

**PRESS CONFERENCE ON IACE FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS
FRIDAY, 8 AUGUST 2003**

PRESS STATEMENT

FINDINGS OF THE IACE

1. Singapore's level of food safety and biosecurity protection is equal to the best in the world. This was the conclusion of the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority's (AVA) International Advisory Committee of Experts (IACE) who undertook a review of AVA's programmes for food safety, animal and plant health and contingency planning for disease outbreaks.
2. The IACE team endorsed AVA's preventive approach of accrediting at source, and promoting consumer education to ensure food safety, and to safeguard animal and plant health. They were also impressed with the infrastructure, competency and commitment of staff within the AVA.
3. Notwithstanding the fact that AVA's policies and procedures are sound and of high standards, zero risk cannot be guaranteed. The IACE was pleased to note that emergency planning is a key component of the AVA's activities.
4. This is the second review conducted by IACE, which comprises experts in the fields of veterinary epidemiology, food safety and hygiene, and biosecurity, from Australia, Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. During the review, which took place from 4 – 8 August 2003, the team reviewed AVA's programmes and visited various facilities such as animal and plant quarantine centres, AVA laboratories, food factories, and wholesale and retail food markets.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE IACE

5. At the same time, the team made recommendations in several areas to help AVA further strengthen and enhance its existing programmes:

Strengthening food safety & biosecurity

- Regional collaboration

5.1 In view of increasing globalisation and movement of people and products across national boundaries, the team highlighted the importance of regional collaboration in reducing food safety and biosecurity risks. Singapore should continue to collaborate with her neighbours, with particular emphasis on harmonising food safety approaches.

- Risk analysis

5.2 Given the wide range and sources of food, the AVA should employ the latest risk analysis methodologies to prioritise its inspection and testing programmes.

5.3 Risk analysis must be done in consultation with stakeholders with independent peer review as appropriate.

- Contingency Planning

5.4 AVA has made a good start in contingency planning for emergency situations. As it is not possible to guarantee zero risk even in the best systems, emergency planning should be enhanced, tested and simulation exercises be carried out in conjunction with other government agencies and industry.

5.5 In addition to developing contingency plans for specific diseases, AVA should develop a generic contingency plan to deal with un-anticipated events.

- Shared responsibility

5.6 The AVA has made great efforts to adopt an inclusive approach with industry and consumers. The IAC strongly recommends that this approach be continued.

5.7 The excellent AVA consumer outreach programme in food safety should remain a priority.

- Staff training and development

5.8 The health of AVA's service will depend on continued training and staff development to meet changing needs and new challenges.

- 5.9 In a co-regulatory environment, where industry and government share responsibility for ensuring food safety and biosecurity, it is critical that AVA remains at the leading edge of evolving technologies and inspection methods.

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