codex alimentarius commission

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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**Agenda Item 3** **CX/FBT 07/7/3 Add.2**
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**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME**

**CODEX *AD HOC* INTERGOVERNMENTAL TASK FORCE ON FOODS DERIVED FROM BIOTECHNOLOGY**

**Seventh Session**

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# REVIEW OF THE WORK BY INTERNATIONAL INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS RELATED TO FOOD DERIVED FROM BIOTECHNOLOGY

**Submission from FAO**

This report provides information concerning the ongoing work for the establishment of a database on food safety risk assessments related to foods derived from biotechnology to be developed within FAO as part of the International Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health[1]. This work is being undertaken to develop a useful tool in relation to the issue to be discussed under Agenda Item 6 of the Task Force at its 7th Session.

## 1. FAO CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON INFORMATION-SHARING MECHANISMS

A consultative meeting to identify a means of sharing information relating to food safety risk assessments was convened on 24 May 2007, FAO Headquarters in Rome, Italy, as agreed by the physical working group on Low-level Presence of Recombinant-DNA Plant Materials held on 13-15 March 2007, Washington D.C.[2] The purpose of the meeting was to follow-up the discussions on information sharing relating to recombinant-DNA plants authorized in accordance with the Codex Plant Guideline. It also specifically examined the proposal made by FAO to provide such a service through the International Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health (http://www.ipfsaph.org ) (hereinafter referred to as International Portal) which includes information on food safety risk assessments carried out by relevant expert bodies and technical consultations including those dealing with foods derived from biotechnology.

The meeting was attended by two of the co-chairs of the WG, representatives of the biotechnology industry, the European Commission, the OECD and the FAO secretariat (herein referred to as the Consultative Group).

The meeting confirmed that the requirement – stated by the Working Group in March – could be met by the FAO system; in addition to referencing published materials, the system should enable importing Codex member countries to make the necessary contacts with competent authorities in the authorizing country as well as with the product applicant to obtain additional information relevant to the food safety assessment, in line with the proposed Annex to the Codex Guideline.

The representatives of the industry provided information on existing sources on food safety assessments of r-DNA plant materials particularly in the USA, Canada, the European Union and Australia/New Zealand. They confirmed their willingness to cooperate with the Member Countries in providing relevant information/data.

[1] ALINORM 07/30/REP para.109 and ALINORM 07/30/34 para.75
[2] CL2007/17-FBT para.20

Discussion clarified that initially data should be entered to the system centrally (the volumes of data are low and do not justify distributed data entry); that there was no need for creating secure areas for storing commercially-sensitive information; and that there was no intention to create an analytical template to enter the component parts of risk assessments separately because only a summary of the risk assessment is to be contained on the database. Given the relatively limited scope of the proposed database, its development and operation could be accommodated within available FAO regular programme resources.

The representative of the OECD informed the meeting of his Organization's interest in being considered as a host for the proposed database as most of the points proposed to be covered are already covered by the existing OECD product database (BioTrack). While expressing its preference to see the Database hosted in FAO (as one of Codex parent organizations and host of the Codex Secretariat), the meeting encouraged FAO and OECD Secretariats to find a workable arrangement. The meeting agreed that such a mechanism should be established as soon as possible.

Following the meeting, a member of the FAO secretariat attended two meetings at OECD on the subject in June and July, and concluded an agreement to develop the required data entry facilities based on the FAO system, but to draw company and product/event reference information from the OECD BioTrack system, and to make available electronically (via xml/web service technology) the food safety assessment records entered, for inclusion in BioTrack. This data would also be available in the International Portal for access by other Codex websites, and for other external groups to utilize (via syndication or similar).

## 2. CURRENT PROGRESS OF THE WORK

The requirement stated by the working group is for the information to be presented in accordance with the following format:

- name of product applicant (*)
- summary of application (*)
- country of authorization (*)
- date of authorization (*)
- scope of authorization (*)
- unique (event) identifier (*)
- summary of safety assessment by competent authority(s)
- link to safety assessment if publicly available (or uploaded document)
- contact details of the competent authority(s) responsible for the safety assessment
- contact details for the product applicant (*).

The list indicates the reference data to be sourced from the OECD system (*).

The work required to implement the food safety risk assessment module involves three distinct pieces of systems work to develop:

- a data entry form specific to the requirements stated by the Working Group
- inter-operability between the International Portal and BioTrack to allow the portal data entry form to be populated with lists of allowable values once the unique identifier has been selected
- some means of notifying BioTrack once a food safety assessment record has been published through the International Portal so that BioTrack can link to, or load this additional data

Aware of the request to finalize this work swiftly, FAO has identified the required information technology resources, and OECD is currently working on finalizing the information technology resources and requirements necessary from its side.

In the meantime, FAO has developed and tested the data entry part of the work which can now be demonstrated. The FAO secretariat has loaded some test records, and the URL was circulated to the members of the Consultative Group for their review and comment. Testing of the means of loading records back to BioTrack is expected to start within the next month. The Task Force is asked to review and give approval to the database before final implementation.

Once the Task Force has agreed to the form, content, and mechanism of operation of the database, the FAO secretariat will begin to work with members to load requisite information onto the database.