

**Address by the Director of the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization
(PAHO/WHO)**

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World Assembly of Delegates of the
World Organization for Animal Health (OIE)**

Honorable President of the World Assembly of Delegates of the OIE, Dr. Carlos Correa
Honorable Director General of the OIE, Dr. Bernard Vallat
Distinguished Delegates of the OIE Member Countries
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I wish to thank the Director General for this invitation to talk about food and nutritional security, a topic of particular importance for public health, which is tied in many ways to the availability of animal protein, animal health, and the fight against animal diseases that affect production, such as foot-and-mouth disease.

Food security, defined as “the state in which all persons at all times have access to the food that they need, in adequate quantity and quality for effective consumption and biological utilization, and to guarantee a state of well-being that supports human development” is one of the biggest challenges facing humankind. Access to an adequate, consistent diet and nutrition is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is also set out in the first Millennium Development Goal. It is therefore a priority in defining our actions in the public health sphere.

I thank the Director General, Dr. Bernard Vallat, for inviting me to discuss this topic at this important forum, and I think it relates in part to PAHO’s experience. The Pan American Health Organization is celebrating its 110th anniversary this year. For historical reasons, and based on far-reaching and visionary approaches to collective health, it has worked for over 60 years to combat foot-and-mouth disease in the American hemisphere, through its veterinary public health program.

In the decades since the countries of the Americas, meeting at the Organization of American States (OAS), decided to create a specialized center for foot-and-mouth disease (PANAFTOSA)—which the Republic of Brazil generously offered to house in Rio de Janeiro—PAHO has worked in support of the eradication of this disease in the Americas and has progressively broadened its mandates to include other public health priorities such as zoonotic diseases and food safety.

Over the years, a coordinated effort was consolidated with the ministries of agriculture and their official veterinary services, the private and cooperative productive sector, and community stakeholders, that made it possible to undertake one of the most enriching work experiences in the history of our organization. It has involved, on the one hand, the opportunity to facilitate dialogue and collaboration between the agriculture and health sectors and, on the other, the need for surveillance, diagnostic, and prevention systems able to meet the enormous challenge of tackling a disease that affects several different animal species and has an enormous capacity for dissemination. This experience also became an education in how to go about mounting an integrated effort with different social and economic sectors in the public and private spheres, mobilizing and involving millions of livestock producers and their veterinary services. Finally, it has allowed us to bear witness to the extraordinary economic and social benefits that advances in control and eradication have brought to the majority of the countries of the Region.

In this context, one of the most important achievements has been the way in which activities to fight foot-and-mouth disease have contributed to food security, measured by the supply of animal protein available to the population. Indeed, FMD was endemic in virtually all significant livestock populations in South America from the time it was first introduced in the 19th century up until the late 1980s. In those days, the meat supply was precarious and only a couple of countries were producing enough protein

food for their populations and had some degree of exportable surplus. Over 10,000 foci of this disease were reported annually, with devastating effects on the production and productivity of most livestock herds. Meats were also subject to severe marketing restrictions due to the risk of dissemination of the infection, and export prices were far lower than those for meat products of comparable quality coming from countries free of this disease. This panorama created a vicious circle in which low productivity and profitability stemming mainly from the health problem made it economically unviable to invest at the levels necessary to significantly improve livestock production. By the early 1990s, so many years of systematic efforts by the countries and the Center had begun to bear fruit. The joint efforts of the authorities and livestock producers had a multiplier effect leading to widespread adhesion to surveillance, prevention and control activities and attracting growing political support from governments. Hard-won technological developments improved the quality of vaccines and mass screening tools so that health interventions could be targeted more effectively. At the same time, veterinary services gradually consolidated the management of their eradication programs, improved immunization campaigns and surveillance structures and systems, and strengthened their diagnostic capabilities. The structure of veterinary care in the field was modified significantly through the creation of operational veterinary units and animal tracking systems and the solid integration of livestock producers and social organizations. Within a short time, the occurrence of the disease had been tangibly reduced and considerable geographic areas, territories, and animal populations were identified where it systematically remained undetected. This meant that several hundred million heads of livestock were no longer at risk of infection. Countries began to receive international recognition as disease free areas from this prestigious sister institution, the World Organization for Animal Health, which had an unprecedented impact on international trade.

There is no question that this step forward in health was the result of a long, complex and far-reaching collective effort involving veterinary services, livestock producers, rural communities with technical support, and process monitoring by our Center. Here I would like to especially recognize the important contribution of the technical personnel from PANAFTOSA and from the countries, working together for innovation and technological developments, greater availability of diagnostic tools, and new approaches to epidemiological analysis.

To summarize, the main contributions of the struggle against FMD in our region are as follows: First of all, the figures reflect a significant increase in beef production due mainly to enhanced productivity measured by animal unit or by surface area used. The livestock herd has grown nearly 50% in less than 15 years and average extraction rates for South American livestock rose from 16% at the beginning of the 1990s to over 22% in 2010. Moreover, the bovine productive cycle has been shortened by over a year, while product quality has improved substantially. This has strengthened the supply of animal protein to meet the internal demand in our countries, and has also created a growing exportable surplus.

The second relevant occurrence was the reduction, and in some cases the elimination, of sanitary obstacles to recognition of the significant improvement of herd health in relation to FMD, since over 85% of the approximately 350 million head of cattle in South America have achieved free of foot-and-mouth disease status, with or without vaccination, with international recognition by the OIE. Exports of animals susceptible to FMD from South America have increased five-fold over the past ten years, reaching a total of more than US\$10 billion.

A third important facet of the struggle against FMD is the consolidation of veterinary services. Through their work on FMD, these services have acquired a technical and managerial maturity that allows them to operate successfully in broad areas of animal health that directly affect public health, such as zoonoses, food safety, waste control, and antimicrobial resistance, as well as to tackle new challenges in the prevention of exotic diseases. In this context, their work with FMD has strengthened interventions in other health-related aspects of the production of food of animal origin and in doing so, has improved the health conditions of animal and human populations.

The fourth aspect is associated with the economic benefits for countries with exportable surpluses. The latter are playing an increasingly significant role in improving the balance of trade and boosting tax revenues, which means more resources can be channeled to improving the population's standard of living. The livestock industry in general has become noticeably stronger, especially slaughterhouses, meat packing plants, and distribution and marketing chains, with the attendant impact on job creation and the standard of living of the participating sectors. This point is clearly illustrated by the dramatic impact of the recent outbreak of FMD foci in Paraguay, where the livestock industry collapsed, resulting in substantial losses in assets of over 40% of inventory value, and in state revenues. This has had negative repercussions for macroeconomic growth indicators with a nearly two point reduction in the Gross Domestic Product.

Against this backdrop, it is worth noting that FMD programs have contributed significantly to food security, directly and indirectly, especially for the human population of our continent, but also for the world's population, since our countries are the main providers of food of animal origin in the world.

It is also important to point out that as a complement to efforts to improve animal health, our Region is waging a frontal attack against child chronic malnutrition in the conviction that it is not only an unacceptable violation of rights, but also an obstacle to the harmonious and sustained development of families, communities, and nations. In this framework, PAHO, together with 14 other agencies of the United Nations system, launched the Pan American Alliance for Nutrition and Development in July 2008, in order to promote and support an approach to this problem based on its social determinants or more structural causes, rather than merely responding to its most immediate effects. This work is being done through direct support for the United Nations teams in the countries, so that they can provide more coordinated and seamless technical cooperation as a contribution to solving such a complex and multicausal problem as child malnutrition.

For these reasons, we must call attention to the major challenges that have to be addressed without delay in relation to foot-and-mouth disease.

The first challenge is that the task of eradication is still incomplete, since there are areas, usually not involved in the export process, where the virus is still circulating endemically. This poses a significant risk to the impressive investment that countries are making to fight this disease, which in 2011 surpassed US \$1.1 billion. Since this is a regional, rather than a local problem, solidarity and collective action is required to rapidly and effectively mobilize resources from the sectors that have most benefited from eradication processes to those countries and areas where the disease is still present. This is necessary not only from an ethical perspective, but also because a more intelligent use of resources is required, making short-term investments where they are most needed that will produce high-impact results on future profitability.

The second challenge is to ensure that the profits from the livestock business extend to family farming and to small- and medium-sized landowners through the incorporation of associative production systems with financial and technological support to improve productive efficiency and generate a growing marketable surplus. This challenge includes comprehensive improvement of herd health as a prerequisite for improving production and productivity.

The third challenge is to strengthen veterinary services as a vital tool for ensuring the quality and sustainability of health programs. This entails equipping them with the professional, technical, and resources structure they need to tackle the challenges of disease prevention. It also means moving toward expanding the sphere of action to effectively address areas relevant to animal health and production as well as public health, such as zoonoses and food safety, with close coordination and joint efforts by the ministries of health and environment. This need is clearly reflected in the fight against FMD, where weaknesses in veterinary services suffice to explain the limited progress in controlling this disease and its persistence in certain countries and areas. It is also important to strengthen veterinary services in light of the vital contribution they make to public health objectives by supporting compliance with the International Health Regulations in their sphere of competence.

The fourth challenge is to strike the necessary balance and harmony between the primary production and processing of food of animal origin in the context of the nutrition and food security and the negative impact of increasingly industrialized production on human health and environmental degradation. This is perhaps the challenge that most requires a coordinated effort on the part of producers, the production chain, and consumers, in an intergovernmental, intersectoral, and multidisciplinary effort in which human health and animal health are a common and shared objective. Continuing down this road, and cognizant of the challenges ahead, I have the honor of inviting each and every one of you to the XVI Inter-American Meeting, at the Ministerial Level, on Health and Agriculture (RIMSA 16), which will take place on 26 and 27 July 2012, in Santiago, Chile, and will address the topic of "Agriculture-Health-Environment: Joining forces for the well-being of the peoples of the Americas."

The fifth challenge is to coordinate efforts to improve animal health and food production with strategies to combat child chronic malnutrition and to achieve MDG1, especially among the most vulnerable groups and populations of our Region.

These are the main contributions and challenges in the fight against FMD in our region that we put before this great Assembly, the highest-level forum on global animal health. We wish to support and recognize the international strategy to control foot-and-mouth disease spearheaded by this Organization, a strategy in which we take part through our joint efforts, and guided by our shared purpose of contributing in a significant way to improving the health, standard of living, and defense of the basic rights of the citizens of the Americas.

I hope that your general assembly will be fruitful for the benefit of all the people of the world who expect courageous decisions and effective actions to ensure a good diet and nutrition for current and future generations. Thank you very much.