

THE ROLE OF AFSSA AND LCHA AT THE NATIONAL, INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES LEVEL

(Abstract of the lecture given by Mr LALOUX of AFSSA at CECALAIT's annual general meeting)

In July 1998, a new french law relative to the reinforcement of public health surveillance and the control of the safety of the products and devices applied in human health created three public bodies :

- ◆ The National Institute for Public Health Surveillance (IVS)
- ◆ An Agency for Health Product Safety (AFSSAPS)
- ◆ An Agency for Food Safety (AFSSA)

They depend on the Ministries of Health, Agriculture and Finance (Consumption and consumers)

THE MISSIONS AND STRUCTURE OF AFSSA

AFSSA has about 700 employees and its mission is to improve the National Survey System for food safety. It has three major tasks :

* For foods and feeds, to evaluate the health and nutrition risks, linked :

- ◆ to the way they were produced, processed, preserved, stored or sold,
- ◆ to animal diseases or to the use of veterinary drugs,
- ◆ to the use of plant-care products, GMOs...

* To provide scientific and technical advice on animal health and well-being policy of the Ministry of Agriculture. The Agency also helps evaluate the consequences of this policy on food and feed safety,

* To issue market approvals for animal drugs

The Agency works together with five specialized Committees, among which, one is dealing with nutrition problems (CNERMA) and another with public health (CSHPF). It is divided into 4 Directions dealing with :

* Veterinary drugs,

* Animal health and well-being,

* Evaluation of health and nutrition risks,

* Food hygiene.

The former CNEVA (National Centre for Veterinary and Food Studies), with its many laboratories joined AFSSA in March 1999. Among these, the LCHA (Laboratoire Central d'Hygiène Alimentaire – Central Laboratory for Food Hygiene) is concerned by all kinds of food.

THE ACTIVITIES OF LCHA

They are divided into three areas : research, development and technical support. For dairy products, the LCHA deals with :

* physico-chemical, organoleptic and hygienic quality monitoring,

* environmental contaminants evaluation and monitoring (pesticides, industrial pollutants, heavy metals, radionuclides)

* microbial enumerations,

* microbial contaminants (toxins).

For all these activities, LCHA works together with other national, European Communities or international organisations for standardisation, food safety, methods of analysis... for instance CEN (European Communities Standardisation Committee), Codex Alimentarius Committees...

The LCHA is the European Communities reference laboratory for food hygiene. So it serves as a liason between the 15 national reference laboratories (one for each European Community country) and local official laboratories.

In fact, the activities of the LCHA concern as well food hygiene and safety as control of international food trade.