

Introduction of Scientific Committee on Phytosanitary and Environment

One of the basic commitments of the Czech government and Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic is to guarantee high level of health protection and to strengthen consumer protection. The Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic needs to pay a great attention to all stages of agricultural production, processing of products and their distribution and also to consumer behaviour. In this respect, it is necessary to ensure a high level of co-operation from all institutions involved and to struggle permanently for preservation of consumers' confidence. To fulfil the task, the inter-ministerial Food Safety Co-ordination Unit (FSCU) has been established by the Czech government. The primarily objective of FSCU is to co-ordinate the activities of individual ministries and to establish priorities, to ensure mutual co-operation between relevant competent authorities performing official control, scientific committees, consumers and state administration, and to establish co-operation with national food safety institutions in EU Member States and with the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). The Scientific Committee on Phytosanitary and Environment (further 'Committee' only) was established in 2002 in conformity with the Strategy to Assure Food Safety in the Czech Republic by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic as a scientific panel providing support for decision-making of FSCU and elaborating the scientific opinions for EFSA.

Current President of the Committee is Ing. Václav Stejskal, Ph.D., from Crop Research Institute, Prague 6-Ruzyně and Vice-president is Prof. Ing. Jana Hajšlová, CSc., from Institute of Chemical Technology in Prague. There are other 6 members of the committee from different national research institutes and universities. The committee has been partially embedded into the structure of Crop Research Institute, Prague.

What are the specific tasks and duties of the Committee? The Committee is to gather information, analyze and predict the problems in the sphere of food safety. The Committee solves problems relate to (1) agricultural production, import and export of agricultural crude materials or products and the phyto-quarantine; (2) food safety problems rising as a consequent disturbances of the environment. The Committee co-operates with European Food Safety Authority and creates consecutive security systems. EFSA provides independent consultant service (on scientific basis) to the European Union in the sphere of food safety.

Long-time preferences and activities of the Committee include the following areas:

(A) Mapping and evaluation of actual risks in various hazard groups (i.e. heavy metals and other inorganic contaminants and additives; Residues of modern pesticides and other organic contaminants and additives; Pathogenic bio-contamination; Bio-toxins (i.e. mycotoxins and other natural toxic substances); Allergens (arthropods, vertebrata, herbage); Fragments of arthropods and other sorts of adulteration coming from agricultural production in food; Physical bio-contamination;

(B) Evaluation of risks of human behaviour (so-called 'human factor') in agricultural works with fertilizers and pesticides, especially 'malpractice' problem;

(C) Hazard evaluation (i.e. Quality of various hazards; Quantity of hazards (abundance, frequency); Geographical expansion of hazards (national, international);

(D) Conditions analysis (i.e. conditions leading to hazards; searching of condition and alternatives to prevent these hazards: accurate using of pesticides (food contamination due to wrong application of pesticides);

(E) Prevention (i.e. monitoring of critical conditions; establishing systems for monitoring of the quality of crude and commodities coming from abroad (developing countries) and residue contamination, legislative changes. Initiation of research programs and projects);

(F) Distribution of information and risk communication of various hazards (i.e. Practical recommendations and information on Web sites);

(G) Prediction of hazard and risk trends: (i.e. problems anticipation and generation of emergence schedules; Predicting and evaluation of problems with the bio and chemical/=pesticide/terrorism).

Among important activities of last year helping to disseminate contemporary knowledge related to several tasks of Committee belong seminar **Advances in research for sustainable agriculture: Methods for assessment of microorganisms in agroecosystems, flows of energy, water and nutrients in cultural landscapes** organized by Crop Research Institute with a strong support of the Scientific Committee on Phytosanitary and Environment on 3rd and 4th November 2008 in Prague. Organizing committee consisted of leading scientists in presented fields, Martina Eiseltová, Václav Stejskal, Markéta Marečková, Jan Kopecký from Crop Research Institute, Prague; Pavel Tlustoš from Czech University of Life Sciences, Prague; and Petr Baldrian from Institute of Microbiology, Czech Academy of Sciences Prague. Several reviews, methodological and scientific presentations done by Czech and foreign participants were chosen and finally prepared for publication in scientific Plant, Soil and Environment journal to offer international scientific community advances in presented topics. All papers will be presented in the issues 9 and 10 of this year.

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