



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
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STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE OF THE PAN AMERICAN CENTERS

DISCONTINUATION OF ACTIVITIES OF INPPAZ AND PROSPECTS FOR PAHO TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN FOOD SAFETY

A proposal has been submitted to the Executive Committee to discontinue the activities of the Pan American Institute for Food Protection and Zoonoses (INPPAZ) as of January 2006. The proposal is part of the identification and application of new approaches to the technical cooperation provided by the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization in veterinary public health, particularly the food safety component. In addition, a roadmap has been proposed to carry out this process of change in coordination with the Government of Argentina, based on the agreements and conventions that have governed interinstitutional relations and technical cooperation between the two parties to date.

Background

1. The Pan American Institute for Food Protection and Zoonoses (INPPAZ) was established in 1991 under an agreement between the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and the Argentine Republic. The objective was to provide PAHO's Member States and their integration initiatives with technical cooperation, reference, and research services to solve problems in the areas of food protection, zoonoses, and the upgrading of health laboratories.
2. In 1996, the Director of PAHO called together a group of experts to evaluate the Veterinary Public Health Program. One of the recommendations of the External Advisory Group was that, given the growing importance of food safety, the activities of INPPAZ be concentrated in that area, and that the responsibility for technical cooperation (TC) in zoonoses be transferred to the Pan American Foot-and-Mouth Disease Center (PANAFTOSA) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The recommendation was accepted by the Director of PAHO, and TC activities in zoonoses were gradually transferred. Today they are carried out entirely by PANAFTOSA.
3. From its inception, INPPAZ has been successful in its work, establishing itself as a regional mechanism to support national food safety programs that have been recognized both in the Hemisphere and globally. That mechanism is supported by the cooperation networks described, which are made up of national institutions of excellence throughout the Region.
4. After 15 years, the time has come to consider other approaches to providing technical cooperation along the lines mentioned in the document submitted to the current Executive Committee entitled "Strategy for the Future of the Pan American Centers."
5. PAHO's new Regional Budget Policy, adopted in September 2004 by the Directing Council, underscores the importance of giving priority over the next three bienniums to gradually allocating more resources to the countries than to regional mechanisms. These latter include INPPAZ and the other Pan American Centers.
6. The growth of operating expenses for technical cooperation has led us to search for alternatives that will facilitate more rational use of the available resources to ensure an effective response to the needs and capacities of the Member States.

7. Moreover, in recent years INPPAZ has not had a consistent flow of resources for its operations, due to the domestic difficulties of the host country (Argentina) in terms of providing counterpart funds in a timely manner to finance local expenditures. This situation has required advances from the regular PAHO budget to cover operating expenses. As of 31 May 2005, these advances had reached a cumulative debt of approximately US\$1,500,000. This debt will be negotiated with the Government of Argentina over the next several months as part of the process of discontinuing the activities of INPPAZ.

Use of Regional Capacity Developed with INPPAZ Support

8. Since its inception, INPPAZ has collaborated with the countries in organizing and developing integrated food protection programs. Regional initiatives implemented by INPPAZ in support of national programs have included the Regional Information System for Epidemiological Surveillance of Food-borne Diseases (SIRVETA); the Inter-American Network of Food Analysis Laboratories (INFAL), in coordination with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations; the Consortium of Universities for Research and Distance Learning in Food Safety; a molecular subtyping network for monitoring food-borne pathogens (Pulse-Net), in coordination with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); centers of excellence, which are outstanding laboratories that deal with food safety issues; and databases with full-text versions of food-related legislation (LEGALIM), *Global SalmSurv*, among others.

9. In addition, INPPAZ has designed training materials on modern food inspection techniques and good manufacturing and food handling practices. It has also used information and knowledge technology to disseminate food safety information (*InfoPanalimentos* and *Canal Comunidad*) and has developed a distance learning system to teach courses via the Internet on quality management in food analysis laboratories (Web-cast courses).

10. All of these courses and programs are now available in various national institutions to complement efforts to support and develop food safety policies, programs, and projects. Thus, continuing a Pan American institution such as INPPAZ is no longer indispensable. Work with regional and national networks of experts on specific technical cooperation issues in food safety will continue to be strengthened as part of PAHO's new policies and strategies.

The Proposal

11. The need to reengineer PAHO's TC strategy in support of food safety is evidenced by the availability in the countries of institutions of excellence and by the various networks developed in the Region to deal with food safety; by the current trend to

consider TC activities across the entire food production chain (“from the farm to the table”); and by the need to increase efficiency in the use of resources (cutting operating expenditures to increase direct TC expenditures).

12. All of this has led us to reconsider the feasibility and justification of continuing INPPAZ operations. In recent months, there have been several consultations and exchanges of letters between PAHO and the Argentine health and agriculture authorities.

13. The consensus is that continuing INPPAZ as an international center is no longer justified, and that it is necessary to take steps to begin the process of discontinuing its activities.

14. On 22 April 2005, during the Inter-American Meeting, at the Ministerial Level, on Health and Agriculture (RIMSA 14) in Mexico City, the Director of PAHO invited the members of the INPPAZ International Coordinating Committee and special guests to an informal consultation. The objective was to provide an update on the status of INPPAZ in particular, and PAHO’s TC in food safety and veterinary public health in general, as well as to invite suggestions on how to address the issue that is now before the current session of the Executive Committee.

15. Listed below are actions to be considered as part of the process of discontinuing the activities of INPPAZ, taking political, legal, staffing, technical, and administrative issues into account.

Political Aspects

16. Report to the Governing Bodies of PAHO/WHO. According to Resolution CSP20.R31 of the 20th Pan American Sanitary Conference, any proposal for the establishment, disestablishment, or transfer of a Pan American Center should be submitted to the Executive Committee and Directing Council. Document CSP20/3 on Pan American Centers, which resolution CSP20.R31 is based upon, indicates that the procedures to close a center should include discussions with the host country, a process that has been under way during recent months.

17. At a series of meetings, consultations, and working groups involving PAHO and the Argentine health and agriculture authorities, topics connected with INPPAZ have been widely discussed, including the possibility of discontinuing operations.

Administrative Aspects

18. With the approval by the Governing Bodies, the respective proceedings will begin with the Government of Argentina to address the following issues: (1) termination of the

agreement establishing INPPAZ; (2) negotiation of the pending debt related to advances by PAHO to cover local operating costs; (3) return of the facilities currently used by INPPAZ to the National Service for Hygiene and Quality in Agricultural Products (SENASA); and (4) a decision, when PAHO turns over those INPPAZ laboratory facilities, about PAHO laboratory equipment provided to SENASA under the “Contract of Commodatum on Laboratory Equipment between PAHO/WHO and SENASA” dated 21 February 2003.

19. Personnel currently working in INPPAZ will be subject to administrative review. Some will be relocated to other units of the Organization, while others will have their relationship with PAHO terminated. In terms of indemnities, approximately \$250,000 will be required, for which financing has been set aside.

Technical Aspects

20. A technical team specializing in food safety will be set up in the current facilities of the Pan American Foot-and-Mouth Disease Center (PANAFTOSA), with a view of taking advantage of the functional capacity of that institution, under the supervision of the Veterinary Public Health Unit. This will require the partial relocation of some of the international professional staff currently working for INPPAZ to PANAFTOSA.

21. All current PAHO technical cooperation agreements and other commitments with the Member States in the area of food safety will be fully guaranteed and expanded insofar as possible. In the specific case of Argentina, a Special Technical Cooperation Program has been launched to strengthen institutional capacity and national programs in support of the government’s efforts to establish and operate a National Center of Excellence in this field with international influence.

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