



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

NOTE FOR THE PRESS

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Note for the Media WHO/12
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WHO AND FAO TO CONSULT CONSUMER ASSOCIATIONS FROM 25 COUNTRIES ON HOW TO PROMOTE THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN FOOD SAFETY

In a new effort to broaden the technical advice they receive in advance of framing policy recommendations to its Member States, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) are inviting consumer associations from 25 countries, representing more than three billion people, to meet with them from 8-10 June at WHO headquarters in Geneva. The meeting is organized in collaboration with Safe Food International, a project of the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), an international non-governmental organization that seeks to establish a common platform for consumer groups and others in advocating for stronger national food safety standards.

Representatives of consumer associations will discuss how they can contribute to their countries' efforts to improve the quality and safety of food. A set of Guidelines for consumer organizations' involvement in food safety efforts will be completed and launched on 10 June.

Sub-standard food is a potential danger to every human being on this earth and there are already an estimated two billion annual cases of foodborne illness. It is also the cause of frequent trade rejections with the resulting economic drawbacks. Consumer organization input into food safety is invaluable, given their ability to reach every person potentially affected by unsafe food.

At the meeting, WHO and FAO will work with consumer groups to devise means of identifying and prioritizing the largest risks to human health in food, be they chemical or microbiological. The aim is for consumer organizations to have the information they require to both communicate the most important food-related health concerns to their constituencies and advocate for improvements in the efficiency of food safety systems.

This consultation is the first step in a changed process whereby WHO and FAO will reach out to all stakeholders concerned with safer and healthier food. WHO recommends broad partnerships with governments, food producers and consumer organizations in order to properly tackle food safety issues.

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Consumer groups from Armenia, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, China, Estonia, India, Korea (Republic of), Lebanon, Malaysia, Nepal, New Zealand, Peru, Poland, Senegal, Seychelles, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay and Zimbabwe have been invited and are expected to attend.

What: WHO and FAO-sponsored meeting with 40 consumer associations to discuss their role in ensuring food safety

When: 8-10 June 2005

Where: WHO Headquarters, Geneva

For journalists: The meeting is closed to journalists; however Interviews can be arranged with WHO and FAO staff and with representatives of consumers associations. Journalists can keep regularly up-to-date on progress in the discussions by contacting Gregory Hartl, +41 79 203 6715.

For more information, please contact Gregory Hartl, WHO, email hartlg@who.int; tel +4179 203 6715