Increasing access to information on international standards

The project aimed to strengthen the International Portal on Food Safety, Animal Health, and Plant Health (IPFSAPH) with stronger data collection, cost-efficient maintenance and improved information sharing.

STDF/PG/079

Status
Completed

Start Date
01/04/2006

End Date
30/06/2009

Project Value (US$)
$720,000

STDF Contribution (US$)
$470,000

Beneficiaries
Global

Implementing Entities
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Partners
World Organization for Animal Health (OIE)
World Trade Organisation (WTO)

Background
Access to information on standards, regulations and supporting technical documentation is a critical factor affecting developing countries' ability to trade in food and agricultural products.

The International Portal on Food Safety Animal and Plant Health, developed by Codex, IPPC and OIE, and WTO, allows access to science-based information and data, decisions and guidelines, with national official information on food safety, animal and plant health – most of the records in English, French and Spanish.

The project aimed to make sure the system can be easily maintained once the Portal is brought under the regular programme activities of the Codex Alimentarius, the IPPC and the FAO Animal Health Service.

Results
Maintenance costs for the system were reduced from US$180,000 a year to around US$80,000, with tasks being semi-automated and responsibility taken over by the system's content manager with some back up.

Webmasters and data owners were encouraged to publish data with associated metadata. Making this information available – with URLs for documents/reports from their site – is generating new visitor traffic.

A new interface design and additional functionality was completed and rolled out at the start of July 2008, following usability studies with users. A key feature of the re-design was clearer XML-based interoperability services so external, third-party databases can set up direct feeds from the portal via RSS.

Recommendations

Maintaining a database means looking at users' changing needs, in particular with fast moving topics such as trade regulations and standards. For a portal to be useful it needs to do more than the source sites. Searching should allow users to juxtapose records from sources and identify texts in different languages.