



Managing contaminants in food exports

To protect the health of consumers of Ecuadorian agricultural products through the establishment of a national programme for the monitoring and integral management of contaminants (pesticides and mycotoxins) in export products.

STDF/PG/318

Status

Completed

Start Date

01/12/2010

End Date

31/05/2013

Project Value (US\$)

\$628,791

STDF Contribution (US\$)

\$432,491

Beneficiaries

Ecuador

Implementing Entities

Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)

Partners

Ecuadorian Agency for Agricultural Product Quality Assurance (AGROCALIDAD)

Autonomous National Institute of Agricultural Research (INIAP)

Ministry for the Coordination of Production, Employment and Competitiveness, Ecuador

Background

In the commercial transactions of today's globalized world, maximum residue levels (MRLs) have become a critical factor. If an exported product exceeds the MRLs set by an importing country, the exporter is considered to have violated international trade laws on food products. The penalties in each case can vary from a refusal to accept the exported product to a ban on imports from a specific country. In Ecuador, many of the major economic activities, such as the production of flowers, African palm, bananas, palm hearts and non traditional products (in particular fruits and vegetables), involve the extensive use of chemical pesticides. The national programme for the monitoring of pesticide residues and mycotoxins focused on training both producers and exporters to improve their practices, strengthening the diagnostic capacity of national laboratories, and implementing an information system for exporters, managed by the State health agency AGROCALIDAD. The programme increased opportunities for the export of Ecuadorian products to new markets and heightened awareness of pesticides and mycotoxins among consumers across the country.

Results

Strengthening of the analytical capacity to control pesticide residues and mycotoxins in export products

The project led to an increase in the analytical capacity of two State laboratories – one from INIAP and the other from AGROCALIDAD – through the purchase of equipment and material, and above all through the training of personnel via technical visits and workshops. Initial monitoring and analysis work was conducted on two pilot production chains: broccoli and coffee. These products were selected based on technical, commercial, economic, social and health related criteria. For coffee, the project made it possible to strengthen existing data from previous studies, leading to some important conclusions. For broccoli, it was possible to analyse samples for export and for the main domestic markets, enabling researchers to obtain information on products for domestic consumption as well.

Strengthening of the capacity to use and manage pesticides and control mycotoxins

In order to strengthen the capacity to use and manage pesticides and control mycotoxins, a training programme was implemented for producers and exporters of both of the agricultural export products selected. The programme focused on good agricultural practices, the correct use and responsible management of pesticides, and the integrated management of mycotoxins.

A guide to good agricultural practices and a corresponding implementation manual were developed and published for each selected product. Theory based and practical workshops on good agricultural practices were held for producers and exporters based on guides for the correct use and responsible management of pesticides. An information and communication system on contaminants was also developed and implemented for producers and exporters at national level.

Strengthening of dialogue and coordination between the public and private sectors

The project provided the possibility for dialogue and coordination between the private and public sectors through workshops organized within the framework of the Integrated System for Agricultural Health, Food Quality, and Safety (SISCAL). The project's legal framework was defined and agreed upon, which ensured the sustainability of the programme for the monitoring and control of residues and contaminants. Workshops were held with the Asia and Pacific Seed Association (APSA), CropLife, the Ecuadorian Export Federation (FEDEXPOR), the Export and Investment Promotion Corporation (CORPEI), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) to define strategies for the shared management of the programme. Workshops with trade associations were also held to establish possible technical cooperation agreements between the public and private sectors.

Recommendations

Permanent communication with the parties concerned

Permanent collaboration and communication with the various actors, ministries and other institutions concerned was very important; in this respect, the meetings and workshops were key to ensuring society's participation in the programme.

Collaboration with interested bodies

Building links with other institutions or trade associations working on or interested in the topic during the implementation of the project was of great help in managing logistics and optimizing project resources. The work conducted jointly with the public sector and various private institutions helped to clarify the aim of the project, expand its reach and facilitate logistics, and even made it possible to set aside some financial resources for additional activities.

Project management

For projects which are similar in design, it can be beneficial to have an administrative assistant monitoring the programme from beginning to end.