

Elements of EMPRES Food Safety Strategic Plan

EMPRES FOOD SAFETY is a holistic and multidisciplinary programme that aims to prevent and deal with food safety emergencies at a global level by partnering with international, regional and national agencies, as well as FAO decentralized offices. Its broad approach is to work with existing initiatives to prevent, mitigate, and manage food safety threats.

EMPRES Food Safety has defined 8 major elements of its strategic plan to achieve the programme's aim. These elements have been grouped under the three (3) pillars of EMPRES Food safety: "early warning", "emergency prevention" and "rapid response", as presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1





Provide early warning:

Engage with INFOSAN to provide early warning of food safety threats.

The International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN), established in 2004, is a joint FAO/WHO initiative. This global network includes most FAO and WHO member countries. INFOSAN monitors food safety events, promotes and coordinates information exchange, and advises countries on potential food safety threats.

EMPRES Food Safety engages with INFOSAN, which alerts its members of imminent food safety threats based on credible indicators. This process includes incident scanning, identification and verification. WHO's access to public health information facilitates obtaining and disseminating food safety information from/to government public health agencies. FAO is in a unique position to obtain production-oriented information related to foods implicated in foodborne disease or food contamination incidents, to contribute to the assessment of events. FAO also has strong experience, and decentralized offices around the world, to disseminate key information to agriculture-related government agencies that deal with food safety issues.

INFOSAN carries out food-borne disease outbreak and food safety event surveillance and receives information from network members and other partners on possible international food safety emergencies with potential public health impact. FAO, through EMPRES Food Safety, strengthens this network by ensuring the inclusion of appropriate members from sectors other than public health, such as food safety and agriculture. National INFOSAN members engage their national decision makers and relevant partners in collecting information and acting on early warning signals.

EMPRES Food Safety proactively engages with INFOSAN to ensure that an emphasis on a preventive approach that focuses on intelligence gathering, as opposed to a reactive approach, is instilled among all INFOSAN members. The outputs from this element can be utilized to implement short-term, rapid prevention efforts (in element 3), to prioritize food safety concerns for development of longer-term prevention projects (in elements 4-6), and to respond to food safety emergencies that are already occurring (in element 8).





Conduct horizon scanning:

Anticipate food safety threats through food safety analytical intelligence of low-key signals and indicators.

EMPRES Food Safety undertakes horizon scanning to detect and analyze early, and possibly low-key, signals that could suggest a food safety threat at the food production and processing levels. This process complements the food safety incident scanning activities of INFOSAN (in element 1). The signals may include changes in plant pest and disease patterns, alterations in food consumption trends, shifts in climate or cropping patterns, or identified vulnerabilities in the food chain (including high-risk food handling practices). Data and intelligence are collected, trends are analysed and information synthesised that can be used as input to identify and then prioritize food safety threats (in element 4) followed by filling of knowledge gaps (in element 5) and development of projects to prevent these threats from becoming emergencies (in element 6). This information also feeds into INFOSAN to provide early warning of imminent food safety threats, as necessary and appropriate, and may trigger rapid response to existing food safety threats (in element 8).

Strong partnerships and information sharing are essential for effectively conducting horizon scanning for food safety threats. EMPRES Food Safety utilizes the experiences of FAO's **Global Information and Early Warning System** on Food and Agriculture (GIEWS), Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information Systems (FIVIMS) and other horizon scanning efforts of FAO to improve its horizon scanning approach and methods. EMPRES Food Safety will develop an international network to gather information and intelligence to conduct horizon scanning, including other FAO units and decentralized offices, other UN agencies, national and regional government bodies, universities, research institutes and related groups. EMPRES Animal Health, EMPRES Plant Protection, and other relevant FAO units such as Fisheries and Land and Water will be included in the network, as well as the other international agencies including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), OIE, WHO, the World Food Programme (WFP), and WTO.





Prevent escalation of imminent threats:

Short term, rapid addressing of imminent food safety threats to prevent the threat from occurring, escalating, or recurring.

EMPRES Food Safety utilizes early warning information from INFOSAN, from rapid response missions to current food safety emergencies (in element 8) and other credible sources to identify countries that require short term, immediate action to prevent food safety threats from occurring, escalating or recurring. When a food safety emergency event is occurring, EMPRES Food Safety will determine if actions are required within that country, or in neighbouring and trading-partner countries, to prevent such an event from occurring again in the future and to prevent worsening of the situation. The short-term, rapid actions needed for timely prevention of such an emergency will also be identified.

EMPRES Food Safety works closely with FAO's capacity building team to share expertise and to implement the needed short-term actions. These two groups work in the relevant activities of the other, to provide optimum benefit to target countries and to also develop national capacity for such preventive actions in the future. Those issues that are identified as requiring longer-term, sustainable follow-up are prioritized (in element 4) for eventual development of larger-scale projects to prevent these threats from becoming food safety emergencies (in element 6).





Prioritize food safety threats:

Prioritize food safety threats at international, regional, and national levels.

Numerous food safety threats are identified through the previously mentioned INFOSAN early warnings, horizon scanning, and rapid investigation of imminent food safety threats. In addition, information on food safety threats and gaps in capacities of food safety systems comes to FAO through other means, such as requests from member countries. Although all these threats are important, some threats require more immediate and larger-scale action than others. Therefore, these threats must be prioritized at the international, regional, and eventually at the national level, so that appropriate longer-term projects can be developed to prevent these threats from becoming an emergency (in element 6) and so that countries can better prepare themselves to deal with food safety threats and emergency situations (in element 7).

In order to conduct this prioritization, an appropriate tool/methodology should

be developed to list, classify and rank these threats. This tool, which will be based on existing related FAO tools, will assist officials at international, regional, and national levels to make appropriate decisions to prevent food safety threats from becoming emergencies. The tool will also enable regions and individual countries to analyze critical vulnerabilities in the capacity of their food safety systems, and will highlight gaps in knowledge about food safety threats (to be filled in element 5). The development of this tool, including the criteria for prioritization and the nature of data required for this tool to deliver meaningful results will be further developed through consultations with experts. EMPRES Food Safety partners with the various initiatives related to such prioritization already occurring in other agencies, as appropriate.





Fill knowledge gaps:

Hold expert consultations and publish lists of research needs to fill knowledge gaps to better prevent food safety threats from occurring.

Through the recognition and prioritization of food safety threats, critical gaps in the knowledge about these food safety threats will be identified. These knowledge gaps must be filled so that these threats can be more effectively prevented (in element 6) and so that countries can better prepare themselves for food safety emergencies (in element 7). Some of these gaps in knowledge should be addressed by a formal risk assessment or risk management exercise at the international level. EMPRES Food Safety works with the FAO/WHO Provision of Scientific

Advice group to hold the relevant expert meetings on issues that require immediate attention. In addition to those addressed by FAO's Provision of Scientific Advice process, a list of other gaps in knowledge related to food safety threats will be widely advertised to scientists around the world. In this way, scientists can gain ideas of critical research needs and FAO can encourage scientists to conduct research to fill these knowledge gaps to better prevent and control these urgent food safety threats.





Formulate and prepare prevention projects:

Based on the prioritization of food safety threats, develop multi-faceted projects to provide long-term, sustainable prevention of these key threats.

Some food safety threats require longer-term, multi-faceted, and multi-disciplinary projects to prevent them from escalating to an emergency situation. Many of these threats exist at a regional and even international level, so would also be best addressed at these levels. Based on the identification and prioritization of these threats and capacity gaps in the previously outlined strategies, effective projects can be developed, upon request from countries/regions, to provide long-term, sustainable prevention of the threats identified as most critical. The increased knowledge of food safety threats provided through element 5 is also utilized in the

formulation of these projects, which will address specific thematic areas and regions.

EMPRES Food Safety works with FAO's food safety capacity building team, in consultation with member countries and FAO decentralized offices, to plan the technical aspects of such projects, and with the Technical Cooperation Department (TC) of FAO to refine the projects and to secure funding from donors. FAO's food safety capacity building team and respective decentralized offices can then implement such projects in collaboration with both internal and external partners.



€ 4.20

€ 4.20

8.00 €

€ 5.70

€ 4.20

€ 2.50

€ 12.90

€ 4.20

OFFERTA
€ 6.50
GRATO
GREEN

OFFERTA
€ 6.50



Provide tools, advice and activities for preparedness:

Develop and provide tools, and provide advice and assistance to member countries to implement food safety emergency preparedness plans.

One of the key aspects of preventing food safety emergencies is for countries to establish a state of constant preparedness against current and future threats. This preparedness will be enhanced by information from the prioritization of food safety threats (element 4), as well as the filling of knowledge gaps on these threats (element 5). Strengthening preparedness also entails incorporating lessons learned from the response to past food safety emergency situations (such as that described in element 8).

To assist countries to improve their preparedness, FAO and WHO developed a Framework document for developing Food Safety Emergency Response (FSER) plans. This document provides useful guidance for establishing and strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation across national ministries and agencies with responsibilities for food safety, such as Agriculture and Public Health, which is crucial for addressing potential food safety emergencies, as well as routine food safety issues. EMPRES Food Safety continues to develop this framework document, in addition to developing further guidance documents and training materials to assist countries in implementing food safety emergency preparedness plans.

Regional collaboration mechanisms

will also be identified and strengthened to address food safety emergencies, utilising FAO's network of decentralized offices. EMPRES Food Safety, together with relevant FAO initiatives, will organize regional seminars, as well as national workshops, to raise awareness of the need for preparedness planning and for information exchange in this regard. At the national level, EMPRES Food Safety will provide advice, through FAO staff and through regional and international experts, on the development, implementation, and updating of food safety emergency preparedness plans. Once countries develop these plans, they will have a better understand the importance of prevention activities, and the need for better providing (and heeding) early warning of food safety emergency situations. They will also be more likely to identify food safety emergency situations that require timely response (in element 8), will be more aware of the available international assistance and should be able to better formulate a request for such assistance.

EMPRES Food Safety works closely with the FAO capacity building team to gain input into the process of improving member countries' preparedness for food safety emergencies, as well as to provide input to the capacity building teams' other activities.





Conduct rapid response:

Within FAO's Food Chain Crisis Management Framework (FCC), in collaboration with the FAO emergency operations group and the relevant national food safety authorities, provide timely response to identified food safety emergencies.

Despite strong efforts to prevent their occurrence, it is recognized that some food safety emergency situations will inevitably occur, which must be dealt with in a timely, effective manner. Such situations may be identified through INFOSAN early warnings (element 1), horizon scanning (element 2), through FAO's normative capacity building activities, or by direct request from member countries – particularly after they have implemented food safety emergency preparedness plans (element 7).

After identification of such a situation, EMPRES Food Safety works with national food safety authorities to conduct an urgent appraisal of the event and mobilize the needed experts, in full consultation with relevant members of the FCC. EMPRES Food Safety develops and manages a roster of food safety experts, based on the information technology platform utilized by the EMPRES Animal Health programme and/or other relevant initiatives. The input of experts in public health is also sought through WHO.

EMPRES Food Safety assumes technical leadership in the provision of emergency response, with operational support from the emergency operations and rehabilitation group (TCE) of FAO, who have the structure to rapidly mobilise human and financial resources to respond to emergencies. EMPRES Food Safety collates and provides the background information and determines the best possible emergency responses. The mission activities are conducted with the active involvement of relevant national food safety authorities, are multi-disciplinary in nature and tailored to the situation. Assistance can include problem identification, testing (sampling and analysis), validation of actions undertaken, technical and financial resource mobilization, monitoring of preparedness for future emergencies, as well as expert guidance on risk assessment, risk management and risk communication. The risk communication may be within the country or with other countries, particularly trade partners and neighbouring countries.

