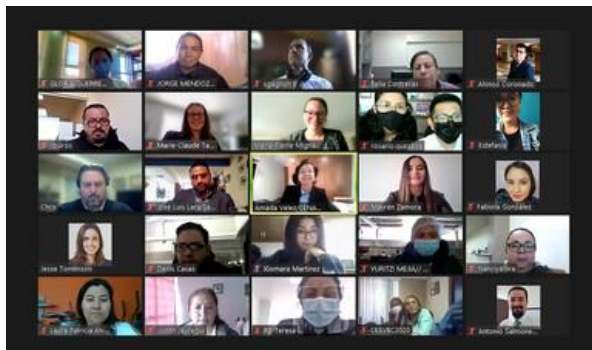


Mexico and Canada Exchange Experiences to Bolster Food Safety Systems

Increased trade in products heightens transmission risks of contaminants harmful to human health.



With the aim of bolstering the safety of foods traded between Mexico and Canada, officials and representatives of the productive sectors from both countries exchanged know-how and experiences on regulation, contaminant surveillance capacity, and microbiological analysis systems.

More than 400 participants, mainly from the agricultural sector, attended the webinar jointly organized by the National Service for Agri-food Health, Safety and Quality (Senasica) and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

At the meeting, Amada Velez Mendez, general director of Agro-Alimentary, Aquaculture, and Fisheries Safety of Senasica, stated that the initiative allows both agencies to identify areas of opportunity to improve their service while helping producers to learn more about the regulation they have to comply with to export their products.

Ms. Velez said that as world food trade has grown to unprecedented levels, measures must be strengthened to prevent an increase in cases of food-borne diseases (FBD).

For this reason, she pointed, the Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development and the CFIA have shared responsibilities and joined efforts to keep agricultural, aquaculture, and fishery products free of physical, chemical, or microbiological agents that could jeopardize human health.

Senasica's Director of Agro-Alimentary Safety, Organic Production, and Pesticides for Agricultural Use, Jose Luis Lara de la Cruz, explained that the federal agency runs two national contaminant monitoring programs, one focused on the prevention of toxic residues in meat, aquaculture, and fishery products, and the other on pesticide residues in vegetables.

Moreover, he pointed out that the programs provide information on incidents and the location of cases with the presence of contaminants in food during the primary process; thus, allowing the detection of prohibited and restricted substances to establish timely preventive and corrective measures.

The director of the National Reference Center for Pesticides and Contaminants of the Secretariat, Mayren Zamora Nava, elaborated that samples obtained by Mexican technicians are analyzed in dedicated Senasica laboratories, where pesticide and pathogen residues are detected, identified, and quantified.

On behalf of the Canadian government, Stan Gagnon, head of food microbiology for the CFIA, explained that surveillance in Canada is divided into random monitoring, which gathers information on the levels of pathogenic organisms that food may contain.

He specified that targeted monitoring is particularly useful when there is suspicion of contamination, while special monitoring is carried out when diseases are reported.

In the same line, CFIA's Food Safety Policy and Programs leader, Chris Coulis, said that, to demonstrate responsibility for food safety, the Canadian agency grants licenses to producers and marketers, and tracks food to ensure a timely response if it detects a problem that could threaten people's health.

Exports of products such as avocado, strawberries, tomatoes, peppers, broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower, chocolate, cucumber, mango, sugar, beef, and amaranth, among others generate an annual trade value of 784 million dollars, which places Canada as Mexico's third largest trading partner.