

For Official Use

C(2000)200/REV4



Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Economiques
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

15-Feb-2001

English - Or. English

COUNCIL

Council

PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF WORK ON FOOD SAFETY 2001-2002

(Note by the Secretary-General)

JT00102918

Document complet disponible sur OLIS dans son format d'origine
Complete document available on OLIS in its original format

**C(2000)200/REV4
For Official Use**

English - Or. English

PURPOSE

1. This revised note sets out, for discussion and approval, proposals for further work on food safety, as requested by Council in conclusion of its discussion of document C(2000)131 on 27 July [C/M(2000)19, Item 227, d)] and in light of further discussions held in Executive Committee and in Council.

BACKGROUND

2. OECD Ministers and G8 leaders have requested the OECD to undertake further work on food safety. The OECD Ministerial Communiqué noted that, “*The OECD will continue to undertake analytical work and to play an effective role in international policy dialogue on food safety, maintaining its engagement with civil society and seeking to share its work in this area with countries outside the Organisation’s membership. Drawing on its comparative advantages, the work of the OECD will effectively complement, without duplication, the activities of other international organisations, in particular the FAO and WHO.*” The G8 Communiqué noted with approval the further work agreed by OECD Ministers (see Annex 1 for text of Communiqués).

3. In response, Council document *Future Work on Food Safety and Related Biotechnology Issues* [C(2000)131] set out Secretariat proposals for further work. While no decisions were taken, initial discussion in Executive Committee and Council in July suggested there was general agreement that: the work of the Task Force for the Safety of Novel Foods and Feeds and the Working Group on Harmonisation of Regulatory Oversight in Biotechnology should continue, taking into account emerging issues identified in the respective G8 reports as requiring attention; the work of these groups is under discussion in the appropriate Committees and subsidiary bodies, with resources issues to be addressed by the Budget Committee, and is therefore not further discussed in this note (Annex 2); the Secretariat should bring forward a proposal with associated resource requirements in response to the invitation by OECD Ministers to consider holding a conference on the environmental impacts of GMOs; the EPOC will further consider this proposal at its meeting on 27-29 November on the basis of a note by the Secretariat (Annex 2); some follow-up to the work of the Ad Hoc Group on Food Safety was appropriate, although there was insufficient time for Council in July to discuss the proposed substance and structure of further work.

4. As requested by Council, the Secretariat further developed the proposals presented in C(2000)131 with respect to follow-up to the Ad Hoc Group, which could be taken up by the OECD in Council Document C(2000)200. The proposals were based on the following general guidelines, which emerged from those discussions:

- exploit and build on existing Ad Hoc Group work;
- utilise established OECD structures and horizontal capacities;
- identify specific activities and minimise demands on Member countries;
- avoid duplication and ensure co-ordination with other international agencies;
- maintain policy dialogue with officials and experts from capitals with food safety and related policy responsibilities; and
- involve developing countries, civil society and industry in the policy dialogue.

5. The Secretariat’s internal steering group (ICGB) has discussed the current proposal and outreach activities have been developed with CCNM. There has been initial dialogue with other international

governmental organisation (IGOs), in particular with FAO regarding the need to avoid duplication and enhance possible synergies with Codex.

6. Discussion in Executive Committee and Council in November strongly endorsed the need for an early decision for this important work to get underway in the OECD. There was widespread support for the proposals in C(2000)200, which were seen as balanced and appropriately taking into account the various sensitivities across the membership. However, the Secretariat was requested to refocus and repack some specific activities, to address *inter alia* concerns about duplication with other international organisations, to redress a perceived bias against the benefits of regulation, and to incorporate proposals for additional components. It was agreed that more discussion was needed on the purpose and timing of a high-level meeting. Executive Committee generally endorsed the revised document C(2000)200/REV1 as a substantial improvement but felt some additional nuances were necessary prior to submission to Council. In reviewing C(2000)200/REV2, Executive Committee requested additional clarification on some of the specific activity proposals for added clarity and a rewording of paragraph 17 concerning the high-level meeting, and agreed that Document C(2000)200/REV3, as possibly modified in light of the Executive Committee discussion of 13 December, would be transmitted to Council. At its 21 December 2000 meeting, Council requested the Secretariat to provide additional information on the rationale, approach and modalities for the proposed high-level meeting (see Annex 3) and agreed to return to this question at a forthcoming session [C/M(2000)29/PROV].

BUDGET AND REPORTING STRUCTURE

7. A programme of work for 2001-2002 has been developed in line with the OECD's two-year planning cycle. It represents incremental funding, which does not appropriate resources from other ongoing or planned activities within the Secretariat. Total staff and consultancy costs to undertake this horizontal work in food safety are estimated at FRF 2.8 millions over the two-year period. This is in addition to work already underway or planned within the Secretariat and financed from current resources. The decision of the Council concerning the budget of the Organisation for the financial year 2001 [C/PWB(2000)01/02/FINAL] approved the proposal from the Chair of the Budget Committee to allocate FRF 1.0 million for the programme of work on food safety from the Central Priority Fund, on the understanding that an agreed programme of work is to be implemented by June 2001. In addition, a carry-forward of appropriations from the 2000 CPF has been requested [EXD/CB(2000)57] which will complement the financing of the horizontal work on Food Safety.

8. Food safety is a horizontal programme of work within the Secretariat, to be managed by the Directorate for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and co-ordinated by the Internal Co-ordinating Group on Biotechnology (ICGB). The Committee for Agriculture will be responsible for the overall management of the programme and will approve the specific terms of reference for each activity, provide opportunities for member countries to review and comment on work in progress and review all draft reports. Consultation and co-ordination with other Committees and subsidiary bodies will be undertaken as appropriate:

- Given the high level of interest and sensitivity of this programme of work, progress reports will be provided to Executive Committee and/or Council to enable these bodies to monitor the work as it proceeds.
- The Trade Committee will have significant input through the subsidiary body, the Joint Working Party on Agriculture and Trade.
- The Public Management Committee, through the Working Party on Regulatory Management and Reform, will play a major role in the specification and review of those studies dealing with regulatory issues.

- Activities involving non-member countries will be co-ordinated through the Centre for Co-operation with non-members, with input from the Development Co-operation Directorate and the Development Centre as appropriate.
- Other parent committees and subsidiary bodies with an interest in food safety and related issues, such as the Task Force on Novel Foods and Feeds (ENV), the Working Group on Harmonisation of Regulatory Oversight in Biotechnology (ENV) and the Working Party on Biotechnology (DSTI) will be invited to provide input and provided an opportunity to review all material.

9. The purpose of this work is to contribute sound analysis to the public debate on food safety issues in OECD's traditional areas of competence -- economic, trade and regulatory policy -- recognising that the more scientific and technical aspects of food safety are dealt with elsewhere within the Secretariat and in other international bodies. As other international bodies are also engaged in these broader aspects of food safety and related issues, consultation and co-ordination to avoid duplication has been, and will remain, a key component of this programme of work.

SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

10. **Activity 1: Trade and economic effects of SPS and TBT measures** -- Work undertaken in the Secretariat suggests that there is a need for better measurement and a more systematic collection of data on the application of SPS and TBT measures and their impacts on trade [CCNM/EMEF/CA(2000)19]. This applies equally to OECD and non-member countries. While the WTO is responsible for the review of the SPS and TBT Agreements *per se* and Codex is developing guidelines for the implementation of such measures, there is a lack of analytical information on the trade implications for agricultural and food products. A study planned as part of the Agriculture Directorate's regular programme of work for 2001 will examine the feasibility of developing criteria for classifying the different types of SPS and TBT measures that could provide a framework for economic analysis on policy decisions about technical trade barriers.

Proposal: Based on this classification, a follow-up study is proposed to examine the trade implications of selected technical measures directly related to food safety. The study would address issues of interest to both OECD and non-member countries. Close consultations with member countries, the WTO and Codex would be necessary to ensure this analytical work was supportive of activities in these respective organisations.

11. **Activity 2: Modern biotechnology and food security** -- The overall context for this particular work is a multi-year effort as part of the Agriculture Directorate's outlook programme, aimed at clarifying the implications of modern biotechnology for agriculture and food product markets. A related question, which was raised repeatedly at the OECD/NGO consultations last November and at the GM Food Conference in Edinburgh, is the potential impact of modern biotechnology on food security. Advances in biotechnology have raised great expectations for feeding growing populations from a dwindling resource base yet a number of countries with major food security concerns have not yet taken policy positions on food safety and other issues (e.g. environmental concerns) raised by technological progress. If the OECD holds a conference on the environmental assessment of GMOs in 2001, the concerns of developing countries and food security would likely be addressed, and there would be a need to co-ordinate this activity on food security with the Environment Directorate and its Working Group on Harmonisation of Regulatory Oversight in Biotechnology, which would be responsible for organising the conference.

Proposal: The proposed study would examine the potential contribution of modern biotechnology to food security, taking into account demand (e.g. consumer responses),

supply (e.g. rates of adoption) and structural considerations (e.g. market structures, innovation). The study would be closely co-ordinated with other intergovernmental organisations such as the FAO, and supportive of the World Food Summit plan of action.

12. **Activity 3: Socio-economic concerns and public consultation** -- The National Compendium on food safety systems and activities, compiled by the Ad Hoc Group on Food Safety, noted differences in the extent to which socio-economic concerns influence risk management across OECD countries. While many countries consider economic factors, the question of whether such concerns as animal welfare, environment and biodiversity should be addressed within, or separate from, the food safety regulatory system are more controversial. The Compendium also noted that the mechanisms for public consultation on these issues, and in the development of food safety regulations in general, differ across countries in their level of formality and measures to elicit and reflect the views of stakeholders.

Proposal: Two complementary studies are proposed to flesh out the information contained in the National Compendium on national approaches to addressing socio-economic concerns and to consultation and communication with the public. The objective would be to increase transparency as to why and how Member countries address these issues within the context of a science-based, rules-based approach to food safety as required under the SPS Agreement. Close consultation with Codex is envisaged to avoid duplication and promote synergies with its work on the extent to which economic and other legitimate factors are taken into account in relation to risk analysis.

13. **Activity 4: Effective inducements to food safety compliance** -- Highly publicised outbreaks of food borne diseases have increased consumer demands for stricter regulations and better enforcement. The cost to the agri-food industry in terms of falling domestic demand and lost trade from the ensuing lack of consumer confidence has been significant. PUMA's Working Party on Regulatory Management and Reform had agreed to undertake in 2000 an overview of national approaches to enhance food safety regulatory compliance. However, the study was put on hold, pending the outcome of the OECD reports to the G8 on biotechnology and food safety. The work could now proceed, building on the work of the Ad Hoc Group on Food Safety. The National Compendium of the Ad Hoc Group reports on activities aimed at improving regulatory enforcement and compliance, observing differences in approaches to enforcement, monitoring systems, legal requirements, penalties, measures to promote compliance and involvement of industry.

Proposal: Building on the work of the Ad Hoc Group, a joint project with PUMA is proposed to follow-up this descriptive information with a more analytical review of recent government responses and lessons learned/best practices. The objective would be to identify and improve the dissemination of promising approaches employed by national food safety systems (e.g. problem definition, market incentives, regulatory requirements, third party roles, monitoring) which could be adapted/adopted in other countries or regulatory sectors.

14. **Activity 5: Costs and benefits of new approaches to food safety regulation** -- The Ad Hoc Group report recognised the need to address consumer concerns by establishing controls that are transparent and that ensure the safety of the food supply, while not unduly restricting technological development and trade. In this context, many member countries are examining the feasibility of various approaches to risk management and product differentiation such as labelling, traceability and identity preservation. Much work is underway on the technical issues, or the "how" aspects (e.g. Codex is currently developing standards for GM labelling, the OECD Scheme for Seed Certification is working on

standards for adventitious transgenic material in seed) but there is relatively little analysis of the broader economic and trade implications of emerging national and industry initiatives. Cost-benefit analysis is applied widely in the setting of food safety regulations but it might also be able to play a broader role in assessing socio-economic concerns and in distinguishing legitimate measures to achieve food safety, or those designed to provide diversity and quality objectives, from measures described as achieving these objectives but which erect non-tariff trade barriers and protect local interest groups. Work of a conceptual nature has already been carried out in the Agriculture Directorate.

Proposal: It is proposed to build on the conceptual work of the Agriculture Directorate by examining in more detail various cost-benefit methodologies as a tool to assess socio-economic concerns and to examine the trade implications of measures designed to achieve food safety or to provide diversity and quality objectives. Drawing on this work, it is also proposed to examine, using case studies, the costs and benefits of emerging approaches to food safety regulations in such areas as labelling, traceability and identity preservation systems.

MAINTAINING THE POLICY DIALOGUE

15. In addition to further analytical work, the Ministerial Communiqué instructed the OECD to play an effective role in international policy dialogue on food safety, maintaining its engagement with civil society and seeking to share its work in this area with countries outside the Organisation's membership. To ensure the widest possible discussions of the proposed analytical work, the Secretariat will ensure:

- co-ordination and possible joint projects, as appropriate, with other intergovernmental organisations such as FAO, WHO, and WTO;
- consultations with NGOs and industry as appropriate to seek their views on food safety issues and this programme of work in particular, possibly through special sessions with the Committee for Agriculture.

16. Non-member countries face many of the same food safety issues as OECD countries, although often from a different perspective, as well as facing other issues unique to developing countries. In expanding the dialogue on food safety to non-member countries, it is important to have a better understanding of their problems, priorities, and policy options. The ongoing Global Agriculture Forum provides a good mechanism for sharing OECD experiences in food safety with non-member countries. The 2001 Global Agricultural Forum will share the latest information and exchange views on a number of emerging issues related to biotechnology and food safety, and their implications for agricultural policy making. The CCNM has proposed a Global Forum on Biotechnology in 2001 as an opportunity to share the experience of OECD, and address the needs of non-member countries, in the regulatory safety assessment of GMOs. A one-day joint session of the Agriculture Forum and the Biotechnology Forum is planned, linking the research and regulatory issues related to the use of biotechnology in the agri-food sector to the associated economic and trade policy issues to be discussed in the Agriculture Forum.

17. **High-level meeting** -- In the context of this two-year programme of work, the OECD would organise a high-level meeting to maintain policy dialogue at a senior policy level. The meeting would take stock of ongoing work and provide further direction in the context of recent developments in food safety issues and policies in Member countries. Participants would include representatives from relevant international organisations, in particular the FAO, WHO, Codex, OIE and WTO. The timing and agenda would have to be carefully developed to avoid duplication and be supportive of the related activities of these other international agencies. As part of its overall responsibility to define and implement the programme of work on food safety, the Committee for Agriculture would develop a proposal regarding

content and modalities for the high-level meeting and report back to Executive Committee and Council for approval.

CONCLUSIONS

18. The Secretary-General accordingly invites the Council to adopt the following draft conclusions:

THE COUNCIL

- a) noted document C(2000)200/REV4 on the Proposed Programme of Work on Food Safety 2001-2002;
- b) endorsed the specific activities proposed in this note, noting that resources for 2001 had already been provisionally allocated for 2001 and recognising that further resources would be required to pursue the Programme of Work on Food Safety in 2002;
- c) agreed in principle with the proposed high-level meeting, subject to approval of the proposal developed by the Committee for Agriculture as outlined in paragraph 17 and in light of developments in other fora;
- d) requested the Committee for Agriculture and its subsidiary bodies, including the Joint Working Party on Agriculture and Trade, to define the terms of reference for each activity and implement the overall programme of work; and
- e) requested the Secretariat to provide progress reports to Executive Committee and/or Council to enable these bodies to monitor and provide direction as the work proceeds.

ANNEX I

**STATEMENTS BY OECD MINISTERS AND G8 HEADS OF GOVERNMENT CONCERNING
OECD WORK ON FOOD SAFETY**

OECD MCM Communiqué -- Paris, June 2000

“36. *Biotechnology* is of growing importance to our societies because of its far-reaching consequences for, inter alia, human health and healthcare, agri-food production and sustainable development. Deepened international understanding and co-operation in managing the benefits and risks are necessary if the potential economic, environmental and social benefits are to be realised and new regulatory issues resolved. Public confidence, in particular, needs to be retained and enhanced through transparent policies. OECD will continue to contribute to this process of understanding across the broad range of biotechnology issues, and will seek to engage countries outside its membership in this work. Ministers invited OECD to consider holding a conference in 2001 to address the environmental impacts of genetically modified organisms.

37. *Food safety* is a fundamental objective for all governments. Ministers affirmed their commitment to a science-based and rules-based approach. How precaution should be applied to food safety in circumstances of scientific uncertainty is being discussed to promote understanding of the various view points on the subject and to achieve greater global consensus on this issue, in particular in the Codex Alimentarius Commission. OECD has undertaken substantial work on biotechnology and other aspects of food safety, including work requested by the G8, contributing to international understanding on different policy approaches. Consultation with interested parties, notably with NGOs and the Edinburgh Conference on GM foods in February this year, has been very successful. The OECD will continue to undertake analytical work and to play an effective role in international policy dialogue on food safety, maintaining its engagement with civil society and seeking to share its work in this area with countries outside the Organisation’s membership. Drawing on its comparative advantages, the work of the OECD will effectively complement, without duplication, the activities of other international organisations, in particular the FAO and WHO.”

G8 Communiqué -- Okinawa, July 2000

“55. Maintenance of effective national food safety systems and public confidence in them assumes critical importance in public policy. We are committed to continued efforts to make systems responsive to the growing public awareness of food safety issues, the potential risks associated with food, the accelerating pace of developments in biotechnology, and the increasing cross-border movement of food and agricultural products.

56. The commitment to a science-based, rule-based approach remains a key principle underlying these endeavours. The on-going work in international fora to develop and refine such an approach needs to be accelerated. In particular, we attach strong importance to the work of the CODEX Alimentarius Commission (CAC), the principal standard-setting body in food safety, and encourage its Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology to produce a substantial interim report before completion of its mandate in 2003. We also support the efforts of the CAC's Committee on General Principles to achieve greater global consensus on how precaution should be applied to food safety in circumstances where available scientific information is incomplete or contradictory.

57. Policy dialogue, engaging all stakeholders and including both developed and developing countries, must be intensified to advance health protection, facilitate trade, ensure the sound development

of biotechnology, and foster consumer confidence and public acceptance. The report by the OECD Ad Hoc Group on Food Safety and the work of the Task Force for the Safety of Novel Foods and Feeds and the Working Group on Harmonisation of Regulatory Oversight of Biotechnology represent a useful step in this direction. We welcome the further work agreed by OECD ministers. We note with approval that the OECD will continue to undertake analytical work and to play an effective role in international policy dialogue on food safety, maintaining its engagement with civil society and seeking to share its work in this area with countries outside the organisation's membership. Drawing on its comparative advantages, the work of the OECD will effectively complement the activities of other international organisations, in particular the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and WHO. We also encourage the FAO and WHO to organise periodic international meetings of food safety regulators to advance the process of science-based public consultations.

58. In pursuing this dialogue we will pay particular attention to the needs, opportunities and constraints in developing countries. We will work to strengthen our support for their capacity building to harness the potentials of biotechnology, and encourage research and development as well as data and information sharing in technologies, including those that address global food security, health, nutritional and environmental challenges and are adapted to specific conditions in these countries.

59. Open and transparent consultation with and involvement of all stakeholders, including representatives of civil society, supported by shared scientific understanding, is a key component of a credible food and crop safety system. We note the proposal to establish an independent international panel put forward at the recent OECD Edinburgh Conference. Building on the success of that Conference, we will explore, in consultation with international organisations and interested bodies including scientific academies, the way to integrate the best scientific knowledge available into the global process of consensus building on biotechnology and other aspects of food and crop safety.”

ANNEX 2

The Task Force for the Safety of Novel Foods and Feeds

The report of the Task Force to the G8 [C(2000)86/ADD1] identified a number of issues to be addressed by food safety assessors in the future. For example, it recognised the need to keep the concept of substantial equivalence under review. It also stressed the importance of exchanging experiences in the development of new testing methods and strategies. The report also identified the need to evaluate feasibility studies with respect to post-market surveillance. Another important event during 2000 was the establishment of the Codex Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived Through Modern Biotechnology.

At its third meeting, held 27-29 September, the Task Force reviewed its activities in the light of the above. As a result, it prepared an updated programme of work (which addresses some of the issues identified in the report to the G8) as well as a draft description of its work. The Joint Meeting of the Chemicals Committee and the Working Party on Chemicals, Pesticides and Biotechnology agreed with the updated programme of work [ENV/JM(2000)42/ADD] at its 31st Meeting, held 7-10 November. The focus remains on the development of consensus documents and outreach activities through BioTrack Online, but includes a few new items, such as work on post market surveillance. Italy is expected to take the lead in developing a new project on this issue. In addition, Canada will host a Workshop on the Nutritional Assessment of Novel Foods and Feeds in February 2001. Finally, the UK and Canada have taken the lead in a new study on issues related to the safety of animal feeds. The Joint Meeting will review the work of the Task Force at its February 2002 meeting.

The Working Group on Harmonisation of Regulatory Oversight in Biotechnology

The report of the Working Group to the G8 [C(2000)86/ADD2] also identified a number of issues to be addressed in the future. For example, while it acknowledged that the work of environmental and food safety assessors is distinct, it also pointed out that environmental risk/safety assessors need to continue to collaborate with food safety assessors. It also identified the need for more efforts towards harmonisation in the area of environmental safety/risk assessment. In this context, it noted the need to identify reasons for differences among Member countries in product approval systems. Another important event during 2000, was the adoption of the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol. At its ninth meeting, 13-15 November, the Working Group updated its work programme for 2001 to 2002 in the light of the above developments. Of particular importance is the role of the information system, BioTrack Online, and the recent recommendation of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Cartagena Protocol that use is made of existing information systems, such as the OECD/UNIDO databases, as models for implementing the obligation under the Protocol to develop a pilot phase of a Biosafety Clearing House. The next steps will be considered at the 10th meeting of the Working Group in June 2001.

An International Conference on the Environmental Impact of GMOs

At its meeting held 27-29 November, the Environment Policy Committee (EPOC) agreed that the United States will host the International Conference on the Environmental Impacts of GMOs in November 2001. In order to plan the Conference, EPOC established a Steering Committee that has as its nucleus, the members of the Bureau of the Working Group for Harmonisation of Regulatory Oversight in Biotechnology. The delegations involved in the Bureau are Austria, Japan, Switzerland and the United States. A number of other delegations offered to join the Steering Committee (including Canada, France, Italy, Spain and Turkey). EPOC stressed that the organisation of the Conference, and participation in the Steering Committee, should be as "inclusive" as possible. To achieve this, representatives of non-member countries, other intergovernmental organisations, as well as civil society are being identified to participate in the Steering Committee.

ANNEX 3

PROPOSED HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON FOOD SAFETY

The proposed programme of work on food safety includes several measures to enable the OECD to continue to play an effective role in international policy dialogue, as instructed by the June 2000 Ministerial Communiqué (see Annex 1 for relevant text of OECD and G8 Communiqués). One such measure is a proposed high-level meeting to enhance the exchange of views and dialogue on food safety issues and policy responses. Despite extensive discussion in Executive Committee, it has not been possible to reach a consensus on this issue and at its meeting on 21 December, 2000 Council requested the Secretariat to provide additional information on the rationale, approach and modalities for a high-level meeting and agreed to return to this question at a forthcoming session [C/M(2000)29/PROV].

Rationale for a High-Level Meeting

To maintain policy dialogue at a senior level: The fundamental role of the OECD is to offer governments the chance to compare experiences and seek answers to common problems, leading to more informed domestic policy decisions and a greater awareness of the implications of those actions on the international community. Food safety is an area fraught with unresolved issues, growing public concern and uncertain policy responses. Many OECD Member countries have expressed a desire to engage in an open exchange of views and national experiences on issues related to food safety. The new programme of work on food safety will be defined and implemented by the Committee for Agriculture but this process would not provide an adequate opportunity for those senior policy makers most directly involved to more fully discuss the latest developments in a non-negotiating environment.

To review and give direction to the OECD programme of work: OECD high-level meetings traditionally reflect on the role of OECD in a specific policy area and provide some direction for future work, to ensure the priority needs of policy makers are being addressed. Such direction, taking into account the ongoing work programme, is crucial in the food safety area given the dynamic policy environment driven by emerging consumer concerns, new technologies and products, advances in scientific knowledge and on-going regulatory reviews. The proposed high-level meeting in 2002 provides for senior officials to assess work underway in the context of recent developments in Member countries, with a view to identifying any emerging issues that might require further emphasis in the work programme.

Why an OECD High-Level Meeting?

Member countries agree that discussion of food safety issues must involve non-member countries. The FAO and WHO are considering a meeting on food safety and public consultation as encouraged by the G8 Communiqué, for which some form of co-operation with the OECD may be an option. However, the purpose, scope and timing of the two meetings are quite different. The OECD meeting would be aimed at high-level officials with food safety and related policy responsibilities rather than food safety regulators. The real value-added of the OECD high-level meeting would be to provide a unique forum for reflection and discussion of politically sensitive issues based on well-balanced research and analysis, including that carried out by the OECD within the context of the present programme of work. By identifying areas of agreement, divergence of opinion and areas of uncertainty among Member countries, an OECD high-level meeting can contribute to the basis of discussions and negotiations in other international fora.

Possible Approach and Modalities

The following outline is provided for discussion purposes only. As part of its overall responsibility to define and implement the programme of work on food safety, the Committee for Agriculture would

develop a proposal regarding content and modalities for the high-level meeting and report back to Executive Committee and Council for approval.

- Purpose:** To facilitate a forward-looking exchange of views and national experiences on issues related to food safety, taking into account the ongoing work programme, so as to contribute to a wider understanding of respective approaches and desirable future reforms. This dialogue, in turn, would contribute to the on-going discussions and negotiations in other international fora such as FAO, WHO, Codex and WTO.
- Scope:** An informal discussion, organised around two or three broad themes, each introduced by a key note address (20 minutes) and two respondents (5 minutes) with brief introductory and concluding comments from the Chair. Possible themes could include “cross-cutting” issues (e.g. trade and economic impacts, consumer confidence, socio-economic concerns), “new policy approaches” (e.g. labelling, traceability, identity preservation) and “process” issues (e.g. public consultation, regulatory enforcement and compliance).
- Timing:** A two-day conference in 2002 for which the precise timing would depend on the progress of the OECD programme of work, and sequencing with other related international meetings, such as the proposed OECD conference on environmental impacts of GMOs, key Codex meetings and a possible FAO/WHO Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators.
- Participants:** High-level officials (Ministers minus 1) with food safety and related policy responsibilities from national capitals and senior representatives from other relevant IGOs. The programme of work provides for the active involvement of selected non-member countries and representatives of relevant NGOs, and some form of participation by these groups in the high-level meeting would be anticipated.
- Output:** There would be no policy recommendations or communiqué. The Chair or Secretariat would undertake to provide a written summary (5-10 pages) identifying, where possible, points of agreement and disagreement, general conclusions and direction for further work.