



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



13th INTER-AMERICAN MEETING, AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL, ON HEALTH AND AGRICULTURE

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Provisional Agenda Item 9

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REPORT ON THE REGIONAL MEETING ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

1. The Meeting on the Safety of Foods derived from Biotechnology (GMFs) was held at the headquarters of the Pan American Institute for Food Protection and Zoonoses (INPPAZ), a specialized Center of the PAHO/WHO Program on Veterinary Public Health, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 20 to 21 February 2003.
2. The main objective of the meeting was to share knowledge and experiences on foods derived from biotechnology worldwide and to examine the situation and views with respect to this issue in the Region of the Americas through a discussion of case studies presented by the national authorities of six countries.
3. The Meeting underscored the importance of Codex Alimentarius since the creation of the World Trade Organization and the formation of the Codex Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology. This Task Force has produced the following reports: (a) preliminary principles for risk assessment; (b) specific guidance for risk assessment; (c) proposed draft guidelines for conduct of safety assessments of foods derived from recombinant DNA plants (d) a list of available analytical methods for genetically modified foods (GMOs).
4. It was emphasized in the general conclusions and recommendations that, if properly implemented, biotechnology and other technologies can play a key role in boosting food production and enhancing food security in the countries in general, and the developing countries in particular. Like other technologies, in order to improve the way in which food is produced and processed, biotechnology should be properly evaluated in terms of the potential direct and indirect risks that it poses to public health.
5. The conclusions and specific recommendations include developing an international framework for assessing the risk posed by genetically modified organisms

(GMOs) used in food production that includes animals in addition to plants and microorganisms. With regard to risk management, the steps taken should be proportional to the level of risk determined in the assessment. The communication of risks in food safety have generally received little attention—particularly communication of the potential benefits and risks associated with GMFs.

6. Finally, the meeting stressed the importance of capacity building (infrastructure and human resources) to boost applied research and technology transfer and development in the developing countries. PAHO/WHO and FAO have facilitated the appropriate use of this and other technologies to boost the production of safe foods.

7. The full report of this meeting is contained in information document RIMSA13/INF/1.
