

Enhancement of Quality in Coffee by Prevention of Mould Formation Project

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SUMMARY

In February 1996 the International Life Sciences institute (ILSI) convened a workshop on Ochratoxin A, which had been first reported in green coffee in 1974 and in the beverage in 1988. This expert meeting strongly recommended that prevention of mould growth was the best solution to the OTA issue. As a result of this the European coffee industry through the Institute of Scientific Information on Coffee (ISIC) financed a pilot study to develop a strategy for studying causative factors in the field.

This work resulted in the development of what is known of as the Enhancement of quality in coffee by prevention of mould formation project, which will be described in greater detail by my fellow speakers. The project was presented in February 1997 to the Executive Board of the International Coffee Organization (ICO) at its meeting in Bali, Indonesia. The project, which was formally backed by Papua New Guinea and Thailand, was endorsed in principle by the Board, which requested the ICUs Executive Director to submit it for financing by the Common Fund for Commodities (CFC), a body established by the United Nations to provide concessionary finance for projects of benefit to primary commodities.

The ICO is an international intergovernmental organization, also established by the United Nations in 1962, designed to foster international cooperation on coffee. It was established because of the great economic importance of coffee, particularly for a large number of developing countries, some of which depend on coffee for up to 80 per cent of their foreign exchange earnings. Total world exports of coffee are valued at some US\$ 10 billion a year and retail value exceeds US\$ 50 billion. The ICO is the international commodity body recognized by the CFC as qualified to submit coffee projects. It has 44 exporting and 18 importing country governments as its Members, with the exporting Members representing over 98 per cent of world exports of coffee. After some revisions on technical grounds the CFC's Consultative Committee approved the project, to a total value of US\$6.9 million, in July 1998, which was followed by approval by the CFC Executive Board in October 1998.

The project is being managed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which is uniquely placed to ensure that the relevant authorities in producing countries are engaged in the OTA prevention process. The scope of the project, although activities are initially concentrated in representative coffee producing countries, is completely worldwide with provision for universal dissemination of the prevention guidelines.

This project development process is important because it implies the endorsement of the world coffee community to the project. ICO delegates are government representatives, often from a high level including cabinet ministers, and this support for the project confirms the commitment of both coffee exporting and importing countries to take action to ensure that OTA formation in coffee is largely eliminated.