities that further human development. The territorial space where local-development initiatives are carried out is characterized by its multidimensionality, and not strictly in agriculture, which alone is not capable of reducing poverty. Consequently, this multidimensionality is not compatible with the specific sectoral vision and, naturally, that means that an intersectoral approach must inevitably be applied.

52. The role of veterinary public health is to strengthen the coordination between human and animal health activities with a view to integral community development. Animal health affects food production, domestic and international trade, human health—in short, people's quality of life. Thus, controlling and eliminating foot-and-mouth disease is an issue of special importance, as is food safety, and both are addressed by the technical cooperation provided by PAHO through the Veterinary Public Health Unit and the Member States.

53. To meet the challenges of local development, high-level intersectoral policy forums must be encouraged, such as those promoted by PAHO (RIMSA, COPAIA, and COHEFA) to ensure critical political support for initiatives. In addition, specific educational programs and interaction with the media, with stronger community participation, should be components of public policies for rural development.

54. In 2003 and 2004, VP in conjunction with OIRSA offered a course in Central America on local development and submitted a proposal for a project to further the development of small producers in the Chaco region. In addition, work is being coordinated through the healthy municipios initiative developed by PAHO's Area of Sustainable Development and Environmental Health. Through this work the Unit is attempting to address the current activities of these PAHO policy guidelines so as to contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

Information Management and Communication

55. Information and communication processes in matters related to veterinary public health are important because of the range of issues addressed by the Unit, the vast geographical area in which its actions are carried out, and the characteristics of its different target groups. The Unit's target groups consist of professionals in the health and agriculture sectors, entrepreneurs (livestock producers and the food sector), and rural workers, among others, all of whom are involved in the technical cooperation provided by the Unit. In addition to taking part in initiatives promoted by DPC, the Unit introduced the following information and communication initiatives: a) the project for the Veterinary Public Health Virtual Library (BVSPV), and b) a preliminary proposal for the Zoonosis Communication Plan.

56. The BVSPV project was made possible by the Latin American and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences Information (BIREME)/ANVISA agreement and is now being implemented at BIREME facilities in São Paulo, Brazil. The objective of the Virtual Health Libraries is to provide access to scientific and technical information as a determining indispensable element for different population groups to compile a body of knowledge on topics relevant for health and other related matters.

57. The Unit's Zoonosis Program includes actions to prevent and control several diseases within an integrated framework of health and agriculture. As this integration is considered strategic by PAHO, it should be replicated in communications activities related to zoonoses. Some zoonoses have a considerable impact on public health (human rabies and leptospirosis, for example), and others on the economies of the countries—for example, BSE, foot-and-mouth disease, and brucellosis. For this reason, different communication strategies geared to the specific characteristics and interests of their target groups are required.

58. Furthermore, the mass media in each country should be encouraged to participate in these initiatives through appropriate planning for both groups of zoonoses. The strategies indicated in the Plan include greater integration of health and agriculture, the creation of different levels of coordination for communication activities, coordination with existing information systems (for example, SIRVETA), and the adoption of different approaches in terms of instruments, languages, and media, giving consideration to zoonoses that affect public health and others with greater economic impact.

Outlook for the Next Biennium

59. The VP will concentrate its efforts on fulfilling the mandates of the Governing Bodies and advisory bodies on regional programs for zoonoses prevention and eradication, food safety, and foot-and-mouth disease eradication. To ensure the

availability of resources with which to carry out technical cooperation activities, it will employ PAHO strategies for the mobilization of extrabudgetary financial resources. It will make a priority of searching for strategic partnerships with other international, regional, and national organizations.

60. The Unit will base its activities on PAHO's strategic technical cooperation objectives to address the unfinished agenda, protect the achievements obtained, and meet new challenges. It will provide continuity for all technical cooperation activities aimed at the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals defined by the United Nations as a priority for its agencies. To this end, it will reduce communicable diseases such as rabies that mainly affect poor populations, as well as foodborne diseases and other zoonoses—actions that are indispensable to human development and improvement of quality of life of the population. For the fight against poverty and hunger, the targets for eradicating foot-and-mouth disease will be met and the local development strategy will be emphasized.

61. One of PAHO's roles for the next biennium is to integrate health and agriculture with a view to improving the quality of life of the Region's inhabitants. The intersectoral approach will continue to be encouraged, particularly the interaction between health and agriculture as the basis for advancing local development strategy. Action at the local level will encourage better results in controlling several diseases of the Veterinary Public Health Area covered by PAHO mandates, such as brucellosis, bovine tuberculosis, and hydatidosis, as well as a vast range of diseases directly related to food production, such as salmonellosis, which affects millions of people each year. This strategy will also make possible progress in the control of neglected diseases.

62. The challenges for the next biennium include the prevention and control of emerging zoonoses with a significant impact on the economy and public health. To this end, PAHO will continue to actively participate in reviewing and implementing the International Health Regulations.

63. The Unit will monitor current processes for managing information and communication on veterinary public health issues. For example, in conjunction with BIREME, it will monitor the project for the Veterinary Public Health Virtual Library. It will also monitor the websites of Headquarters and the Centers, the participation of initiatives promoted by DPC in these areas, and the formulation of the Mass Communication Plan on Zoonosis, which has now begun through the preliminary proposal.