For Official Use **AGR/CA/APM(2003)10/FINAL**

Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Economiques
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development **23-Jun-2003**

English - Or. English

DIRECTORATE FOR FOOD, AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES
COMMITTEE FOR AGRICULTURE

AGR/CA/APM(2003)10/FINAL
For Official Use

Working Party on Agricultural Policies and Markets

ADDRESSING SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONCERNS RELATED TO FOOD SAFETY: CIVIL SOCIETY VIEWS

Contact: Wayne Jones (E-mail: Wayne.Jones@oecd.org)
Tel: 33 1 45 24 78 74
Fax: 33 1 44 30 61 19

JT00146515

English - Or. English

ADDRESSING SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONCERNS RELATED TO FOOD SAFETY: CIVIL SOCIETY VIEWS

NOTE BY THE SECRETARIAT

This report on socio-economic concerns related to food safety seeks to present the views of agricultural producers, agri-food industry and consumer organisations. Submitted to the 31-March - 2 April 2003 meeting of the Working Party on Agricultural Policies and Markets for discussion, it was agreed to revise the document and re-submit to the APM for declassification under the written procedure.

Delegates are asked to provide any final comments on the Secretariat revisions by 17 June 2003. To facilitate this review, a copy of the document with all additions and deletions indicated, is provided on the food safety password-protected website:

http://www.oecd.org/agr/foodsafety/
USER name: FSAGR
Password: safer

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ADDRESSING SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONCERNS RELATED TO FOOD SAFETY:
CIVIL SOCIETY VIEWS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. In the context of its 2001-2002 Programme of Work on Food Safety, Member countries requested the OECD to examine how governments can best address socio-economic concerns related to food safety without undermining the credibility of the science-based regulatory system and/or unjustifiably impeding trade. This report on the views of civil society (CSOs) complements two other reports on international developments and innovative Member country approaches.

2. In order to obtain the views of farmers, the agri-food industry and consumers, the International Federation of Agricultural Producers, the Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD and Consumers International were each invited to canvass their members and provide a synthesis response to three broad questions. Those responses are presented verbatim in this report. While no attempt was made to reach consensus views, this Executive Summary identifies some common concerns across civil society. The views expressed are strictly those of the participating organisations and in no way suggest endorsement or advocacy on the part of the OECD or its Member countries.

3. Scientific evidence is used to determine the level of risk a product carries but by nature such evidence is always inconclusive. Consumer confidence in any product varies from individual to individual and is dependent on numerous conditions – scientific evidence being only one of many factors. Even overwhelming scientific evidence may not effectively reassure some segments of the public. Food safety regulations may deem a product fit for consumption but consumers may find that certain foods are unacceptable for other reasons, including unacceptable farming or industry practices. However, this is an area of food policy, not food safety. Risk communication at the national level should be employed to educate the public on the risk assessment framework and to address societal concerns. Where scientific evidence is insufficient to ensure consumer confidence, consumer groups argue that a precautionary approach can serve to balance science and broader socio-economic issues.

What are the key socio-economic factors related to food safety and how should they be addressed?

4. A common message from all three organisations is the need to separate science-based food safety risk assessment from broader socio-economic concerns, which may be legitimate issues worthy of discussion and consideration in the development of policy. Socio-economic factors such as animal welfare, cultural practices, environment and biodiversity issues do not affect food product safety. Consumer groups note that socio-economic concerns should be seen as elements of multiple decisions at many stages of the risk analysis process, and it engenders a broad underlying approach in its own right. A useful distinction can be made between consumer preferences that can be addressed in the market (*e.g.* through established food quality indicators, food labelling, etc.) and cultural preferences (*e.g.* animal welfare, environmental impact) that may be reflected in national government legislation. Regarding regulatory costs, it was noted that the broader economic and trade impacts of regulatory options are seldom adequately addressed.

What should be the role of civil society in addressing socio-economic concerns related to food safety?

5. With the growing influence of globalisation, international standards, and trade agreements on the agri-food sector, CSOs feel an increasing need to facilitate the harmonisation of policy positions among their national bodies and to actively participate in international policy fora. While views on specific issues

may vary, the basic goals of food safety and consumer confidence are the same such that there is no real polarisation among mainstream producer, industry and consumer groups. Industry plays a key role in providing expert advice to food safety regulators but producer and consumer organisations struggle to develop the technical capacity, as well as ensuring appropriate resources, to participate effectively, particularly in transition and developing economies.

Are the current mechanisms adequate for involving civil society in addressing socio-economic concerns related to food safety?

6. There was strong support among CSOs of the need for international standards setting, while stressing the importance of a transparent, open and participatory process of decision-making. CSOs suggest international agreement should be sought on principles for consultation, with CSO accreditation for international fora based on a democratic structure to ensure a clear mandate and established criteria in order to better assure that CSO participation can further the mandate of the international organisation. Consultation mechanisms, however, were seen as best left to national or regional bodies given different cultures, political systems, institutional frameworks, etc. However, in order for CSO participation to be more effective, CSOs felt there is a need to clarify the specific mandate of the international forums and also to delineate the terms associated with the work including such areas as “legitimate socio-economic and other issues”.

ADDRESSING SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONCERNS RELATED TO FOOD SAFETY: CIVIL SOCIETY VIEWS

I. Introduction

1. A key feature of the High Level meeting of the Committee for Agriculture in September 2001 was a dialogue with civil society [C(2001)235]. The non-governmental organisations (NGOs) noted that the agri-food sectors were undergoing significant changes driven by technology, globalisation and societal expectations. They stressed the need to ensure that the agri-food sector is economically, environmentally and socially sustainable. There was a broad convergence of views among the NGOs that the sector should be competitive and market oriented, while also meeting societal demands for environmental protection, food safety, equity and animal welfare.

2. In this context, a major challenge for policy makers is how to address the provision of public goods in agriculture and how to deal with food safety and/or environmental risks, without distorting markets and while making progress to realise the benefits of further trade liberalisation. They stressed that the dialogue should be continued and strengthened by engaging with a wider range of NGOs and devoting more time to the discussions. Policy makers saw consumer demands and societal expectations as major driving forces with food safety, consumer protection and preserving the environment through sustainable agricultural practices taking on a higher policy priority. They also emphasised the importance of considering the situation and perspectives of non-member economies when implementing policy reforms.

3. Participants at the High Level meeting stressed the need for better communications with civil society being more involved in discussions on new and emerging issues earlier and more consistently than is currently the case. The OECD was encouraged to undertake a more meaningful, two-way dialogue with civil society and parliamentary representatives, both in defining the scope and drawing upon the results of work activities. During the May 2002 consultation between civil society and the Committee for Agriculture, it was agreed that more substantive consultations on specific issues would be useful [AGR/CA/M(2002)1].

4. The *Overview of National Food Safety Systems and Activities* (OECD, 2000) noted that the mechanisms for public consultation on socio-economic issues related to food safety, 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. In the context of its 2001-2002 Programme of Work on Food Safety, Member countries requested the OECD to examine how governments can best address socio-economic concerns related to food safety without undermining the credibility of the science-based regulatory system and/or unjustifiably impeding trade.

5. To date, the Food Safety Programme has prepared reports on international developments [APM/CA/APM(2002)17] and innovative Member country approaches [AGR/CA/APM(2002)27] with respect to addressing the socio-economic concerns related to food safety. This third report provides a brief synopsis of the views of agricultural producers, the agri-food industry and consumer organisations. To solicit these views, a letter seeking comments on three broad questions was sent to the following international organisations -- the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), the Business

and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD (BIAC) and Consumers International (CI). Each organisation then canvassed its members and submitted a synthesis of the responses received.[1]

6. It was not the intention of this consultation to enter into extensive dialogue to develop a consensus across a range of various civil society groups nor to produce an exhaustive list of concerns, but rather to provide a range of views on addressing socio-economic concerns related to food safety. The three broad questions posed to each organisation and the IFAP, BIAC and CI responses are reproduced verbatim in the following sections. The views expressed below are strictly those of the participating organisations and in no way suggest endorsement or advocacy on the part of the OECD or its Member countries.

II. Addressing Socio-Economic Factors

What are the key socio-economic factors related to food safety and how should they be addressed?

7. Many OECD countries consider economic cost, technical feasibility and risk perception to be legitimate factors in risk management decisions. The question of whether socio-economic concerns such as animal welfare, cultural practices, environment and biodiversity considerations should be addressed within, or separate from, the food safety regulatory system is more controversial. Some countries emphasise the importance of taking account of such factors in their food safety regulations. In those countries, such factors are included in the basis for selecting risk management measures but not in the assessment of health risks. Others express concern that such factors may be used to unjustifiably impede trade in agricultural and food products. Still others stress that the integrity and credibility of their science-based food regulatory systems could be undermined by the introduction of other factors.

- Is the distinction between food safety and food quality, and between risk assessment and risk management sufficiently clear in the public debate about food safety regulations?
- Are economic considerations (*e.g.* compliance costs, trade impacts) adequately addressed when regulatory options are considered?
- What are the socio-economic factors related to food safety? Should any of these factors be addressed within the food safety regulatory process?
- How should these factors be addressed? During regulatory impact assessment? As part of risk management? Outside the risk analysis paradigm?
- What are the costs and benefits of adding socio-economic factors to the current risk analysis approach? Do the benefits justify the cost?

International Federation of Agricultural Producers

8. For farmers, it is important to make a clear distinction between food quality and food safety, and between risk assessment and risk management. However, this distinction is not yet sufficiently clear in the public debate.

1. In addition to its regular membership, BIAC requested input from the Confederation des Industries Agro-Alimentaire de l'UE (CIAA), the International Agri-Food Network and Crop life International.

9. *Food safety* is characterised by the fitness for consumption of food products, and protection of consumers against food-borne health risks. These include: microbiological risks, toxicological risks, nutritional risks, and physical contamination risks. Thus good farming practices are important for food safety, for example the use of pesticides and veterinary medicines, or control of hazards and contaminants. More broadly, food safety is an obligation to consumers by the different actors in the agri-food chain: consumers/citizens, governments, farmers, processors, distributors, and media. Food safety must be assured by governments through the development, setting and administering of food safety standards.

10. In contrast, *food quality* is a complex notion made up of several different components including nutritional composition, visual appearance, taste, and links to a local area. Food quality can also be related to the special characteristics of a product as a result of regional culture, or special efforts by farmers in their production practices. These can be controlled by producer quality assurance programs, or through certification schemes for the whole product chain that guarantee quality from the seed to the table.

11. In order to avoid problems, it is necessary to assure that the whole food chain meets recognised international standards, such as those of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, or higher domestic standards if these are based on a desire for a higher level of protection and can be justified on scientific grounds. Further, it is necessary to better harmonise international disease surveillance systems, data reporting, and diagnostic methods for food safety and quality. Food products that do not meet the minimal food safety standards should not be authorised for sale on internal or international markets.

12. The costs of implementing food safety regulations (*e.g.* traceability/product tracing systems) too often fall disproportionally hard onto farmers. At the moment farmers are being squeezed between two sets of demands. On one hand, developments in the WTO, which lead to increased market orientation and to reduced support. On the other hand, farmers are faced with increasing demands from consumers and society for stricter food safety regulations, higher quality standards, environmentally-friendly production, animal welfare consideration, etc., which imply extra costs for farmers.

13. Discussions within IFAP on socio-economic factors have focused mainly upon animal welfare and environmental considerations. Some animal welfare and environmental questions may belong in the field of food safety and others may not – advances in scientific knowledge will decide. For example, some farmers feel that the use of antibiotic or hormone growth promoters is a food safety issue as well as an animal protection issue. The same applies to the use of products of modern biotechnology. Some farmers feel that this is a food (feed) safety question as well as an environmental issue.

14. All factors that could have an impact on food safety should be addressed in the food safety risk analysis process, whether these factors are socio-economic, toxicological, etc. This is important to assure consumers of the credibility of the food regulatory system. Risk analysis must always begin with an objective risk assessment entirely based on sound scientific evidence. The risk assessment will identify the degree of scientific uncertainty.

15. Based on evidence from the risk assessment (scientific committees, Codex), risk managers (public authorities) are able to decide which measures to apply in order to protect human, animal or plant health and the environment. In situations where the risk assessment has proved that an unacceptable risk to human health is present, then the product concerned should be declared unfit for human consumption. However, where there is insufficient scientific evidence to be able to make an informed judgement about the level of the risk, risk managers may choose to take a precautionary approach. In doing so, risk managers will take into account the level of protection considered appropriate in their country. This level will be different for each situation. However it is essential that the level of risk accepted within the individual countries be applied in a consistent and non-discriminatory way.

16. Countries should recognise the obligation, when invoking a precautionary approach, to commission the necessary research to obtain sufficient scientific evidence to provide the missing data and perform a new risk assessment within a reasonable period of time, as laid down in Article 5.7 of the SPS Agreement of the WTO. IFAP believes that risk management measures based on a precautionary approach must always be of a provisional nature, pending the results of scientific research.

17. It is preferable that the relevant authorities ensure that sufficient resources are available to allow adequate measures to be taken to protect human, animal and plant health and the environment, instead of the application of precautionary measures. Farmers hold the opinion that measures based on a precautionary approach must be proportionate to the potential harm to human health and the environment. In order to avoid that a precautionary approach be used as disguised import protection, clear criteria should be developed on its application.

18. Even when food safety regulations deem that a product is fit for consumption, governments or consumers may find that certain foods are unacceptable for other reasons, including unacceptable farming or industry practices even through these deliver safe food. However, this is an area of food policy, not food safety. For policy purposes, a distinction needs to be made between consumer preferences (*e.g.* for organic or local products) that can be reflected in the market through labelling and price, and societal preferences (*e.g.* concerning the treatment of workers (child labour), animals (cruelty), or the environment (pollution), that is reflected in government legislation.

19. Regarding the question of the costs and benefits of adding socio-economic factors to the current risk analysis approach (do the benefits justify the cost), IFAP points out that no food producer can survive without being attentive to demands from the market and from society.

Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD

20. A safe food supply is integral to public health and is crucial to all stakeholders - government, citizens and the agri-food chain. An effective food safety system begins with the development of safety standards that establish safe levels of chemical residues, food additives and ingredients, microbial load as well as appropriate regulations for the use of food safety technologies such as irradiation. These standards and regulations, developed by national governments, must be rules-based, grounded in sound science and developed in a transparent manner.

21. An effective food safety system enables governments to monitor food production at each step in the food distribution chain and reduce hazards for example, by halting imports of contaminated food and closing down processing plants that do not comply with the nationally regulated safety standards. Once a food safety issue has been identified, a scientifically based process of evaluation and assessment is initiated. Risk/benefit analyses are systematic, objective assessments of specific issues based on quantifiable data.

22. Socio-economic factors such as animal welfare, cultural practices, environment and biodiversity issues do not affect food product safety. Therefore, they cannot be an integral part of the analysis of food safety risk nor of food safety regulation if it is to be objectively and quantitatively based. There are two likely drawbacks to including socio-economic factors in the analysis or management of food safety risk. The first is that it will complicate or obviate the evaluation with immeasurable data, thus compromising, and potentially undermining, the veracity and usefulness of a science-based analysis. The second is that it will create a more unwieldy and thus more expensive system that accommodates non-risk based activities and which incur higher costs borne by all consumers.

The following bullets are in response to the specific questions posed in this section:

- Civil society generally does not distinguish between food safety and quality or between risk assessment and risk management. However, the question relates to risk communication rather than assessment or management. Work is required in the areas in which an objective basis of assessment and output would be available or could be developed.
- Economic considerations are made during risk management in food safety issues by those upon whom the onus to provide the products lies. Most nations take into consideration economic feasibility in regulation, many nations are required to do so by statute. Work at the international level could be beneficial if directed toward evaluating the economic impact of many of the potential or contemplated global food safety initiatives.
- The issue is not the regulatory process but the basis upon which regulatory decisions can be made. Socio-economic factors that can be measured to have a demonstrated impact on food safety have yet to be identified. Only factors identified to have an impact on the safety of the food product should be addressed in the food safety regulatory process. Environmental and animal health issues are evaluated separately unless a true linkage is demonstrated to food safety.
- Socio-economic factors should be considered outside of the risk assessment paradigm; a case might be made that they could be considered in risk management and communication but those would then be the purview of member governments.
- Cost/benefit analysis has not been made for socio-economic factors in risk analysis for food safety. Each factor that was identified would need to be evaluated both dependent and independent of other factors and quantified objectively. For example, what would be the relative cost/benefit of including a specific (and it would need to be named) environmental impact or animal handling practice on the safety profile of a processed food?

23. In each of these cases, one might argue that some of the information would be “nice to know” and may be useful as marketing information in order to target specific populations. However, the relative cost/benefit of such questioning prohibits broad-based consideration of socio-economic factors in food safety assessment. For this reason, any inclusion of socio-economic factors or a specific factor would need to be based on a delineated food safety outcome or objective prior to initiating the investigation or assessment.

24. Food safety regulations require compliance, inspection audit and enforcement to ensure equivalent standards and to continue to protect public health. These are all essential parts of any regulatory system. Food safety should remain, as the words imply, the lack of risk to the public from the ingestion of raw and processed foods. Economic considerations are rarely adequately addressed when assessing regulatory options. Often the economic factors are narrowly focused, taking little account of broader economic impacts and international trade.

25. Risk communication requires an understanding of local social and cultural practices. In some countries, the shift from technical risk assessment to social and ethical impacts is in general rendering safety measurements an inappropriate means of responding to a perceived crisis of trust and therefore is eroding the jurisdiction and authority of scientific experts. This needs to be addressed, for example, the quality of the OECD’s scientific programme and its consensual approach needs to be more effectively communicated. If public acceptance of decisions made on their behalf is a function of trust in the institutional context of food assessment, technical risk communication alone may not be an appropriate coping strategy - but neither is discrediting the process of a science-based risk assessment.

Consumers International

26. In a rapidly changing world where science and technology are creating new methods to produce, store and transport food, regulatory measures need to be just as quick in responding to and anticipating new developments. Recent food scares such as Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and concern over products of modern biotechnology illustrate the importance of managing food safety risks effectively. These examples also show the importance of being able to strike a balance between science and broader societal concerns. Where scientific evidence is inconclusive and cannot effectively reassure the public on their health concerns then a certain level of regulatory action is needed to ensure consumer confidence in the food product.

27. As an example, the 'precautionary principle' has become a hotly debated topic in food policy, where many are calling for it to become an essential element in the management of food risks. It can play an important role in balancing scientific uncertainty with a short or long-term approach to managing risks. It is important to place this debate within the broader context of how we deal with food risks and in particular how 'new' risks presented by new technologies can be effectively managed. This is complex within an international context but given the global marketplace in which foods, and risks, are now traded, and therefore the importance of standard harmonisation, it is critical that it is discussed.

28. Recent events have shown that many decisions are made by governments, at whatever level, where uncertainty exists about whether it is appropriate to regulate risks. They have also highlighted difficulties in effectively dealing with these risks. The traditional 'scientific' approach to controlling food risks has been questioned – particularly following a succession of scares such as BSE, the growing problem of antibiotic resistance and concern over products of modern biotechnology. A balance has to be reached between the risks and benefits when deciding what action is appropriate. But increasingly it has been apparent that risks are not one-dimensional and many other factors can come into play.

29. Some weaknesses of current approaches have been exposed by food safety concerns and disagreements over the appropriate level of consumer protection. It has also become clear that science can never be completely objective. There will be varying degrees of conclusiveness about the status and reliability of the evidence under consideration, and where there are gaps, judgements and assumptions will have to be made. In some situations, for example, there may be ample data and the assessment will be relatively straightforward. In others, and BSE and products of modern biotechnology foods are examples, the nature of the hazard may not even be fully understood. However, in both of these situations and the multiple possibilities that fall in between, scientists (usually in their role on expert scientific committees) will be expected to reach a conclusion and this advice will then be used as the basis of the policy decision.

30. The limitations of this approach are amply illustrated. Frequently, different scientific committees when presented with the same evidence will reach different conclusions about the significance of the risk. The judgements and assumptions that they have to make in the absence of a full set of data may vary according to their own preconceptions, their vested interests and their own assessment of the relative benefits. In most cases neither the underlying uncertainties, nor the assumptions and judgements made as a result, have been explicit.

31. The approach based on 'sound science' is therefore not as sound as it is often presented. It is the very nature of science that at a particular point in time many questions will remain unanswered and there will be a range of views on the most appropriate way forward. It does science a disservice to suggest that it can provide all the needed answers. Science has sometimes been used to dictate policy without acknowledging any possible limitations in its ability to inform decisions. There has also, in some situations, been a misuse of scientific advice, by using it to support politically motivated actions while presenting them as based objectively on science.

32. Differing perceptions of risk between the public and the 'experts' or governments, and also among the supposedly objective experts themselves, have illustrated this. For example, the UK's Department of Health has produced a list of 'fright factors' which make risks more worrying and less acceptable to the public (UK Department of Health, 2003). These include whether the risks are perceived to be involuntary, to be inequitably distributed, to be inescapable by taking personal precautions or to arise from an unfamiliar or novel source. These perceptions are not irrational. Everyone will bring their own values and judgements to the table – whether they are a scientist, a policy maker, consumer or another stakeholder – when reaching conclusions about the acceptability of a particular risk. The current approach to risk analysis has typically failed to acknowledge this – and as a result, several recent decisions have proven to be controversial particularly when presented as scientifically justified. The controversy surrounding Bovine Somatotrophin (BST) is an illustration of this.

33. Unfortunately, in many cases, the pursuit of short-term economic and technical objectives has taken priority over long-term public health concerns – and greater efforts are still needed to redress the balance. Certainly within Europe greater focus on socio-economic factors has come as a result of a succession of food scares and a breakdown in consumer confidence over whether their interests are being given priority. This has been reflected by moves to separate out producer interests from public interests in the way that foods are regulated in many countries around the world, in many cases by the establishment of agencies or authorities with a remit primarily focused on public health and consumer protection.

34. How does a socio-economic factor fit into the risk analysis debate? It is essential that risk analysis is seen as an iterative process rather than as a linear one. The aim should be to ensure that the analysis is as rigorous as possible and that a broad approach is taken to analysing risks rather than one that is too narrowly focused. Many would consider socio-economic factors to be limited to the realm of risk management. However, this is too narrow an approach. So socio-economic factors do not need to be invoked at the end of a risk analysis – but rather they must be seen as elements of multiple decisions at many stages of the process, and it engenders a broad, underlying approach in its own right.

III. Role of Civil Society

What should be the role of civil society in addressing socio-economic concerns related to food safety?

35. Previous OECD consultations with consumer groups and industry organisations (civil society organisations - CSOs) on food safety and related issues have emphasised that all stakeholders want to be consulted in the regulatory process from planning to implementation. In a number of countries, the mechanisms employed to consult stakeholders have been revised to address, amongst other things, perceptions that regulators place inordinate emphasis on expertise and advice from the food industry. CSOs have been actively involved, at both the national and international level in discussions regarding the consideration of socio-economic concerns or "other legitimate factors" in the food safety regulatory decision-making process.

- What has been the role of CSOs on these issues? What have been the main objectives of industry involvement? Have these objectives been achieved?

- Do producer/industry/consumer organisations try to speak with one voice on these issues? Is a consensus view desirable/possible/necessary? Is there sufficient dialogue within specific CSOs?

- Should CSOs take a more active interest in these issues? Are the roles of CSOs different at the national and international level? Should they be?

- Is there sufficient dialogue among CSOs representing different aspects of civil society? Is representative? Is it dynamic, on-going? Is there a need for more multidisciplinary dialogue (e.g. science, economics, social disciplines)?

International Federation of Agricultural Producers

36. In order to make the risk management process transparent and valid, all stakeholders - including farmers - should be consulted on the various management options that may be envisaged once the results of the risk assessment are available. The role of farmers' organisations should be to improve awareness about the realities of farm production conditions. Also, they should help to develop and promote information on agricultural products for human consumption (documentation and labelling for traceability/product tracing).

37. The International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) has developed a consensus view on 'Food Safety and Quality' and this was adopted unanimously at the last World Farmers' Congress in May 2002 (IFAP, 2002). Thus the 100 national farmers' organisations from around the world that are members of IFAP speak with one voice on this issue.

38. At the national level, farmers' organisations in OECD countries are widely involved in dialogue on food safety issues. For example, in Denmark, co-operatives have spent a lot of money during the last two years, together with the Danish authorities, in efforts to reduce food borne diseases, with good results.

39. Farmers' organisations must have an active role on this area. The roles of CSOs at the *national* level will reflect the particular national circumstances in which they work. At the *international* level, the work is different, since it involves building consensus among different national perspectives. However, with globalisation, it has becoming increasingly necessary to adapt national policies to each other. Through IFAP, farmers seek progress in the international harmonisation of national regulations.

40. IFAP, and most of its member organisations, generally enjoy good consultative relations with other civil society organisations. In order to secure food safety and quality, there is a need for a strong link 'from conception to consumption' - meaning tight co-operation and understanding between farmers, processors, retailers and consumers. Food regulatory systems, and emergency response procedures, need to provide for effective lines of communication, and regular consultative processes with farmers and other stakeholders.

Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD

41. It is important to recognise the role that the agrifood industry plays in assisting regulators to obtain needed scientific information, data and specific expertise in areas that relate directly to the products that the industry develops, manufactures and markets. Active industry involvement in the development and implementation of food safety standards is crucial to a healthy food supply. Industry sponsored research and extensive testing is critical to produce food products that are safe for human consumption and to develop new and innovative food safety technologies. Providing expert advice to government regulators is critical to the development of food safety regulations that are cost effective and able to be implemented.

42. Industry also has an obligation, and a commercial imperative, to consider public concerns unrelated to food safety in the development of its products. Consumer purchasing power necessitates manufacturers of all goods to bear the interests and concerns of consumers in mind. Industry recognises that socio-economic issues are important to specific sectors of the population and products are voluntarily designed and developed to meet that need. For the agrifood industry, safety must take precedence when

making manufacturing choices. However, when food safety is not a concern, it must balance the costs and benefits of addressing socio-economic concerns. The following questions need to be considered when industry contemplates address socio-economic concerns in product development:

- How large a percentage of the population is interested in a particular socio-economic concern?
- Which means of addressing the identified issue is the most cost effective?
- Who will bear the cost of addressing a given issue?
- Will addressing the issue stifle innovation or lead to any other public welfare loss?
- Will addressing the issue violate the rules of free trade?
- Will addressing the issue negatively impact other populations or trading partners?

The following bullets are in response to the specific questions posed in this section:

- The role of regulated agrifood industry, in the area of food safety, is to ensure that the products it markets are safe and that they meet standards set by countries in which the products are marketed. In order to accomplish that goal, it is necessary for the industry to be deeply involved with national government regulators in order to assure that the industry can comply and in order for the regulators to be assured that the regulations meet specific food safety objectives. The objective is to develop a food supply that is safe for human consumption; that objective is tested every day and most would say has been successfully met through the co-operative work between the regulated industry and the regulators.

- To the extent that the regulated industry shares concerns among the various industry sectors, views are discussed; and where consensus positions are possible they are developed. Perspectives offered to the OECD from the business community through BIAC are consensus views. Industry recognises that policy can be more effectively influenced when "speaking with one voice". However, each industry sector has different concerns as well as different customers and suppliers. Industry works together as appropriate and mutually beneficial similar to consumer groups or other non-governmental organisations. However, when socio-economic concerns are raised, CSOs typically raise them toward one arm of the industry rather than at the industry generally. With respect to socio-economic effects on food safety, individual companies and concerns attend to the interests as appropriate.

- The agrifood industry takes an active interest in issues that affect their business, both nationally and internationally, and the degree to which the industry is involved is largely dependent upon the specific issue or venue and the ultimate impact on their business (whether directly or indirectly).

- Dialogue among CSOs again vary by segment of the industry, issue under discussion and specific company interest. Dialogue among CSOs is a continuing part of doing business within countries as well as internationally. Interactive dialogue among CSOs will also vary among countries and may be somewhat dependent upon economic status and cultural practices as well as transparency within the regulatory process.

43. It is obvious that industry has a vested interest in regulatory systems. Industry is not against regulation, indeed anything which encourages best practice, ensures a level playing field and reduces uncertainty, is welcomed. What industry needs is a transparent regulatory system based on in-depth knowledge of sourcing and food processing using relevant scientific disciplines such as microbiology and toxicology. It was industry in partnership with government which developed systems such as HACCP to drive forward food safety. The food industry is not homogenous, neither is it a simple chain. Food manufacturers are acutely aware of the consumer and consumer needs, which is essential to remain in business. Too often there is a perceived polarisation between industry and other civil society. The goals of both groups are often the same, that is enhanced quality of life which is sustainable both for the individual, society and the environment.

Consumers International

44. A two-fold approach is required to improving consumer participation in decision-making processes and in relation to addressing socio-economic concerns. On the one hand, building the capacity of consumer organisations (within the OECD area especially for countries in transition). Effective capacity building will ensure that consumer organisations can participate in national, regional and international negotiations, and that they actively monitor agreements, protocols, guidelines and standards, which are developed.

45. There are five key issues which affect the capacity of consumer organisations to participate effectively in decision-making processes:

- human and physical resources
- training
- access to information
- linkages and networking
- effective regulatory systems

46. In order to improve participation and consultation the interaction between the issues needs to be considered in a contextual manner.

47. The second approach to improving consumer participation lies with the national and international organisations responsible for food safety. Such organisations have a clear responsibility to promote participation, if only to further transparency, openness and democracy within their working structures. This can be done and facilitated by, for example:

- producing a ‘check list’ with which the progress of CSO participation can be tracked
- regularly inviting CSOs to workshops, roundtables, etc.
- international agencies encouraging Member governments to work broadly with civil society

IV. Mechanisms for Involving Civil Society

Are the current mechanisms adequate for involving civil society in addressing socio-economic concerns related to food safety?

48. In OECD countries, mechanisms generally exist for consulting interested parties in the development of food safety regulation, including consumer organisations, the food industry, trade organisations and other interest groups. These mechanisms differ, however, in their level of formality and in the specific measures employed to elicit and reflect the views of stakeholders. In particular, there are differences in the degree to which regulators are proactive in consulting interest groups, rather than simply making information available and inviting views on regulatory proposals. In addition to dialogue at the national level, efforts to discuss and agree on the legitimacy of socio-economic factors ("other legitimate factors") in food safety regulation have been addressed in a variety of international fora, including Codex and other FAO/WHO initiatives.

- *Are the consultation processes analytically sound, objective, credible, transparent, accountable? Do they instil public confidence? Is there sufficient international harmonisation?*

- *Do the consultation processes adequately address emerging socio-economic issues? Is there a need for international standards for CSO consultation?*

- *What criteria should determine the "legitimacy" of a CSO to represent consumers or industry? At the national level? At the international level?*

- *Are CSO views adequately represented at the international level? Is there an appropriate balance among CSOs representing different aspects of civil society? Should CSOs have greater access to intergovernmental committees (e.g. observership, right to speak)?*

International Federation of Agricultural Producers

49. IFAP and its national member organisations generally have access to the main fora where food safety regulations are being discussed. For example, national farm organisations follow and influence the work in Codex Alimentarius Commission.

50. Although mechanisms for involving all interested groups in the food chain differ, from developed countries to developing countries, in their level of formality and measures employed to reflect the views of all interested groups, the dialogue on regulatory proposals and the legitimacy of socio-economic factors in food safety in international fora is going-on and work for harmonisation and setting up accepted standards should be speeded up considerably, in order to instil public confidence.

51. The most significant discussions for farmers in Codex Alimentarius during the last few years have been the discussions about the 'precautionary approach' and considerations of including 'other legitimate factors'.

52. IFAP argues that consideration should be given to the examination of the desirability of establishing a World Food Authority (as noted in its statement on food safety and quality), as a multilateral forum for coordinating the work of national food authorities and similar bodies dealing with the various aspects of food safety. Such an authority would complement existing international institutions, such as the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

53. The question of what criteria should determine the 'legitimacy' of a CSO has also been under discussion in Codex Alimentarius Commission Committee on General Principles (Codex, 2003). As a general rule, IFAP feels that the legitimacy of CSOs depends on them having a democratic governance structure, to ensure that leaders have a genuine mandate to speak for their constituency.

54. At the international level, the Codex Alimentarius Commission is open to observers from civil society, including IFAP. On a European level, the recently-established European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has farmer, consumer and industry representatives on the Management Board. Many other food safety authorities work in the same way.

55. IFAP wishes to draw attention to the constraints facing farmers' organisations in many developing countries and transition economies in being able to participate effectively in such consultative processes. IFAP calls upon OECD countries to provide technical assistance and capacity-building to help developing countries to overcome such constraints to participation.

Business and Industry Advisory Committee to OECD

56. Regulatory processes created and implemented by national governments need to be transparent, objective and based on sound-science. All stakeholders must be given a voice in order to ensure an effective food safety system. With that in mind, however, it is important for all stakeholders to understand that the regulatory process can only be inclusive to a certain extent, for example, introduction of opinion or business perspective may not be entirely relevant to a discussion about food safety risk. Therefore, as issue arise and as countries try to make sense out of the risk management and communication needs that they have, CSO involvement may vary. Risk analysis on the other hand, particularly as it relates to food safety, needs to remain in the system where it can be objectively and quantifiably managed.

The following bullets are in response to the specific questions posed in this section:

- It is unclear how an "international harmonisation" of consultations for food safety imperatives might be accomplished beyond what is currently managed within the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Critical scientific input, stakeholder dialogue and input and consensus positions are developed for identified food safety issues. Beyond that, national governments may further consider how to manage and communicate the outcomes from those decisions - within the national framework, consideration of socio-economic issues might be possible. The OECD plays an important role through the development of consensus documents and other data-containing information useful to Codex in developing guidance and standards.

- The issue of criteria used for legitimacy of CSOs is a very important one and one that has been discussed extensively within Codex and other intergovernmental organisations. There are criteria that FAO, WHO and Codex use with respect to membership and input into not only the organisations but also the committees and the expert panels. In establishing such criteria, some thought must be given to what are the objectives for the various Coos and how might that input or perspective best be characterised and used.

- Inclusion of CSOs in discussion, dialogue and expert committees within Codex is dependent on a defined objective for that participation. For example, experts in the committees establishing standards and the scientific basis are included or excluded based on a different set of criteria than are those for NGO participation. It is important to explain why that inclusion or exclusion exists and for this system to be consistent among committees and

panels. Where CSO participation is seen as inadequate or inappropriate, the specific rationale for that contention as well as objectives for future inclusions should be provided to the managing organisation. In that way, CSOs have the opportunity to consistently provide input as appropriate. It is important to consider the economic costs of broad CSO participation as well as the importance of creating a transparent forum, while simultaneously facilitating the progress of work.

57. Probably no one-model will fit all. Different countries will have different cultural traditions, political systems, and methods of public consultation. Principles by which consultation should occur could be laid down on an international basis, mechanisms may be best left to national or regional decision. What is required is a space within which interested parties will be able, and keen, to evaluate new ideas and assess their benefits and risks.

Consumers International

58. In relation to regulatory systems, an appropriate and effective system should embody three general principles. It should establish comprehensive and rigorous systems for ensuring safety for human health and the environment in respect of food and feed – whether produced through conventional means or through using novel methods, such as genetic engineering. It should implement those requirements through an open, transparent and inclusive process. And finally, it should provide the public with information to make informed choices and decisions in the marketplace, through clear and non-misleading labelling.

59. With respect to the dialogue between CSOs, there is a need to facilitate this process further as it happens on an ad hoc issue basis at present. However, in order to make such a dialogue fruitful (and taking the broad nature of the issue of socio-economic factors into account), there needs to be a broad representation of CSOs. The issue of legitimacy is, of course, a question. From a consumer point of view, CI provides a legitimate international voice of consumers with members from all over the world in more that 125 countries. Also CI is accredited by the United Nations[2], has observer status at Codex, etc. Regarding the development of CI positions, they are developed by consensus and in consultation with our regional or global food, trade or environmental networks, as appropriate.

60. With respect to broader involvement of CSOs in future dialogue on socio-economic concerns related to food safety, Consumers International's experience is of a mixed nature. In some cases, CI involvement seems to depend more on an issues/personal contact basis than a systematic approach. In this respect, CI would very much welcome a more systematic approach by such institutions as the OECD, taking into account the nature of the CSO in question and the resources available.

2. Non-governmental, non-profit public or voluntary organisations may be admitted into a mutually beneficial working relationship with the United Nations by attaining consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The rights and privileges enumerated in detail in ECOSOC resolution 1996/31, enable qualifying organisations to make a contribution to the work programmes and goals of the United Nations by serving as technical experts, advisers and consultants to governments and Secretariat. Sometimes, as advocacy groups, they espouse UN themes, implementing plans of action, programmes and declarations adopted by the United Nations. In concrete terms this entails their participation in ECOSOC and its various subsidiary bodies through attendance at these meetings, and also through oral interventions and written statements on agenda items of those bodies. In addition, organisations, qualifying for General Category consultative status, may propose new items for consideration by the ECOSOC. Organisations granted status are also invited to attend international conferences called by the U.N., General Assembly special sessions, and other intergovernmental bodies.

V. Summary Observations

International Federation of Agricultural Producers

61. In recent years, food safety and quality – including the ways in which food is produced - has become the subject of increased attention by consumers, the food industry and governments, particularly in the industrialised countries. As a result, new demands are placed on farmers, and regulation of farming and food production is increasing.

62. From the viewpoint of the farmers, the most important issue concerning the issue of addressing socio-economic concerns, is the need to separate food (and feed) safety questions (*i.e.* questions related to whether products are fit for consumption from food 'quality' considerations such as animal welfare, cultural practices, environment and biodiversity. The food safety regulatory system should be based on good science and sound risk management principles so as to enable an objective assessment of risks and implementation of appropriate measures to protect the health of consumers. In this context, farmers support the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission and the SPS Agreement of the WTO so that a consistent global approach to food safety can be maintained on a non-discriminatory and scientific basis.

63. In relation to the question of whether socio-economic issues should be the subject of further consultations between governments and consumer and other interest groups, IFAP strongly supports such dialogue. During these consultations, consumer, industry and other interest groups would be able to raise their concerns and discuss appropriate measures to address any demonstrable shortcomings in the producing countries' animal welfare, environmental or related policies. Consumers should be able to make informed choices about their food purchases, through access to reliable and meaningful information. In this way, consumers and other interest groups can help to determine the market acceptance of the products concerned and achieve changes to production practices, if such changes are seen to be desirable.

Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD

64. Socio-economic concerns such as animal welfare, cultural practices and the environment have raised questions and stimulated debate in nearly all consumer product industries. This debate over agrifood chain products has been particularly heated and has entangled socio-economic concerns and the safety of the food supply. Socio-economic concerns are subjective, non-scientific concerns which have no place in food safety risk assessment framework. The assessment of food safety risk depends entirely on scientific and objective quantitative analysis.

65. However, socio-economic concerns are still valid consumer issues worthy of discussion and consideration in the development of policy. Industry has an obligation as well as a commercial imperative to consider consumer concerns in product development as they can impact consumer purchasing decisions. At the domestic level, governments use a variety of mechanisms to take into account public concerns in the formulation of regulatory policy. Before decision making, national governments also need to assess net social costs and benefits of the policy options as they affect the entire population. Finally, all domestic regulations need to comply with existing trade obligations and international standards.

Consumers International

66. A succession of food scares, especially in Europe, has resulted in a breakdown in consumer confidence and a stronger focus on how decisions are made at both the national and international levels regarding food safety controls. These food scares have shown that food safety and risk is multi-dimensional and should be considered within wider socio-economic and cultural contexts.

67. Although the history of socio-economic factors or ‘other legitimate factors’ is mainly in environmental policy, it has recently become hotly debated in food safety policy. The changing nature of food risks, especially through technological advancements, demands flexible regulatory systems that can quickly adapt to emerging risks. The debate on socio-economic factors has extended its application to various multilateral and inter-governmental organisations, including the World Trade Organisation and Codex Alimentarius.

68. Consumers International recommends that food safety and risk be approached as multi-dimensional and consider them within wider socio-economic and cultural contexts, that policy makers ensure ‘other legitimate factors’ are considered and used to inform policy decisions as science alone cannot always provide all the answers and that regulators and civil society work towards transparency, openness and the participation of stakeholders on issues related to food safety, including the wider context of socio-economic factors

REFERENCES

Codex (2003), NGO Participation: Principles Concerning The Participation Of International Non-Governmental Organizations In The Work Of The Codex Alimentarius Commission, http://www.codexalimentarius.net/ngo_participation.stm

IFAP (2002), statement by the farmers of the world on "Food Safety and Quality", 31 May, 2002.

OECD (2000), Overview of National Food Safety Systems and Activities, report of the OECD Ad Hoc Group on Food Safety to the July 2000 G8 Summit in Okinawa, Japan.

UK Department of Health, Communicating about Risks to Public Health: Pointers to Good Health, http://www.doh.gov.uk/pointers.htm