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Integration of the Veterinary Services of NAFTA Partners.

One of SENASICA's institutional policies is to seek for harmonization of the national and international standards in order to assure the unrestricted execution of zoosanitary measures, with the purpose of facilitating trade and positioning Mexican agri-food products in national and international markets. With this vision and through the General Administration of Animal Health of SENASICA and by means of the Memorandum of Understanding among SAGARPA, USDA and CFIA, our country, together with the NAFTA members maintains integration links with the principle of safeguarding animal health and food safety in North America.

On behalf of this agreement the North American Animal Health Committee has been working as an effective mechanism to facilitate technical consultations regarding zoosanitary and food safety issues that help maintain an open market based on scientific knowledge.

In the same way, this integration seeks for harmonization of Veterinary Services through out diverse projects of epidemiological surveillance, animal identification, state of the art diagnostic techniques, rapid communications while zoosanitary emergency events may occur in one of the member's territories, and tripartite exercises of outbreaks, always with the mission of coordinating actions that allow trade among countries, coinciding with the standards, guidelines and recommendations addressed by the OIE Code, and *Codex Alimentarius* and according to the appropriate level of protection which is a member's decision stated on The Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures of the WTO.

With the same intention of maintaining open markets within NAFTA and other trading partners, the Veterinary Services of the three countries tries to always integrate the position of North America, based on experience and science, when the OIE code is intended for modification, and with the same purpose the NAFTA countries also seek for integration of the other countries of the continent, through the COPEA, in order to strengthen our market possibility's around the world.

As an example is the integrated strategy to set minimum standards for Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) measures in North America, which seeks to effectively manage the risk of BSE in the region with the vision of establishing and implementing equivalent BSE measures in each country in order to protect public and animal health and provide for the restoration of safe trade.

Other example of integration is the Tuberculosis Program placed in México in order to reach the disease status applied by the US regulations, in addition to the Mexican Campaign; these efforts will keep safe trade of feeder cattle to the US territory.

It is important to say that the integration strategy on animal health issues has a long background, since the FMD outbreak occurred in Mexico on the 50's, where a Mexican-US Commission for the eradication of the disease was created in order to joint efforts with the primary goal of eradicating the disease and as a result preventing its introduction to the US territory. This is a successful experience that continues working as the Commission in charge of preventing foreign animal diseases in the country, CPA, where technical and financial resources from both countries pursue to maintain the zoosanitary status not only of Mexico, but the region itself.

Other activities that have reached harmonization in a regulation process are the pesticides, where a common process for authorization has been implemented by the 3 countries. In the majority of the cases the Environment Protection Agency of US elaborates the different studies needed, except the biological effectiveness for the region, and the other two countries evaluate the results to authorize the pesticide. For e legislation among the NAFTA countries has been stipulated in order to protect our regional land. Other example is the meat certification process where US and México accept the slaughter and packing certification processes of both countries as equivalent and therefore the meat packing plants that authorized for in both countries are eligible to export their products. This is based on trust on each others food safety agencies.

Actions taken as result of animal disease outbreak in NAFTA countries:

When one of the NAFTA member countries alerts the presentation of a foreign animal disease outbreak, the first mechanism to protect the dissemination of the disease through out the territory, is closing the border to high risk products. When an outbreak occurs, the affected country immediately sends epidemiological information of the affected area and of all possible risk movements that could affect the border of any of the other countries. This communication is based on confidence and good will, and always with the offer of technical support to control outbreaks.

This can be exemplified by different technical expert missions that have helped by offering control strategies in emergency situations. At the same time these missions help to gather information about the outbreak and set the guidelines to be able to restore trade either by choosing a national, zoning or compartilizing criteria according to the level of risk of the each commodity. All this methodology has proven to be successful to prevent uncontrolled dissemination of disease and to reestablish a safe market access.

Taking the case of the trade disruption occurred due to the BSE cases in Canada and USA, the international standards, meaning the OIE code, enlist the commodities that can be trade, even if they come from a country where the disease is present, because this products represent a negligible risk for transmission. In the other hand all other products that can be consider as an introductory risk for the country that imports them, have to be evaluated to determine the correct implementation of mitigation measures that can aloud safe trade, this according to the OIE Code.

In this particular case the Veterinary Services of the NAFTA countries reacted as dictated by this international standard, but with the objective of continuing safe trade within the region, as soon as good knowledge of the epidemiological information is available, and by evaluation the mitigation measures taken by each country, trade is being restored on a case by case bases.

This process is needed to assure the safety of trade, and could be expedited if good knowledge of the surveillance systems and mitigation strategies is accessible and analyzed by the member countries' before hand. In the case of this

disease there are other factors that difficult trade and should be solve; like the need of an equivalent animal identification system that can guarantee an effective trace of animals when needed, more scientific research about epidemiological characteristics of the disease in our continent and development of better diagnostic methods.

Conclusions

In the process the Veterinary Services are starting to work together in an equivalent zoning guide for diseases that cause public health or economic impacts, like European Union is doing already, which will facilitate the procedures the regain market access in our region, based on scientific information.

One of the key points that has to be addressed in order to prevent unjustified closing of borders or difficulties in reopening them is the communication of the risk to producers and consumers. Therefore, it is very important to be able to develop a communication strategy which clearly explains the impact of a disease on human and animal health, the transmission process, the mitigation measures that a country is already taking to prevent or control the disease, and every other issue that clarifies the magnitude of an epizootic. It is also crucial to communicate the true dimension of the problem and the different strategies that exist to solve it.

After the experiences we have had for integrating the Animal Health Services and to ensure certification of international trade upon demonstration of status, epidemiological surveillance, emergency response systems, etc. it is important to continue with the current cooperation and guarantee the prompt use of financial resources.

In terms of regulation, it is very significant that we first understand the regulation processes of the members, in order to be able to begin the harmonization process, which will make clearer and simpler to assure the safety of agri-food trade.

Regarding BSE and other diseases that impact trade of the countries that have them, the NAFTA countries, through their respective Veterinary Services should continue working on the process of integration, looking for the equivalence on the animal health regulations and joining efforts as a region, when intervention is

necessary to set international standards. To be successful, consideration has to be given to the differences between the livestock systems in each country, their own export priorities, their financial resources to implement prevention, control or eradication strategies, and to take into account that not only the Veterinary Services have to reach agreement for this integration, but also others as industry, consumers and other governmental stakeholders.

In order to work in the harmonization process state agreements have to be achieved taking into consideration the industry participation, which should help in the determination of the adequate level of protection that a country wishes to set, according to its health status and other priorities.