The Joint Panel on Toxic Microorganisms (the Panel) is one of the original seven established in 1964 and is currently one of 18 operating under the United States-Japan Cooperative Program on Development and Utilization of Natural Resources (UJNR). The early history of the UJNR Program and the Panel has been reported by Hesseltine (Hesseltine CW, UJNR Panel on Toxic Microorganisms, In: Microbial Toxins in Foods and Feeds, Ed. AE Poland et. al. Plenum Press, New York, 1990, pp. 1-15). The scientific discussions and other activities of the first meeting (1966) and first symposium (1968) were focused on botulism. With the discovery of aflatoxin as a serious food and feed safety concern, mycotoxins became an increasingly important concern of the Panel. Areas of interest have continually expanded and now include bacterial pathogens, viruses, phycotoxins, mycotoxins, and other microbiological issues that adversely affect consumer health, food and feed quality, food industry economics, and international trade.

The Panel is multidisciplinary and its members, who represent various governmental agencies from each country, have expertise in microbiology, epidemiology, molecular biology and genetics, toxicology and related disciplines. Among the specific topics frequently considered are identification of microorganisms and toxins, elucidating the genetics and regulation of toxin (myco-, phyco-, bacterial) biosynthesis pathways, mechanisms of action, methods for detection and quantification of toxins, investigation of disease outbreaks, monitoring and surveillance, and mitigation strategies to reduce exposures to consumers and economic losses. Specific activities of the Panel are consistent with the overall objectives of the UJNR program. The most important of these are: scientific collaborations by US and Japanese scientists and technical experts; exchange of research findings, literature and other information relevant to timely topics and mitigation of foodborne disease; sharing samples, analytical standards and other research materials; site visits by scientists and food safety specialists; technical study tours to relevant research institutes, diagnostic laboratories, and industrial food pro-
cessing facilities; and hosting international symposia.

The symposia are an important function. They have been held at three to eight year intervals since 1968 with each country alternating as host. Proceedings from the previous 11 have been published in nine books and two issues of *Food Additives and Contaminants Part A* (Vol. 25(9): 2008; Vol. 30(8): 2013). The 12th International Symposium, having the general theme “Toxins, Pathogens, and Foods: Challenges and Opportunities for Public Health”, was held on May 16-18, 2017, at the US FDA Facilities in Laurel and College Park, MD. Thirty-three scientists representing five countries participated in sessions on “Policies and Programs”, “Bacterial and Parasitic Genomics and Gene Expression”, “Foodborne Viruses”, “Bacteria in Foods: Risk Characterization, Detection, and Mitigation”, “Mycotoxins: Fungal Genomics and Secondary Metabolites”, “Toxic Phytoplankton, Diatoms and Phycotoxins”, “Exposures, Outbreaks and Epidemiology”, “Pathogen Detection, Isolation and Surveillance”, “Mycotoxin Exposures and Toxicology”, and “Mycotoxins: Detection and Quantitation”. A selection of reports from the 12th International Symposium are published as peer-reviewed articles in the previous [Vol. 6, (1)] and current issues of *Food Safety*. In the previous issue, Datta and Burall update on current trends in foodborne Listeriosis; Cary et al review secondary metabolites other than aflatoxins that are produced by *Aspergillus flavus*; Abraham and colleagues present the current status of biomarkers as a tool for monitoring brevetoxins in shellfish; and Guard et al report on *Salmonella enterica* serotypes found in mice caught on US poultry farms. Eight reports are found in the current issue. An update on the epidemiology of norovirus outbreaks in the United States during 2009-2015 is presented by Marsh et al. Kobayashi et al report the distribution and sterigmatocystin production of the isolates of *Aspergillus section Versicolores* collected from various foods and environments in Japan. Yamazaki and colleagues report findings suggesting that wild deer in Japan might be healthy carriers of bovine *Cryptosporidium*. Two short communications relevant to toxins in seafood are included. The distribution of diarrhetic shellfish toxin in tissues of plankton-feeding shellfish is described by Matsushima et al and a method for large-scale cultivation of *Gymnodinium catenatum*, which is needed for the production of paralytic shellfish toxins, is described by Oikawa and coworkers. Trichothecene mycotoxins, specifically an *in vitro* comparison of deoxynivalenol and nivalenol toxicity, is the subject of the presentation by Nagashima. Onami et al present a phylogenetic analysis of *Aspergillus section Nigri* isolates, which included fumonisin B2-producing strains of *A. niger*, found in food and environmental samples from Japan. Finally, Uegaki and Tsunoda present a short communication describing the survey results for mycotoxins contaminating domestic feeds used by small-scale farmers and livestock farming establishments in six regions of Japan. Together, these reports illustrate some aspects of the diversity of research required to understand, respond to, and mitigate diseases caused by foodborne pathogens and toxins.

The UJNR panel is grateful to the speakers, session chairs, and all others who contributed to making the 12th International Symposium a success. We especially thank Dr. Susumu Kumagai, Dr. Shigeki Yamamoto, the Editorial Board, and staff of *Food Safety* for making this selection of reports available to researchers and others in the scientific community who work to protect the public and farm animals from the adverse effects of toxic microorganisms found in foods and feeds.