FORUM: World Health Assembly

QUESTION OF: Measures to Regulate Unapproved Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) Varieties and Prevent Unintended Toxin Production or Nutrient Loss

MAIN SUBMITTER: Chile

CO-SUBMITTERS: Germany, Mexico, Japan, Croatia, Thailand, Egypt

WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY,

Recalling that the Constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) sets the attainment of every individual's highest possible level of health as the objective of the WHO and achieves it with developing, establishing and promoting international standards regarding food, biological, pharmaceutical and similar products,

Noting the collaborative efforts of the WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on international food safety standards,

Recognizing the key role of the FAO in facilitating information sharing among member states regarding the safety of genetically modified (GM) organisms (GMOs) and derived food products,

Deeply concerned by reported cases in which genetically modified (GM) crops that had not been approved for food use entered global food supply chain, resulting in large-scale recalls, disruption of trade and public uncertainty about the safety of the food product,

Alarmed by the possibility that unintended effects of genetic modification, including elevated levels of natural toxins, new allergenic proteins and reduced levels of important nutrients, may not be detected by conventional compositional analysis, which examines only those components of a food that are already known and expected,

Bearing in mind that member states approve GM varieties according to different timelines and safety standards, which allows varieties approved in one country to enter another country where they remain unapproved,

Affirming the sovereign right of every member state to determine its own policies and safety standards on the approval and cultivation of GMOs, and stressing that this resolution neither

promotes nor prohibits GMOs but is intended strictly to protect public health where unapproved varieties or unintended effects are concerned,

1. **Requests** the WHO to collaborate with the FAO to develop a technical guide on the assessment of unintended effects of genetic modification in foods, which include:
    a) establish a standard procedure to determine GM variety crops' exhibition of higher levels of natural toxins, new allergenic proteins or reduced nutrient levels than their conventional non-GM counterparts, and ensure uniform global assessment through:
        i. specific targeted measurement of known inherent toxins, nutrient, and allergenic proteins to occur naturally in the crop concerned,
        ii. checking novel or modified proteins against original databases of allergenic proteins, proteins that have been identified as posing potential risk,
        iii. the use of standardized units and methods to ensure international data comparability, and a comparative analysis of essential nutrients (vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and fatty acids) before and after genetic modification,
        iv. requiring scientific risk assessments to determine whether detected GMO varieties actually have potential food safety concerns,
    b) genes that go under examination with protein and chemical components of food that act as a complementary tool to assist analysis such as:
        i. crops with several stacked traits or genetic modifications,
        ii. primary staple crops that account for a major portion of a population's daily caloric intake,
        iii. crop varieties exhibiting abnormal results in previous analyses,
    c) address the assessment of gene-edited crops which are exhibiting risk of unintended effects comparable to those of genetically modified crops, while respecting each member state's legal classification, by:
        i. clearly defining the range of gene-editing techniques, stating difference between minor or natural mutations and the major mutation caused by foreign gene insertions,
        ii. recommending a flexible, case-by-case risk assessment instead of a strict regulatory framework for all gene-edited products,
    d) providing a systematic review and update of the guide every five (5) years, by:
        i. reviewing current scientific research on unintended effects to update the guide of analytical methods,
        ii. conducting structured feedback sessions with member states and reference laboratories that have applied the guide,

iii. publishing and distributing each updated version of the guide in the six official languages of United Nations (UN);

2. **Encourages** member states to share data regarding the approval status and safety assessments of GM varieties on an open access platform, building on existing information sharing work of the FAO instead of creating a new system, in order to reduce the gaps between national approvals that allow approved varieties to cross borders, by:
   a) uploading essential information required by foreign authorities to understand and verify a decision, such as:
      i. the authorization status of each GM event (approved, pending, or rejected), covering the date of the decision and the uses for which is approved, such as food, feed or cultivation,
      ii. executive summaries of the safety assessment on which each decision was based, especially the data regarding natural toxins, allergenicity, and nutritional composition,
      iii. the validated method for detecting each approved variety in food and seed samples,
   b) instituting a designated national contact point responsible for answering questions to:
      i. responding to technical inquiries from foreign member states concerning nationally submitted data,
      ii. serving as the primary operational contact for customs and health authorities when a suspect shipment arrives,
      iii. publishing updated contact details on the platform, managed directly by the respective member state,
   c) providing technical assistance to member states requiring support in uploading and maintain their data, through:
      i. the regional offices of the WHO and the FAO, supplying technical personnel and administrative training,
      ii. official translation of each updated version of data in the six official languages of the United Nations;
3. **Calls upon** the WHO to extend the emergency mechanism of the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) so that it issues rapid alerts when an unapproved GM variety is confirmed in the food supply, with notice given with in

seventy-two (72) hours, allowing affected member states may act before the product is widely consumed, including:

a) The information to be contained in each alert particularly:
   i. the type of GM variety, the food or seed product in which it was found, and the location and date of detection,
   ii. the estimated quantity of affected product, incorporating the member states that may have received it,
   iii. the laboratory that conducted the test and the method used, so that receiving member states can verify the result,
b) the next steps that affected member states are advised to consider, subject to national legal frameworks and risk assessment, comprising:
   i. tracing the product through the supply chain to map the extent of market exposure,
   ii. executing product withdrawals or market recalls where warranted by public health risk assessments,
   iii. informing transparent public health advisories regarding findings and guidance for consumer safety,
c) submitting a comprehensive incident report to INFOSAN within thirty (30) days outlining management strategies, so that lessons may be shared with other member states, such as:
   i. the cause analysis that explains the presence of the unapproved variety, if established,
   ii. the actions taken and their results,
   iii. changes that could prevent a recurrence;

4. **Recommends** that member states launch or strengthen post-market surveillance of foods derived from unauthorized GM sources, to detect unforeseen health effects and nutrient changes that were not apparent before reaching the market, by:
   a) regularly sampling and testing nutrient and toxin levels in widely consumed crops, utilizing the methods developed under operative clause 1 where available, with priority given to:
      i. essential crops such as maize, rice, soybeans and potatoes,
      ii. foods frequently consumed by vulnerable populations, particularly children and pregnant women,

iii. imported products entering national borders through major ports,

b) operating a national reporting system for adverse reactions and suspected allergic events linked to the consumption of foods derived from GM sources, with anonymized data shared with the WHO annually, in which:

i. doctors, hospitals and poison control center may submit clinical cases, with public reporting facilitated through regional health agencies,

ii. the WHO compiles a restricted executive summary of regional reports to identify cross border trends for internal senior leadership,

c) transparently communicating overall monitoring results to the public in plain language, to reinforce public confidence, by:

i. publishing fact sheet and digital portals that outline what was tested, what was found and what the findings mean for consumers,

ii. engaging local health workers and community leaders who are trusted by the communities they serve,

iii. candidly addressing public questions on food safety, including the area that has lack of scientific evidence;

5. **Calls for** the establishment of the Global GMO Detection Network (GGDN), coordinated by the WHO, to detect and identify unapproved GM varieties in food and to provide reliable, comparable test results to member states, by:

a) setting up a voluntary network of national and regional laboratories meeting agreed quality requirements which will:

i. appoint at least one lead reference laboratory in each WHO regional to be a focal point for staff training and confirmation of complex results,

ii. require annual proficiency testing using identical samples, to verify precision, quality, and cross-board comparability,

iii. making participating laboratories and their proficiency test results public accessible to all member states,

b) confirming standardized testing methods and reference materials to acquire mutual results that can be accepted across borders, including:

i. baseline polymerase chain reaction (PCR) screening to identify target GM elements in food and seed samples,

ii. confirmatory targeted genetic sequencing to verify unmatched or novel genetic elements detected during initial screening,

iii. mandatory sharing of reference samples for unprecedented unapproved

varieties across all participating laboratories within thirty (30) days of detection,

c) Providing rapid analytical assistance to support member states lacking specialized infrastructure with:

i. a low-cost sample forwarding mechanism that allows member states to submit suspect samples to the nearest reference laboratory,
ii. affordable low-cost field test kits for rapid screening at border, ports, and trade markets,
iii. online training modules with web-based technical certification for laboratory staff to enhance standardized screening methods outlined in sub-clause b);

6. **Urges** the creation of a Biosafety Capacity-Building Initiative (BCI) based on WHO coordination to assist developing member states in building regulatory and laboratory capacity, by providing:
   a) Practical repeating training sessions for local staff, delivered by:
      i. Specialized workshop of safety assessment and detection led by the experts from the WHO and FAO,
      ii. exchange programs allowing regulators from developing member states' staff to work in more experienced agencies to build experience,
      iii. free online learning materials in the six official languages of the United Nations (UN), allowing developing member states' staff to continue learning without leaving their posts,
   b) laboratory equipment and supplies, essential consumables, and post-delivery operational support mechanisms, through:
      i. detection hardware, specifically PCR systems, with access to sequencing through the regional hubs described in sub-clause c),
      ii. reference samples and chemical reagents necessary for continuous diagnostic testing,
      iii. long-term service maintenance contracts and spare parts provisions to guarantee operational continuity;
   c) regional evaluation hubs enabling neighboring member states to share staff, laboratories and assessment work, ensuring that:
      i. technical expertise and advanced facilities beyond the budget of individual

states may be shared by several countries,

ii. member states avoid duplicating identical safety and risk assessment,

iii. information on regional trade risks, such as unapproved varieties moving across common borders, may be shared in one place,

d) funding structure delivered from:

i. voluntary contributions from member states, philanthropic organizations and international financial institutionsthe World Bank,

ii. allocation of existing WHO biosafety and food safety budgets, avoiding additional assessed financial contributions;

7. **Appeals** to governments to increase awareness on unapproved GMO to their citizens through ways especially but not limited to:

a) Using methods of media to persuade people of the danger of unapproved GMOs, as a country is accustomed to:

i. news, tv shows, educational program since it is trustworthy and has qualified verification,

ii. social media that has great influence on both youths and adults in various online communities,

iii. dedicated documentaries that recognize innocent victims and cases of injection of unapproved GMOs,

b) General awareness in the world for both children and adults of unapproved GMOs

i. setting up school programs that bring awareness to children of all grades,

ii. non-profitable programs be made so that all adults also be given proper education on the dangers of unapproved GMO and its effects on health;

8. **Promotes** member states to adopt proportionate, when unapproved GMO varieties are detected in international food shipments, by:

a) distinguishing between the lack of national authorization and confirmed evidence of health risks by:

i. recognizing that an unapproved GMO is not automatically harmful to individuals,

ii. requiring scientific risk assessments to determine whether detected GMO varieties present potential food safety concerns,

iii. considering the results of scientific risk assessments before implementing large-scale product withdrawals or trade restrictions,

b) encouraging appropriate responses to detected unapproved GMO varieties, including:
    i. conducting additional laboratory to confirm the presence of GMO and characteristics of the GMO detected,
    ii. implementing product segregation or shipment returnment when necessary and under international regulations;

9. **Supports** the creation of a voluntary international review framework, coordinated by the WHO and the FAO, to reduce differences in approval timelines between member states, while fully respecting the right of each member state to make its own final approval decision, by:
    a) allowing member states to fast-track the risk evaluation of low-risk GM varieties that have already been assessed by other member states in line with the technical guide described in operative clause 1, through:
        i. reusing the safety assessment summaries shared on the platform described in operative clause 2,
        ii. applying common assessment methods so that the same data does not need to be produced twice,
    b) encouraging member states with experienced regulatory agencies to help reduce approval delays for their trading partners, through:
        i. joint reviews of GM varieties traded between them,
        ii. technical support delivered through the Biosafety Capacity-Building Initiative described in operative clause 6;