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PANEL: COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN FOOD PROTECTION

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HEALTHY MARKETS

by

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1. My Neighborhood Market: an Alternative to Guarantee the Availability of Safe Food to the Population

My Neighborhood Market is a vision and an innovative strategy for fresh food markets that, in a joint effort between the Ministry of Health, the municipalities, and market and consumer organizations, is intended to improve the 2,500 fresh food markets at the national level and convert them to:

- Food supply centers that put a variety of fresh, nourishing, culturally appropriate, safe products guaranteed by the Ministry of Health within the reach of more than 80% of Peruvian families.
- Places where the gastronomic culture of the country is promoted, orienting the consumer toward local foods in season with good nutritional value for a better diet.
- An open window for comprehensive education of the children and young people of Peru through visits to the markets that provide practical, lively, interactive educational experiences in food hygiene and other environmental aspects related to the integral health of the population.
- Centers for interaction with the community, considering the market a nucleus for interactive information that will make it possible for our country to have discerning consumers and incorporating, in the future, informatics through multimedia kiosks.
- A tourist attraction par excellence, where tourists can experience the popular culture and taste the local Peruvian cuisine safely, consuming wholesome, nourishing, and safe food.
- An opportunity to integrate the more than 2 million food vendors and their families that work in our fresh food markets into health promotion efforts.

2. My Neighborhood Market and Self-monitoring: A Step in the Application of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points System in Fresh Food Markets

In Peru the application of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points system (HACCP) is compulsory and serves as a reference standard for monitoring the sanitary quality and safety of processed foods. Because HACCP is an efficient and effective way of ensuring food safety, the Ministry of Health, through DIGESA, has been making efforts to expand it in markets to ensure sanitary surveillance with self-monitoring and the adoption of the preventive measures of hygiene, good practices, and sanitation.

In My Neighborhood Market, self-monitoring is being promoted through the following measures:

- *Training of inspectors* from health offices and the municipalities in the practical application of the principles of the system.
- *Training of the committee for sanitary self-monitoring of the market.* For the practical application of the system, flash cards have been prepared that identify the critical control points (CCP) in the market. The self-monitoring committee is trained to apply the preventive measures through Good Food Handling Practices (GHP) and monitoring and controlling the CCP. Each member of the committee receives a packet of technical documents, the most important of which is the guide for the application of the HACCP system in the markets.
- *Sanitary inspection.* Each food stand is inspected and given a rating based on the risk involved, with the strictest control exercised over perishable foods, including meat and prepared foods such as sauces, dressings, and ready-to-eat dishes. Municipal health inspectors issue the rating through periodic visits.

For the rating, the colors of the traffic light have been utilized:

Food stands

- Red, for fulfillment of less than 50% of the sanitary requirements evaluated.
- Yellow, for fulfillment of 50% to 80% of the sanitary requirements evaluated.
- Green, for fulfillment of more than 80% of the sanitary requirements evaluated.

For all types of food, fulfillment of 80% of the requirements is considered an acceptable sanitary standard for the designation "healthy food stand."

Healthy food stands are marked by stickers affixed in locations where housewives and other consumers can see them.

Markets that maintain healthy food stands will be noted on panels aimed at the community in the area targeted by My Neighborhood Market and that indicate the presence of good hygienic practices and thus guarantee that the food is safe and of good quality.

3. Strategies for the Development of My Neighborhood Markets

3.1 *Role of the Community and Joint Activities between the Public and Private Sectors*

Participants from the community include:

Food producers, merchants from the markets through their workers' organizations, the Ministry of Health and its decentralized organs at the national level, the district municipalities, the Ministry of Education through the schools at the kindergarten and primary levels, the Bureau of Tourism of the Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Integration, and International Trade Negotiations, private institutions for the promotion of business and the installation of multimedia kiosks, and the organized community through neighborhood groups and consumer organizations.

The strategies developed to inform the community are the following:

- Multimedia kiosks to provide information through interactive programs: for housewives, on matters related to hygiene and recipes using regional products; for schoolchildren, with games targeting nutritional issues and the natural science of foods, with emphasis on local products; and for merchants, on suppliers, new products, prices, advances in health technology, and microenterprise management.
- Panels, posters, and booklets with information on health and nutrition for the community, containing aspects of hygiene for the different types of food sold in the markets and recipes to promote the use and consumption of regional foods.
- Booklets for children in kindergarten and primary school, with stickers that tell stories adapted to the natural sciences by type of food, crossword puzzles and anagrams, a Spanish/English dictionary for the stories, and educational messages on ethics and the rights of the child.
- Promotion of typical Peruvian cuisine, incorporating visits to My Neighborhood Markets in tourist guides and including that information in the promotional literature distributed by travel agencies and tourist centers.

3.2 *Need for the Modernization of Infrastructure and Services*

Fresh food markets in Peru are generally old. Some were built over 40 years ago, and their infrastructure and basic services are inadequate for the growing population.

In order to turn these markets into “My Neighborhood Markets,” it is necessary to consider:

- Adapting and redesigning the sanitary and infrastructure plans.
- Distributing the stands according to risk in order to provide them with the necessary basic infrastructure.
- Making the basic services operational, providing a sufficient and continuous supply of drinking water and locating and modernizing toilet facilities so that they do not pose a risk.
- With private enterprise and the municipalities, promoting modernization of the markets and food stands with appropriate storage technology (refrigeration), equipment for the preservation and display of products (refrigerated display cases), slicing and grinding equipment, and materials to improve the infrastructure (floors, walls, etc.).
- Holding of fairs to promote the use of materials, equipment, and technologies to modernize the infrastructure and services provided to the public.
- Upgrading and introducing innovations in market design to improve food services to the public, promoting, for example, sections for the sale of regional food.

3.3 *Technical Cooperation Required*

My Neighborhood Market has been under way in Lima and is gradually expanding in the country’s interior, mainly with resources from the Ministry of Health. The strategies for its expansion at the national level need to be reinforced with support from other sectors and international cooperation.

The progress made in Peru toward the vision of My Neighborhood Market, which contributes to the implementation of the food safety policy of WHO/PAHO, makes it possible to propose this experience as a focal point that can help to achieve the same goal in the other countries of the Region, as was the case with the street vending of food some years ago.

In this regard, technical cooperation could be oriented mainly to:

- Expanding the application of practical experience to the national level through teleconferencing among the Health Regions of the country and through workshops.
- Acquiring modules of appropriate health technologies for upgrading infrastructure, equipment, and services to promote their use through model stands in selected national markets.
- Training municipal health inspectors in order to replicate the good practices and principles of the HACCP system in the self-monitoring committees.
- Preparing and distributing flash cards, guides, manuals, and booklets to the different actors participating in My Neighborhood Market.
- Promoting My Neighborhood Market in educational centers through pilot projects in the different regions of the country.
- Set up multimedia kiosks with appropriate hardware and software, giving priority to programs for schoolchildren and housewives. These kiosks should be located in the pilot markets to interest the private sector in using them on a grand scale.

4. Prospects for a Regional Policy

My Neighborhood Market contributes to the implementation of the food safety policy developed by PAHO through INPPAZ. It would be relevant to use the network of markets to obtain valuable health information on the principal biological, chemical, and physical agents found in food. In addition, application of HACCP principles is also being promoted.

As part of the “healthy cities” strategy, My Neighborhood Market would represent an important contribution to the promotion of a integrated environmental health strategy involving the municipalities, the community, and private enterprise.