



## Improving food inspection through a virtual school

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The overall objective was to improve the safety of fresh and processed food in the region, and in so doing to facilitate trade and improve public health, using up-to-date and harmonized inspection procedures carried out by a pool of properly trained food inspectors in all countries of the region.

A result story on the project is available [here](#).

The project was externally evaluated and presented to the Working Group in 2019. Please access the evaluation report [here](#).

### STDF/PG/344

#### Status

Completed

#### Start Date

01/07/2012

#### End Date

30/06/2016

#### Project Value (US\$)

\$1,534,294

#### STDF Contribution (US\$)

\$977,643

#### Beneficiaries

Belize  
Costa Rica  
Dominican Republic  
El Salvador  
Guatemala  
Honduras  
Nicaragua  
Panama

#### Implementing Entities

Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)

#### Partners

Governments of Belize, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama

## **Background**

Bearing in mind that food inspection in the countries of Central America and the Dominican Republic is the responsibility of various government agencies, and considering the importance of promoting harmonized, effective and technically justified coordination efforts, the possibility arose of undertaking a project aimed at strengthening the capacities of the inspectorates in order to guarantee food safety throughout the food chain.

A cadre of food inspectors trained in modern inspection techniques and having an attitude conducive to proactive participation in the improvement of food safety in the region would contribute not only to eliminating or minimizing incidents, as a result of obstacles to trade, and overcoming the distrust of countries in the inspection system vis à vis their regional trading partners, but would also promote the modernization and ongoing improvement of the associated regulations.

The harmonization of the regional inspection procedures would facilitate progress towards a customs union and have a positive impact on consumer health.

## **Results**

### ***Regional food inspectors school in operation***

The establishment of the school led to the following activities being undertaken:

- Development of a virtual course on food inspection available on the IICA virtual platform.
- Development of a virtual course on food safety auditing.
- Establishment of an Academic Council with representatives of the eight countries participating in the project.
- Establishment of a Technical Advisory Group made up of representatives of the government sectors responsible for food inspection (Ministries of Agriculture and Health).
- Seven memorandums of understandings were signed with the universities partnering the project, to provide support for the organization and implementation of virtual courses on food inspection and food safety auditing. Agreements were signed with Costa Rica: Universidad de Costa Rica, CITA; El Salvador: Universidad José Matías Delgado; Guatemala: Universidad Rafael Landívar; Nicaragua: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, León; Honduras: Universidad Nacional de Agricultura; Panamá: Universidad de Panamá; and Dominican Republic: Universidad ISA.
- Under these agreements and with the aim of facilitating implementation of the project, videoconferencing equipment was purchased for Universidad Rafael Landívar, UNAN León, Universidad ISA, Universidad de Costa Rica and Universidad José Matías Delgado. Two year Webex licences were obtained for the Universidad Nacional de Agricultura and the Universidad de Panamá.

### ***Delivery of two virtual food inspection courses***

Two virtual courses were delivered from 18 February to 18 September 2015 and from 20 October 2015 to 26 April 2016, with the following results:

- 936 inspectors from the eight countries began their training.
- 544 inspectors completed the courses.
- 479 inspectors passed the training tests:
  - Honduras: 48
  - Dominican Republic: 47
  - El Salvador: 104
  - Panama: 23
  - Guatemala: 43
  - Costa Rica: 144
  - Belize: 6
  - Nicaragua: 64

### ***Sustainability proposal for Virtual Regional Food Inspectors School (ERVIA)***

At the closing project meeting, it was agreed by the members of the academic sector and the official sector that ERVIA's sustainability should be ensured through implementation of a strategic alliance and the coordination of efforts to ensure its continuing operation.

Agreement was reached at the meeting on a new structure comprising the Official Technical Commission, made up of representatives of the competent food safety authorities in each country and the Academic Council made up of partner universities in each of the countries participating in the project (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama and Dominican Republic). In addition, the parties agreed on the importance of promoting initiatives at both local and regional level.

### ***Available international public goods***

- 1 virtual food inspectors course which will be migrated to the platforms of the partner universities for delivery at national and regional level.
- 1 virtual food safety auditing course which will be migrated to the virtual platforms of the partner universities for delivery at national and regional level.

### ***Formation of a network of academic food inspection experts at regional level***

This initiative led to the formation of a group of some 25 representatives of the academic sector with expertise in food inspection and food safety auditing; this may contribute to the technical improvement of work on this topic at both the regional and the local level, and at the same time to capacity building within the countries.

### **Recommendations**

#### ***Work on the long term sustainability of the project***

Promotion of in depth discussion with governments and alternative universities to ensure the sustainability of the course at local and regional level.

#### ***Communication and coordination mechanisms***

Strengthening the means of communication between the Academic Council and the Official Technical Commission at regional and local level.

#### ***Inclusion of strategic partners from other competent organizations in the government and private sector***

Identification of programmes at the regional and local levels to promote the participation and active inclusion of the Ministries of Health in the region and other competent bodies, and establishment of strategic alliances with the private sector.

#### ***Identification of other strategic partners in the Americas in order to replicate the initiative***

Disseminate and share the results of the project with other governments, with a view to disseminating and extending the initiative in other countries and regions.