STDF WORKING GROUP PROJECT STATUS REPORT

STDF	79 – "Quality information on SPS issues - a pre-requisite for capacity building; support to the International Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health (IPFSAPH)"
Date of Working Group approval	September 2005
Date of start of implementation / supervision activities	June 2006[1]
Overall status report	**Describe the current status of implementation in comparison with the activities, timetable and budget set out in the project document.** Work under STDF 79 to minimise long-term system maintenance costs has continued, and the appointment of a full-time project manager (Jackson) since August 2007 has helped ensure the project's fundamental objectives have largely been completed. The underlying architecture of IPFSAPH has been improved and reliance on manually updated data pools has been significantly reduced. A new interface design and additional functionality completed and rolled out at the start of July 2008. This included the development of clearer XML-based interoperability services so external, third-party, databases can set up direct feeds from the portal via RSS. As of September 11th 2008 IPFSAPH contains 37,792 records (representing a 50% increase since January 2007), derived from 56 data pools. Specific work on automating content updates of data pools to improve data management and enhance links to principal data feeder systems has progressed as follows: ▪ **WTO Specific Trade Concerns, Notifications, Documents, Enquiry Points and NNAs** - WTO launched its new SPS Information Management System in October 2007. Working closely with WTO, the IPFSAPH team successfully completed mapping to and automatic harvesting of data from the WTO system, with full integration and publication into IPFSAPH of nine new WTO related data pools in April 2008. ▪ **OIE Weekly Disease Reports** – A key original project activity was for OIE to develop a web service utility to enable automated and systematic access to specific metadata on OIE official weekly disease reports. Ongoing dialogue with OIE in 2007 and 2008 has resulted in a Letter of Agreement (LoA) between FAO and OIE being drawn up and submitted to OIE for signature in early September 2008. It is expected that work under the LoA, worth US$80,000, will take 13 weeks and be completed by the end of 2008. ▪ **GSFA & JECFA Online Databases** - all current JECFA specifications for food additives, flavouring agents, and residues of some veterinary drugs in animals and foods, and the Codex General Standard for Food Additives database, have been incorporated into the portal since late 2007.

[1] This was the first project implemented by FAO which required a full project proposal – given the funding amount, this resulted in some administrative delay in becoming operational (NB previous smaller projects had been done as fast track Letters of Agreement).

Comparison to progress against timetable and budget

As noted below, progress against the envisaged timetable has been somewhat slower than expected, and a final extension of the project to the end of 2008 is now being requested. This extension is principally to allow for the completion of data automation work with OIE.

Overall progress was slowed by substantive changes in external feeder systems, which were outside the team's direct control (e.g. EFSA). There have also been dependencies on completion of other projects (e.g. WTO and OECD), or with organisations experiencing competing priorities (e.g. OIE whose main focus between 2005 and 2007 was, understandably, HPAI).

Nonetheless, as of August 2008 79% of the budget has been spent and the remaining balance fully allocated to final project activities.

Implementation problems encountered and actions taken to resolve them

As noted above the hiring of a full-time project manager over the past year has significantly improved progress. However, automation of one major data pool has not been possible:

- **EFSA Scientific Opinions** – The launch of a new EFSA website in 2007 entailed considerable manual updating of the EFSA data pool to reflect new links, which was completed in late 2007. Unfortunately, the automation of a data feed for EFSA Scientific Opinions did not come to fruition at the same time. The EFSA Web Manager recently confirmed that the provision of RSS feeds/XML output for EFSA Scientific Opinions might be considered for inclusion in EFSA's 2009 work plan. Thus, for the time being at least, the EFSA data pool will continue to be manually updated in IPFSAPH.

Describe project activities in the past six months and any relevant outputs

Activities funded by this project have generally concentrated on programming and systems design, and four years after initial development IPFSAPH is now a mature information system, with a well defined and stable underlying architecture. Under the original project activity to improve portal functionality, the following new data sets have recently been incorporated:

- **IAEA Clearance of Irradiated Foods Database** – New data set added via automated web services linkage with IAEA's Nucleus Clearance of Irradiated Foods Database completed in January 2008.
- **Food Safety Assessment of Foods Derived from r-DNA Plant Material –** New data set added. In September 2007 FAO/IPFSAPH was requested by the Codex *ad hoc* Intergovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived from Modern Biotechnology to design, develop and host a publicly accessible information and data sharing mechanism for food safety assessments in situations of low-level presence of recombinant-DNA plant material in food. In close collaboration with OECD BioTrack, and via semi-automated and automated data linkages to the CBD Biosafety Clearing House, FSANZ and the EC Register of GM Food and Feed this was successfully put into production in July 2008. This additional task highlights the flexibility and scope of IPFSAPH, as well as its ongoing utility.
- **BCH National Focal Points -** New data set added via automated web services arrangement in August 2008.
- **Keyword Ontology** - This has recently been revised and corrected to take account of new subjects (e.g. 'nanotechnology' and 'cloning') and to expand the scope of subject issue keywords used by IPFSAPH. Testing and inclusion in the production version will be completed during September 2008.

	In addition, the www.ipfsaph.org interface has been completely redesigned to make it more user-friendly and to give it a more inviting visual identity. Most importantly, the redesign has ensured that the IPFSAPH's core role as a search engine for SPS related official information has been brought to the fore. A number of related promotional and training materials have also been produced: ▪ A downloadable user guide in English, French and Spanish; ▪ Information display stands for use at international meetings; ▪ A downloadable guide on how to integrate national documentation relevant to the SPS Agreement into IPFSAPH; ▪ A general information gatefold brochure/leaflet in English, French and Spanish. Finally, the International Phytosanitary Portal (IPP), with which IPFSAPH has automated feeds for plant health related reports, standards, notifications etc., recently confirmed that it is expecting to automate data feeds from various regional Plant Protection Commissions including the Asia and Pacific Region Plant Protection Commission (APPPC), the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO) and the North American Plant Protection Organization (NAPPO, including www.pestalert.org). This will facilitate IPFSAPH's automated access to the same data, via the IPP, and without any significant additional programming work.
Achievements / Impact	**Outline any impact which the project may be having. Impact can be quantitatively measured or qualitatively judged.** The main purpose of this project has been to make IPFSAPH more easily maintainable and less reliant on manual updating, thus reducing resource costs. These fundamental objectives have now largely been achieved through system architecture enhancements, and via increased use of automated web services arrangements developed in close collaboration with various international organizations including WTO, OECD and IAEA. The benefits of using web services technology to enhance information exchange mechanisms and support applications such as IPFSAPH have been clearly demonstrated. Ongoing running costs have been reduced by approximately two-thirds. Reliance on manual data pool updating will be further reduced once work with OIE and has been completed, and the IPP automates data feeds from regional Plant Protection Commissions, as outlined above. In addition, the development of web services arrangements benefits the feeder system by increasing traffic on the original website (as IPFSAPH links directly to original records), as well as having the added advantage of increasing accessibility to SPS related data that is already published. With the inclusion of new data sets, there has been a 50% increase in total records held in IPFSAPH since the start of 2007. Usage figures indicate over 50,000 unique external visitors requesting around 200,000 page views[2] per month. Visitor demographics show OECD countries as the main user base, although countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Ecuador, Nepal, Peru and South Africa have increased their usage, and each now accounts for between 0.5% and 1% of the monthly user base.[3]

[2] This figure excludes web crawlers, spiders and robots and internal FAO page views.
[3] It should be noted that on average ~25% of pages viewed cannot be identified by source country.

End date	Initial delays in setting up the project, and, more significantly, continued delays as a result of critical dependencies on other projects and partners mean that project completion will be delayed beyond the initially agreed timeframe. **An extension of the project end date to December 31st 2008** is thus being requested from the STDF Working Group in order to complete work provisioned under the LoA with OIE. Concerning ongoing sustainability and running of IPFSAPH, a Service Level Agreement is currently being defined with FAO's in-house applications support unit (KCT) to provide long-term system maintenance under FAO's regular programme budget. Finally, and subject to confirmation by FAO, it is further proposed that 15-20% of a Nutrition & Consumer Protection Division (AGN) professional officer's time will be allocated to provide technical content management support to IPFSAPH (e.g. if unexpected changes are made to feeder data systems), and to ensure that remaining manual data sets and the underlying ontology are updated as necessary.