Conference on Food Safety
Science, Evidence & Regulations

May 20-21, 2011
Colombo, Sri Lanka

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Conference on 'Food Safety: Science, Evidence and Regulations' was organized by International Life Sciences Institute-India (ILSI- India), Regional Office for South Asian Region*; on 20-21 May 2011 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The Conference was cosponsored by the Ministry of Health, Government of Sri Lanka, Ministry of Technology and Research, Government of Sri Lanka, Industrial Technology Institute, Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka Standards Institute.

During the opening ceremony, keynote address was made by Dr Karan Hulebak, Chairperson, Codex. The Guests of Honor, Mrs Dhara Wijayatilake, Secretary Ministry of Technology and Research, Mr. Patrick Evans, FAO representative for Sri Lanka and Maldives, Mr D H Pai Panandiker, Chairman, ILSI-India and Dr Chris Nonis, President, ILSI South Asia Sri Lanka Committee addressed the Conference.

A special address was made by Prof Tissa Vitarana, Hon'ble Senior Minister, Ministry of Scientific Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka.

*ILSI-India with headquarters in New Delhi is a non profit scientific foundation working on public health issues particularly those relating to food safety and nutrition. It is a branch of ILSI with 15 branches worldwide, a Research Foundation and Health and Environmental Sciences Institute. ILSI has special consultative status with FAO and is affiliated with WHO as non-governmental organization.

Discussions on some of the key subjects were led by Mr. S Dave, Vice Chair, Codex, Dr. Samuel Godefroy, Director General, Food Directorate, Health Canada, Government of Canada and Dr. Yongxiang Fan, Institute of Nutrition and Food Safety, Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Beijing. About 27 experts made presentations and 190 participants attended the Conference.

A drafting Committee chaired by Mr. D.H. Pai Panandiker, Chairman ILSI-India deliberated on the presentations and discussions at the Conference and drew up a set of action points. These were discussed in the Closing Session and were adopted by the participants.

PREAMBLE

- **Safety is affected** by all those hazards which make food injurious to health. These hazards come from improper agricultural practices, poor hygiene at all stages of the food chain, lack of preventive controls in food processing operations, misuse of chemicals, contaminated inputs, or inappropriate storage and handling.

- **Food hazards** can be biological, .chemical or environmental. Food can also contain extraneous materials which can be dangerous to health.

- **Food borne diseases** also impose an enormous economic burden. It is not only the medical costs that consumers have to bear but also loss of income from absence at work or loss of education from absence at school.

- **Many episodes** have occurred recently because of the elongated food chain. Foods are transported over long distances overseas, handled at

far too many points, are exposed to different temperatures, and sometimes stored in unhygienic conditions.

☐ **There are a number of ways the incidence of contamination** can be reduced if not eliminated. Good agricultural practices (GAP) good manufacturing practices (GMP) and good hygienic practices (GHP) can make considerable difference and should be encouraged.

☐ **Detection and control of contamination** will be possible by hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) and risk analysis including risk management and communication.

☐ **Each country has to institute its own food control syste**m. But there are broad guidelines which have been developed by Codex Alimentarius Commission. Codex, with scientific inputs from JECFA, JMPR and JEMRA on specific issues, presents a unique opportunity for countries to join the international community in formulating and harmonizing food standards and ensuring their global implementation.

☐ **Codex has been recognized by World Trade Organization** as an international reference point for the resolution of disputes concerning food safety. It should also be the basis for domestic regulation.

☐ **Food safety is paramount.** Consumers and government authorities have become increasingly aware about the safety and quality of food. To ensure adequate safety it is important that food control system and food regulations are in tune with the best practices that are internationally accepted. Keeping this in view the Conference identified the following action points.

ACTION POINTS

1. **The best option for Sri Lanka is to complete the process of harmonizing** with the regulatory regime under Codex Alimentarius. This process of harmonization could be a two way process between Sri Lanka regulations with Codex guidelines. The areas identified for harmonization are:

   a- Food safety systems / HACCP

   b- Food labeling / claims

   c- Food categorization system / Food additives

   d- Contaminants and biological hazards

2. **The regulations should be implementable, provide room to innovate** and introduce new products. This mechanism essentially involves all stakeholders i.e. government, regulators, consumer organizations and industry

3. **To get full advantage of harmonization it is necessary that:**

   a. Participation by Sri Lankan institutions in Codex process and meetings should be enhanced

   b. Cooperation with other regional countries (e.g. SAARC countries) should be strengthened to promote sharing of data, knowledge base, best practices, cross visits, laboratory infrastructure, training of manpower, etc.

4- **The national food control system should:**

   - ensure that only safe and wholesome foods are marketed;
   - take decisions based on science and risk assessment;

- empower authorities to detect sources of contamination and take necessary action to prevent contaminated foods from reaching the consumer;
- enforce compliance by farmers, manufacturers, distributors, importers, and other stakeholders;
- be transparent and promote public confidence.

5- **Government may consider establishment of an independent authority** as in other countries like EU, Canada, India, Australia and New Zealand, etc. for better coordination among different agencies including stakeholders for addressing issues regarding food and related standards, contaminants, labeling requirements, streamlined procedures, methods of analysis, accreditation of laboratories, conducting surveys, maintaining database and organizing training programs at all levels.

6- **Surveillance and monitoring based on information from different sources**, analysis of such information and their use in decision making would ensure effective operation of the food control system and minimizing risks of biological and chemical hazards.

7- **Self regulation by industry is the best way of control if their product** is demonstrated to be safe in line with Food Safety Management System (FSMS).

8- **Education of the consumer is important and should be a shared** responsibility of industry, regulators and consumer organizations