Electronic SPS Certification in the Americas

"Learning from past experiences and exploring new approaches"

(25 -27 July, 2023)
San José, Costa Rica

Background

Electronic SPS certification for international trade has received greater attention during and since the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the extent to which countries have adopted this type of exchange varies significantly. The Americas have been a leader in adopting electronic SPS certification. Over 15 countries in the region[1] are currently exchanging electronic phytosanitary certificates through the ePhyto Hub while several others are in the testing phase to begin exchanging. The ePhyto Hub is a centralized exchange system for ePhytos that can be used by all national plant protection organizations (NPPOs) once they are connected. Implementation of the use of ePhyto Hub provides useful lessons for countries in the region and abroad.

Although the use of ePhytos has grown exponentially over the last few years, the uptake of electronic veterinary certification (eVet) remains less widespread, and its adoption continues to pose challenges for many countries. IICA is currently exploring the development of a project to pilot test a regional approach for the exchange of electronic veterinary certificates. This effort may require reforming legislation, modernizing infrastructure, and shifting mind-sets to implement change (OECD PAPER N°190).

There are some noteworthy cases of IICA Member States working towards eVet exchange and being early adopters in this area. For example, in recent years, Chile has been working towards a standard XML for the exchange of e-sanitary certificates with the European Union and with other Pacific Alliance member countries (i.e., Colombia, Mexico, and Peru). And since August 2022, Chile and Korea have been exchanging electronic certificates for all animal and aquaculture products." (OECD PAPER N°190).

The ePhyto solution, which has two structural components, the hub and the generic ePhyto national system (GeNS), has been operational since July 2019. Article 5.2.4. of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code notes that "Certification may be provided by electronic exchange of data sent directly from the Veterinary Authority of the exporting country to the Veterinary Authority of the importing country." However, the diversity of formats and contents of data elements for the electronic exchange of certificates continues to create challenges for international uptake. (OECD PAPER N°190). A practical workshop to discuss the challenges and opportunities of eVet with experts in the region and beyond is timely and represents an important opportunity to discuss regional harmonization.

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1   ARG, BHS, CHL, COL, CRI, DOM, DMA, GTM, GUY, JAM, LCA, MEX, PAN, PER, PRY, TTO, and USA.

Certificación Electrónica MSF en las Americas "Aprender de experiencias pasadas y explorar nuevos enfoques"
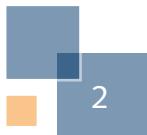
Objective of the event

This two and a half-day event brought together experts from 29 IICA Member States to provide a platform to exchange lessons learned on electronic SPS certificates and discussed ways to pilot test a regional approach for the exchange of electronic veterinary certificates.

Structure of the event

The event was structured around plenary sessions and breakout groups to maximize the benefits of in-person interactions. As a result of the forum, an outcome document was produced with conclusions on the different points discussed during the plenary sessions. Event sessions had simultaneous interpretation in English and Spanish.
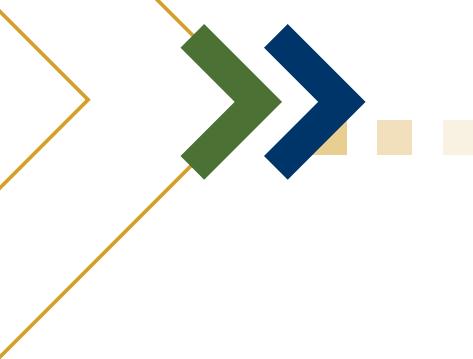
Program and presentations

DAY 1	
TIME	**AGENDA POINT**
8:30 – 9:00	**Registration – morning coffee**
9:00 – 9:30	**Opening ceremony** • Dr José Urdaz, Manager – IICA's Agricultural Health, Safety and Agrifood Quality Program. • Simon Padilla & Pablo Jenkins (STDF/OMC)
9:30 – 11:00	**Plenary session I: Intro to eCert** Facilitated by IICA followed by Q&A • Presentation IPPC - Rodrigo Robles (SAG - Chile) • Presentation Codex Alimentarius - Erik Bosker (MINLNV – Países Bajos) • Presentation WOAH - Catya Martinez • Presentation WCO - Juan Diego Chavarria
11:00 – 11:30	**Coffee break**
11:30 – 13:00	**Plenary session II: Country experiences on ePhyto** Moderated by STDF followed by Q&A **Panelists** • Presentation Chile - Rodrigo Robles (SAG) • Presentation USA - Michael J. Perry (USDA APHIS) • Presentation Jamaica - Damian Rowe (MOA) • Presentation Mexico – Delfino Hernández Garrido (SENASICA)
13:00 – 14:30	**Lunch break**
14:30 – 16:00	**Plenary session III: Country experiences on eVet** Moderated by IICA followed by Q&A Panelists • Presentation Chile - Claudia Mancilio Ascencio (SAG) • Presentation USA – Ciarra Toomey (FSIS/USDA) • Presentation Brazil - Fernanda Michalski & Claudia Dantas (MAPA)
16:00 – 16:30	**Coffee break**
16:30 – 17:30	**Plenary session IV: Discussion and summary** Wrap-up session facilitated by STDF

DAY 2

TIME	AGENDA POINT
9:00 – 9:30	**Intro to Day 2**
9:30 – 11:00	**Plenary session V: Roundtable discussion: Prerequisites and possible ways of establishing electronic exchange of veterinary certificates in the region** Moderated by IICA followed by Q&A **Speakers** • Presentation Prof. Vidal Zapparoli Melo (USP - Brazil) • Erik Bosker (MINLNV – Países Bajos) • Presentación Juan Diego Chavarria (WCO)
11:00 – 11:30	**Coffee break**
11:30 – 13:00	**Breakout session – Prerequisites of establishing electronic exchange of veterinary certificates in the region** • Group 1: Andean + Central + Southern Regions • Group 2: Caribbean + Northern Regions
13:00 – 14:30	Lunch break
14:30 – 16:00	**Breakout session - Possible ways of establishing electronic exchange of veterinary certificates in the region** • Group 1: Andean + Central + Southern Regions • Group 2: Caribbean + Northern Regions
16:00 – 16:30	**Coffee break**
16:30 – 17:30	**Report of breakout sessions and discussion** Facilitated by STDF followed by discussion • Group 1: Andean + Central + Southern Regions • Group 2: Caribbean + Northern Regions

DAY 3

TIME	AGENDA POINT
9:00 – 10:30	**Presentation of forum findings & agreement on workshop conclusions** Facilitated by IICA • Conclusions
10:30 – 11:00	**Coffee break**
11:00 – 12:00	**Closing ceremony** • IICA Representative • STDF
12:00 – 13:00	**Lunch break**
13:00 – 16:30	**IICA Lab visit**

Breakout sessions report and discussions

>> BREAKOUT SESSION – Prerequisites of establishing electronic exchange of veterinary certificates in the region

GROUP 1: Andean, Central and Southern Regions

QUESTION 1 – What would be possible Pre-Requirements to establish and Implement eVet Certification?

- That importers and exporters have capacities (Paraguay)
- Homologation / Standardization of the fields that contain a sanitary certificate (Nicaragua)
- Starting from a data mapping (Mexico)
  » A previous work of each country in the identification of the data that must be included in an eCert. (Uruguay)
- That pre-existing experiences/systems be considered (Honduras)
- Have a legal framework that facilitates the exchange of information (Nicaragua).
- Regional articulation to reach a common solution (Chile).
- Consider the IT infrastructure of those involved (Mexico).
- Take advantage of the experiences of the Pacific Alliance and SIECA, as well as OMSA, Codex, etc. (Uruguay and Mexico).
- Sensitization and technical training for implementation (Nicaragua and Mexico).

- That there is a certain level of flexibility for adjustments in the platform/system.

QUESTION 2 - What should be the sequence / importance ranking (human resources, financial, technological, political and negotiation aspects)?

- Political - Sensitization of decision-making levels (establish statement for future work and indication of focal points)
- Regulatory
- Financial / human / technological resources / continuity in the work
- Technological
- Negotiation with partners

QUESTION 3 - Given that most work is done at the bi-lateral level, why isn't there more exchange at the multi-lateral level? What is needed to advance the multilateral solution?

- No progress has been made because, in the past, the discussion has been based a lot on approval. But, if there is data to transmit, it must begin (Chile).
- The absence of a GeNS (Mexico).
- Formation of a working group (Paraguay)
- That a platform be established (Uruguay)
- Take advantage of / explore the possibility of using the example of the Pacific Alliance.

- Seek to approve a joint solution of the IABA regarding the issue.

GROUP 2:
Caribbean and Northern Regions

QUESTION 1 – What would be possible Pre-Requirements to establish and Implement eVet Certification?

- Resources needs: This was broken down into three main areas;
  - » Financial
  - » Human (Technical Skillset) –Competent Authority establishing the level of skillset required for the undertaking.
  - » Infrastructure – Computer (with compatibility), Internet and Servers.
- Commodities Review and Mapping of requirements – This involve looking at all commodities that would be featured in the system for both the aquatic and terrestrial environment and document the requirements.
- Review of the Legal Framework – A crucial step in the procedure would be to examine the legal structure to see if the mechanism for exchanging electronic certificates is currently in place. The requirement to exchange eVet could be included in the animal health law, made into a separate law, or both.
- Political Support – At the beginning of the process, getting support from the political directorate is essential. When interacting with politicians, it would be wise to present the data in a way that

encourages trade facilitation and national modernization. Important catalyst for the discussion includes:
- » Trade Facilitation – It would be helpful to the discussion to provide justification for how the deployment of eVet could assist the private sector. For example, the cost of doing business would decrease, port wait times would shorten, fraud would decline, and most importantly, this would be a method to modernize the capability and position of the nation.
- » Politicians would be highly reluctant to hire staff members due to the expense involved; however, if it could be shown how much money would be saved, it would encourage support for funding and other resources. This is where the Cost Factor plays a significant part in propelling the case ahead.
- Private Sector Support – Getting the backing of the commercial sector right away should be a priority. The support for the eVet system should be unrestricted once the commercial sector is able to recognize its advantages. Some participants in the meeting mentioned that their nation used public-private partnerships to activate eVet activities. The Netherlands stated that its endeavor received a 50/50 mix of private and public funding. One participant indicated the conventional system of verification was challenging, but then the modernize system provide real benefits and companies would indicates their level of cost savings.
- This workshop's major goal is to work

with participants to determine how to get started while ensuring that no nation is left behind. The best course of action should be to digitize the national system; however, some nations have already begun the mapping process, while others have not.

QUESTION 2 - What should be the sequence / importance ranking (human resources, financial, technological, political and negotiation aspects)?

The Group engaged in a process to map the sequence of activities that must be conducted to create and execute eVet Cert across the region, and the outcome of this deliberative exercise can be found below:

- Assessing the country's current status – It may be important to conduct an evaluation of the existing national situation in order to determine what steps must be taken to go forward. This task would consist of the following components:
- Reviewing of the legislative process,
- Identifying the platform for trade that the country chooses to employ, such as the WCO Single Window option or a Web-based service comparable to GeNS.
- Consultation with the political directorates to ensure top management support. One method of conveying the word to the political directorate is through a Change Champion, with each member relaying the message to their top management in order to initiate the change.
- Sensitizing and Collaborating with Private Sector – In most circumstances, the pri-

vate sector's assistance will help to efficiently drive the process, especially given that the private sector benefits the most.

QUESTION 3 - Given that most work is done at the bi-lateral level, why isn't there more exchange at the multi-lateral level? What is needed to advance the multilateral solution?

- Absence of a Harmonize Standard – The Group stated that there is no defined, standardize model for data exchange at the WOAH level. As a result, eVet exchange has to be negotiated bi-laterally, making it considerably more complex when compared to ePhyto. It was further stated that for the IPPC there are two standardized ePhyto model certificates that different nations can choose to utilize at the IPPC level. At the moment, there is no formal disclosure of a multilateral lead on developing harmonized reference data model for eVet.
- Multiple Requirements – Brazil shared how it had over 600 different veterinary certificates for various products/trading partners, making worldwide harmonization in eVet challenging to achieve.
- A long discussion ensued as to whether or not it is possible to reduce these hundreds of certificates to a smaller unit.
- A member indicated that Professor Vidal worked with the competent authority to obtain the specifications for all nations in their national system to develop eVet-Certs in the language of several nations.
- The Group emphasized the need for the creation of simple models that take
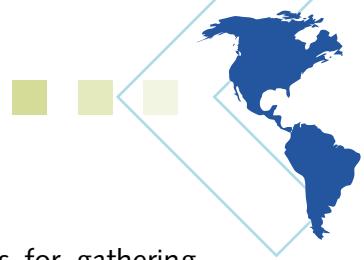
into account the needs of every nation. Reducing the number of fields on an eVet template to only those relevant fields that are required for trade. Attachments, with additional information, can be sent with the certificates.

- These hundreds of different certificates needs could be readily scoped into the national system capability. The template will have particular areas for gathering criteria for each country, making the task easier and more structured.

- According to one Member, the anticipated new work of WOAH to establish a Reference Data model will incorporate the Codex template, which will be used by WCO in the Single Window.

BREAKOUT SESSION - Possible ways of establishing electronic exchange of veterinary certificates in the region

GROUP 1:
Andean, Central and Southern

QUESTION 1 - Would there be value in constructing a GeNS system to promote the work in the Region?

Si, hay valor porqué si tenemos recursos limitados, nos ahora recursos en el desarrollo de un sistema (México).

- Yes, there is value because if we have limited resources, we save resources in the development of a system (Mexico).
- Mainly to those who do not have systems.
- To those who do have a system, it could also be used as a complement.
- Yes. If there were a generic system, covering multiple products, many problems would be solved. (Chile – "if available, we would implement it immediately").
- How is the experience of the Pacific Alliance used? Taking advantage of the model and content homologation work achieved in the AP and reviewing it based on the OMSA and Codex standards. Also, having multiple systems is not a limitation. The systems complement each other.

QUESTION 2 – How do you see the Single Window helping to implement eVet?

- In the case of Uruguay, joint work between the health authorities and the customs authorities is essential.
- Nicaragua – determining role because it generates everything that has to do with documentation.
- Honduras – the idea is that all countries have a single window.
- Paraguay – everything through the single window.
- Chile – does not depend on the single window.

QUESTION 3 - Would your country be willing to participate in pilot project and what would be the requirement for the pilot? What requirements should a country meet to be a pilot country (political commitment, level of development on the issue, exporter/importer profile, etc.)?

- Have some previous experience (countries that already start with some previous work on the subject)
- Countries that have some kind of exchange of veterinary certificates.
- Political-institutional commitment – designation of responsibilities.
- Ensure continuity/sustainability during the pilot.
- Potential candidates to take part in a pilot experience: Mexico – Chile – Paraguay – Uruguay – Peru – Dominican Republic (Honduras and Bolivia – pending consultation).

GROUP 2:
Caribe and Norte Regions

QUESTION 1 - Would there be value in constructing a GeNS system to promote the work in the Region?

GROUP RESPONSE: YES.

The Group also added the following comments:

- It could be a low hanging fruit that countries could use to get started.
- This is an acceptable move to harmonize the process; unfortunately, the ePhyto GeNS does not allow for online payment, which would be a helpful function incorporated in the structure. It was stated that ePhyto GeNS now incorporates an upgrade component and that a new release structure with a role for NPPO Cashier that allows for fee collection will be accessible.
- One participant stated that the GeNS is not a system that transmits information from nation to another, and that this requires the presence of a hub. The participant further stated that the use of a hub for eVet may not be a good fit for many countries. It was also suggested that a possibility existed for GeNS and the HUB be expanded to promote the exchange of eVet, and that an agreement between WOAH and IPPC may be required.
- Divergent views of the Group
  » If countries move toward a Single Window, having a GeNS may become obsolete in the long term.

  » What may be required is not GeNS, but rather the construction of a new harmonized mechanism for exchanging certificates, i.e. a new Web-Based Mechanism for moving eCerts from one IICA Member State to the next. WCO might be able to provide capacity building on single window connectivity through a regional program.
  » Another viewpoint would be to concentrate on the identification of an existing bilateral/multilateral mechanism (e.g. The Pacific Alliance) that might be enlarged to create that web-based prototype, but this would have to be further analyzed.

QUESTION 2 – How do you see the Single Window helping to implement eVet?

- Single window will help to implement eVet by establishing the national system for countries. This national system can be link via XML or JSON to push and receive data with other country.
- There was discussion around whether a protocol is required for the exchange of XML data, however, Professor Vidal stated that the standard for exchanging eCerts is essential, but there is no need to design an exchange protocol because the protocol for exchanging xml is no different than what is used on the internet to exchange emails. In other words, the system for exchanging data is already in place and ready for use.
- It was emphasized that the WCO worldwide data model for exchanging certi-

ficates exists and that it could become the standard for sharing eVet data. -exchange information package (IP) for each country.
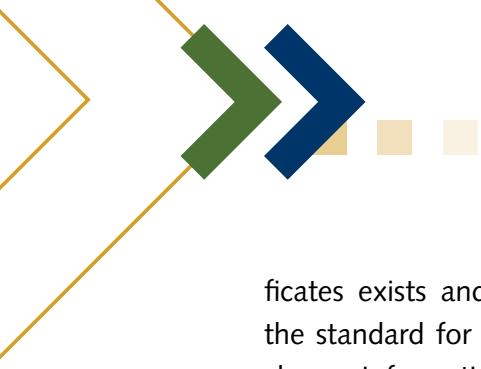
QUESTION 3 - Would your country be willing to participate in pilot project and what would be the requirement for the pilot? What requirements should a country meet to be a pilot country (political commitment, level of development on the issue, exporter/importer profile, etc.)?

'All group member stated yes"

However, before a pilot project can begin, a system must be established to choose which countries will open the trial. As a result, the Group embarked on a process to create certain criteria for selecting pilot countries. Please see below:

I.   Having a country that is a net importer/exporter
II. Countries willingness to provide resources to participate – financial and human (technical capacity), this includes IT capacity and having good internet flow.
III. Country must be established on the Single Window platform at the 3rd or 4th level (if the Single Window solution is chosen)
IV. Select countries from develop and developing region.
V.   Spanish/ English balance
VI. Have a legal framework that allows for exchange electronic data (do a check list to determine where you are)
VII. Technical and Political Directorate buy-in

Presentation of forum findings & agreement on workshop conclusions

>> CONCLUSIONS

- IICA Member States represented at this session recognized the progress made by the international standard setting organizations (Codex and WOAH) in the preparation of guidelines on electronic certification for animals and products of animal origin.
- The representatives reviewed existing initiatives in the region for generating and exchanging electronic veterinary certificates. Several national initiatives at the bilateral level as well as the regional level (Pacific Alliance, SIECA, etc.) were identified.
- However, the representatives recognize that there is no mechanism for the multilateral exchange of electronic veterinary certificates that is accessible to all stakeholders.

- In this sense, the representatives consider that the development of a standardized protocol for the issuance and multilateral exchange of electronic veterinary certificates would facilitate the import and export processes of animals and products of animal origin. This is especially true for those countries that do not have national systems in place for this purpose.
- Therefore, participants expressed their interest in being part of future initiatives aimed at developing a mechanism for the generation and multilateral exchange of electronic veterinary certificates accessible to all potential stakeholders.
- Representatives noted their interest in receiving the support of IICA and the STDF for the development of a mechanism for the issuance and exchange of electronic veterinary certificates and that this be reflected in the Interamerican Board of Agriculture.

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*   Antigua y Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, United States, Grenada, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Rep. Dominicana, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, San Vicent and the Grenadines, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay.

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