



联合国  
粮食及  
农业组织

Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

Organisation des Nations  
Unies pour l'alimentation  
et l'agriculture

Продовольственная и  
сельскохозяйственная организация  
Объединенных Наций

Organización de las  
Naciones Unidas para la  
Alimentación y la Agricultura

منظمة  
الأغذية والزراعة  
للأمم المتحدة

E

# COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

## Twenty-fourth Session

Rome, 29 September - 3 October 2014

### FAO's Strategy for Improving Food Safety Globally

#### Executive Summary

Following the endorsement by the 19<sup>th</sup> Session of COAG of the FAO food chain approach for a safe and nutritious food supply, FAO has continued to play a key global role in food safety governance and capacity development. Food safety supports the achievement of all five of the Organization's Strategic Objectives: adequate consideration of food safety is essential to improving food and nutrition security and to alleviating poverty and promoting economic development. There have been lessons learned over the last decade and there is a changing 'food system landscape' that has required a rethinking of our food safety programme during the recent strategic planning process. This paper outlines key areas of work that have been identified as the core of the FAO Strategy for improving food safety globally. These include: (i) strengthening national food control regulatory capacities; (ii) supporting science-based global governance of food safety; (iii) promoting improved food safety management along food chains; (iv) facilitating access to information through relevant platforms and databases; (v) contributing to food chain intelligence and providing foresight on food regulatory issues.

FAO's key role in global governance puts it in good stead to guide governments in the establishment and operation of food control regulatory systems. FAO's food chain expertise allows concrete support on the application of Codex guidance in specific subsectors and intelligence on complex food chain issues. This underlies FAO's value in global efforts to address problems such as antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Furthermore, FAO's new Strategic framework strengthens its singular leadership role in addressing the agri-food dimensions of the global Trade Facilitation agenda constructively and in a manner that is coherent with countries' obligations for the effective regulation of plant health, animal health and food safety.

*This document can be accessed using the Quick Response Code on this page;  
a FAO initiative to minimize its environmental impact and promote greener communications.  
Other documents can be consulted at [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)*



m1159e

**Suggested action by the Committee:**

The Committee on Agriculture is invited to:

- a) Endorse the key areas of work identified as the core of the FAO Food Safety strategy;
- b) Support a greater role for FAO in Trade Facilitation programmes as an important means for supporting the delivery of FAO's food safety strategy;
- c) Advise on how to meet the challenge of the growing demands on FAO's food safety scientific advice programme;
- d) Advise on FAO's role in contributing to global food chain intelligence and provide guidance on the role of FAO in assisting countries to contain the growing threat of AMR and the potential negative impacts on food and agriculture.

*Queries on the substantive content of the document may be addressed to:*

Renata Clarke

Head of Food Safety and Quality Unit

Tel: +39-06 570 52010

## I. Background and Introduction

1. The 19<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG, April 2005) endorsed the FAO food chain approach for a safe and nutritious food supply, recognizing FAO's unique ability to advise on complex issues related to food and agriculture from pre-production to the consumer. The paper COAG/2005/5 underlined the importance of combining regulatory and non-regulatory approaches to preventing food safety incidents and recognized the need to consider the costs of applying food safety measures particularly as they could affect small-scale producers.

2. In the 10 years that have passed, FAO has continued to play a key global role in food safety governance and in food safety capacity development. FAO hosts the Secretariat of the Joint FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission and, jointly with the World Health Organization (WHO), provides scientific advice that underpins Codex standards. FAO's technical assistance to member countries has enabled them to strengthen their regulatory frameworks for food control and to promote national programmes that facilitate and encourage compliance with good practices through non-regulatory means.

3. A changing economic, social, environmental and technological context has had an impact on the main drivers of food safety concerns. Continued population growth and rapid urbanization, people's lifestyle and dietary changes in both industrialized and developing countries, increased global and regional trade, the ever more urgent need for conserving the natural resource base in the face of climate change, advancement in science and technology, especially the transformational adoption of communication tools, are all contributing to a changing landscape. This has brought new challenges and new opportunities for addressing long-standing problems as well as emerging issues.

4. This changing landscape of food systems and the evolving demands from countries were considered during the recent Strategic Planning process in FAO which identified the food safety areas of focus required to support the achievement of the Organization's Strategic Objectives.

5. Food safety supports the achievement of all five of the Organization's Strategic Objectives (SOs): in the current biennium, the demand for food safety expertise in work teams exceeded available staff resources. The new food safety strategy has been developed to guide a process of re-orientation and re-organization that will facilitate the optimal contribution of the food safety programme to the achievement of the main goals of the Organization.

6. This paper (a) outlines the main contribution and the pivotal role of the food safety programme to FAO's global mandate and programmes under the Reviewed Strategic Framework and the Medium Term Plan (2014-2017) (Section II); (b) highlights the strategy and the areas of focus that have been identified for the FAO food safety programme (Section III); and (c) seeks the endorsement of COAG of the core elements of the food safety strategy and its guidance on selected issues relevant to the implementation of the food safety program under the Strategic Framework.

## II. Food Safety: why is it central to FAO's main goals?

### *Food and nutrition security*

7. Food safety plays an important role in improving food and nutrition security and makes a critical contribution to the achievement of SO1. Food-borne illness exacerbates nutrient deficiencies and food-borne parasitic infections have huge social and economic cost, particularly in developing countries.

8. Exposure to chemical hazards continues to be a widespread concern, especially to the smallholder farmers and consumers in the developing countries. There is presently international focus on aflatoxin contamination given the mounting evidence of the linkage between dietary exposure to aflatoxin and stunting. It has been estimated that between 80 - 100 percent of children in some African countries are chronically exposed to this toxin through their diets.

9. Without integrating food safety pragmatically but consistently into the global food security agenda, achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the Post 2015 Agenda will be compromised.

#### ***Sustainable food production***

10. Promoting sustainable intensification is an essential aspect of SO2 and the safety of the resulting foods is an essential consideration. This has been illustrated by a number of food safety issues associated particularly with meat and fish production systems. Furthermore, potential benefits of new technologies applied to the food chain will only be realised if there is public confidence that the technologies are safe.

#### ***Reducing rural poverty***

11. The food and agriculture sector is an important engine for growth in many developing countries: agriculture contributes as much as 30 percent to gross domestic product and an even bigger share of employment, particularly in rural areas. Food safety is a fundamental pre-requisite for market access and hence an essential consideration for the achievement of SO3.

12. The Committee on Fisheries (COFI) has highlighted the importance of FAO technical assistance to developing countries to promote adherence to food safety requirements especially by small-scale fisheries. In other sectors as well, support to small-scale producers, including family farms, to meet food safety requirements will be essential if such programmes are to achieve target social benefits.

#### ***Efficient and inclusive food systems***

13. Food safety makes a major contribution to improving efficient and inclusiveness of food systems which is the objective of SO4. Agreed international standards underlie an efficient system of international trade. The ability of increasing numbers of food chain operators to meet these standards promotes inclusiveness and reduces market rejections and food loss which lead to inefficiencies. A recent survey by the International Trade Centre has shown that food businesses in developing countries consider food safety requirements as a major challenge.

#### ***Prevention of food chain emergencies and improving resilience***

14. Food safety is a key consideration in most food chain emergencies. Management of food safety is also a critical question in the management of responses to other types of crises, such as natural disasters and conflict situations. This underlies the essential contribution of food safety to SO5.

15. The food safety programme is expected to contribute to better global food chain intelligence that could facilitate early warning and prevention of emergencies. It is also expected to provide for prompt guidance when emergencies do occur and to strengthen the capacities of countries to respond rapidly and effectively when needed.

### **III. The FAO's food safety strategy and areas of focus**

16. The foregoing sections underline the clear need for a strengthened food safety program that prioritizes and effectively delivers on public goods and services. This section presents the five key elements of the strategy for achieving this.

#### **A. Strengthening national food control regulatory capacities and global trade facilitation**

***Strategic focus:*** Provide leadership in supporting countries in the assessment and progressive development of food control systems.

***Outcome:*** Increasing numbers of countries are able to demonstrate improved capacities for food control that support national food safety goals and market access.

*Supporting steady improvement of national food control systems*

17. Ensuring food safety is ultimately the responsibility of the national authorities. FAO has worked with national food safety authorities for decades to strengthen their systems. There is a considerable demand for this work to continue and a number of lessons learned need to be incorporated into FAO's approach to this work. The first of these is the need for more systematic assessments of food control systems as the basis for rational strategies for strengthening national systems.
18. FAO has embarked on the development of an assessment tool that is currently being piloted in several countries. WHO has joined FAO in further developing this tool and it will be finalized as a Joint Tool, fully aligned with international requirements for food safety as laid down by the Codex Alimentarius and the International Health Regulations (IHR).
19. Much work of Codex involves the definition of minimum acceptable quality and standards of identity that protect consumers from unfair practices in food trade. Food control systems should ensure the integrity of the food supplies to assure expected levels of safety and quality.
20. FAO's support to the strengthening of national systems of food control includes engagement in global processes that influence food control; with private sector bodies that increasingly influence 'trans-national regulation' of foods and feed; and with a range of other partners in promoting coherence in food safety-related capacity development and other regulatory issues.
21. FAO's food safety programme would benefit from strengthened linkages with national authorities which could further enhance its role as a catalyst for knowledge-sharing and mutual learning among food safety regulators of the member countries.

*Supporting the global trade facilitation agenda*

22. At the global and regional levels, key trade facilitation mechanisms such as the Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-related Assistance to Least Developed Countries (EIF), could have a multiplier effect on the quality of food safety interventions. The Agreement recently reached by the World Trade Organization (WTO) on Trade Facilitation contains several provisions relevant to the management of sanitary and phytosanitary issues: once the Agreement is ratified it will be important for FAO to be involved in capacity development efforts to support its implementation.
23. Many countries are looking to increased intra-regional trade as an opportunity for growth. Several regional economic communities (RECs) have developed or are developing various agreements to facilitate intra-regional trade in some cases with separate protocols to guide the regulation of animal health, plant health and food safety within the community. FAO's expertise in all three of these areas provides the basis for an important role in advising RECs on this.
24. There are a number of new players (including international organizations, academia and the private sector) with a "trade facilitation" focus who are now supporting the development of food control systems. Apart from increasing overall investment in food safety, their involvement can facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration thus leading to more coherent national responses to food safety issues. However, it is important that these "new players" receive guidance on good practice in the development of food control regulatory capacities. FAO has an important role to play in this.
25. Outcome 1 of the FAO Strategic Objective 4<sup>1</sup> provides a platform that facilitates joint work among the Trade and Markets Division (EST), Animal Health Unit (AGAH), the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) Secretariat and the various Units concerned with aspects of food safety: a collaboration which has previously been limited. This provides the basis for a truly singular role for FAO in supporting inclusive and efficient trade.

---

<sup>1</sup> Outcome 1 of SO 4 is the following "International agreements, mechanisms and standards that promote more efficient and inclusive trade and markets are formulated and implemented by countries".

## **B. Supporting science-based food safety governance and decisions**

*Strategic focus: Provide sound scientific advice to underpin food safety standards.*

*Outcome: Timely setting of risk-based standards that address current and emerging food chain issues and consumer confidence in a global food system based on sound science.*

### *Scientific advice to Codex*

26. The Joint FAO/WHO programme providing scientific advice in support of Codex standard setting remains a foundational element of global food safety governance. Without the authoritative and globally-relevant advice from the Joint FAO/WHO expert bodies<sup>2</sup>, the setting of many critical Codex food safety standards would not be possible. In recent years the members of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) have underlined the critical need to secure increased funding for this programme.

27. CAC has raised the issue of the possibility of broadening the donor base for this programme to include private sector donors. In light of the FAO Strategy for Partnerships with the Private sector, endorsed by Members in 2013, FAO does not consider it appropriate to receive funds from private sector actors in the norms and standard setting work of the organization in order to safeguard its independence and impartiality.

28. Nonetheless the problem of inadequate and unstable funding remains to be solved. Article 9 of the Statutes of the CAC requires that FAO and WHO fund the work of Codex through their Regular budgets. If the programme on Scientific Advice to Codex were to be considered as an integral part of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, then the same budgetary protection would apply.

### *Scientific advice to countries and partners*

29. Member countries and partners call on FAO for scientific opinions and advice, beyond that provided to Codex. There have been calls in the past for science-based advice on food safety implications of new technologies: such requests are likely to increase in the future as are requests for risk-benefit analysis.

30. During the last biennium, FAO responded to requests from the World Food Programme (WFP) for advice on the quality and safety of their procurement to avoid disruption of food supplies to malnourished populations. Notably, WFP has been seeking a longer term collaborative agreement with FAO for timely scientific advice on food safety. More generally, FAO needs to consider how it can prepare itself to provide food safety scientific advice on short notice to prevent or to reduce the impact of food safety emergencies.

31. FAO's programme of work to develop capacities of developing countries to effectively apply the risk analysis framework also promotes wide adoption of science-based approaches to food safety decision-making and remains a critical aspect of FAO's food safety programme.

### *Effective participation in Codex*

32. Inclusiveness is an essential quality of Codex processes and FAO continues to give high priority to developing the capacities of countries to participate effectively in Codex.

33. Effective participation is the resultant of a number of competencies and capacities within the country and as such, FAO's entire programme on food safety supports this goal. However, specific programmes are necessary to ensure that there is a high level of awareness of Codex in developing countries, to strengthen the national Codex structures and processes which allow for the development of sound national positions on Codex matters and to enable delegates to effectively communicate national positions and influence decision-making within Codex.

---

<sup>2</sup> Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA); Joint Expert Meeting on Pesticide residues (JMPR); Joint Expert Meetings on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA).

### C. Enhancing food safety management along food chains

**Strategic focus:** Support developing countries to apply risk-based food safety management along food chains that are appropriate for national and local production systems and in compliance with Codex texts.

**Outcome:** Reduced trade disruption due to non-compliance with food safety requirements.

34. Prevention is the ultimate goal of food control and is only possible if food producers and food businesses are correctly implementing effective programmes of food safety management. There are a large number of agencies and NGOs providing training on food safety management based on the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point system (HACCP) and in recent years FAO has de-emphasized general training on Good Hygienic Practices (GHP) and HACCP. However, we recognize that having a number of Technical Divisions specialized in production in various sectors – fisheries, livestock, dairy, crop – provides a valuable opportunity for FAO to integrate food safety at all stages of the food chain into broader sector development programmes.

35. There are other instances as well where FAO maintains an advantage as a service provider in improving food safety management along value chains such as:

- a) where there are synergies with associated work on strengthening the capacities of regulatory agencies. In recent years the emergence of private transnational regulation of food safety and the need to reconcile this efficiently with essential official systems of control has made this consideration even more compelling;
- b) where there are difficulties to be resolved with the interpretation of specific Codex texts illustrated by recent requests for assistance in developing guidance on the implementation of Codex provisions for the hygienic production of molluscan shellfish and for the reduction of microbial contamination in poultry;
- c) where there are synergies with specific normative projects or programmes of FAO. For example, in its efforts to better understand the impact of agricultural practices on anti-microbial resistance (AMR) and to support countries in their efforts to contain it, FAO has implemented a number of country projects to assess practices in primary production and to promote good practice, including the prudent use of antimicrobials.

### D. Providing food safety platforms and databases

**Strategic focus:** Provide mechanisms which support networking, dialogue and access to information and facilitate effective communication internationally on key food safety issues.

**Outcome:** Efficient communication and effective collaboration internationally on food safety issues.

#### *Databases supporting food safety management*

36. As a knowledge-based organization FAO is a recognized source of independent and reliable information. While the importance of this has grown in the last 10 years, the cost of maintaining databases and other platforms requires careful sustainability assessment.

37. FAO maintains several databases which provide information relevant for food safety management: the databases of the Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) provide international assessments on chemical food safety issues and FAOLEX<sup>3</sup> provides a repository of legal texts relevant to food control in many member countries. Ongoing work to strengthen FAO/WHO databases of food consumption data supports assessment of dietary exposure to chemicals and biological agents and assessment of nutrient intake.

#### *Platforms for communication*

38. INFOSAN, an FAO/WHO network of national food safety authorities, facilitates the timely exchange of information on food safety incidents. The value of the network depends on the capacities

---

<sup>3</sup> FAOLEX is an up-to-date legislative database providing access to one of the world's largest electronic collection of national laws and regulations on food, agriculture and renewable natural resources.

of the national focal points to reliably provide and effectively utilize information relevant to the prevention of emergencies: FAO recognizes its essential future role in developing these capacities.

39. An important function of FAO is to provide a neutral forum for information exchange when the need arises such as the recent technical meeting on the management of low level presence of GM in traded commodities.

### **E. Developing food safety intelligence and foresight**

*Strategic focus: Play a major role in the collection, analysis and communication of food chain intelligence.*

*Outcome: Countries are better prepared for emerging food chain issues and sustainability of food systems is promoted.*

40. FAO has for years, on an ad hoc basis, looked into emerging food safety issues as a means of promoting preparedness on the part of member countries to address these. An example from the current biennial programme is work linked to whole genome sequencing which is poised to revolutionize surveillance approaches globally and which raises a number of issues that countries must be prepared to address.

41. A key question is how we could be more systematic in our approach to identifying prospective issues of food control regulatory significance. A preliminary review showed that a number of FAO Units are involved in various formal and informal foresight activities that could identify issues of food control regulatory significance. The review also identified external groups currently investing in food safety intelligence most of whom recognize a key role for FAO in contributing to global food safety foresight.

42. Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is one emerging issue of global concern. FAO, as the lead intergovernmental agency with the mandate for food and agriculture, has an important role in building understanding of the impact of agricultural practices on the development and spread of AMR and, conversely, the impact of AMR on agriculture production and food security.

43. The impacts of emerging and recurrent food safety (and ‘one health’) threats, which frequently arise from human/animal/plant/food-chain/environment interface, can be devastating for agri-food systems. Improving resilience and sustainability of these systems requires multi-disciplinary approaches to collecting and analysing information. Such intelligence is essential to inform pressing discussions on such issues as AMR and on strategies for adapting to climate change within specific sub-sectors.

44. The need for better integration of food safety issues in regular tri-partite discussions involving FAO, WHO and the World Animal Health Organisation (OIE) has also been highlighted.

## **IV. Conclusions**

45. Improvements in global food safety will only be achieved if countries can implement good practices and enforce national regulations that are aligned with international requirements. FAO’s key role in global governance puts it in good stead to guide governments in the establishment and operation of food control regulatory systems. FAO’s food chain expertise allows concrete support on the application of Codex guidance in specific subsectors and intelligence on complex food chain issues. This underlies FAO’s value in global efforts to address problems such as AMR.

46. FAO’s new Strategic framework strengthens its singular leadership role in addressing the agri-food dimensions of the global Trade Facilitation agenda constructively and coherently with countries’ obligations to the effective regulation of plant health, animal health and food safety.

47. As a Knowledge Organization and as a neutral inter-governmental forum, FAO has a critical role in the provision of reliable, trusted and globally-relevant scientific advice to underpin food safety management globally.

## V. Issues for consideration by COAG

48. The Committee on Agriculture may wish to:
- a) Endorse the key areas of work identified as the core of the FAO food safety strategy.
  - b) Support a greater role for FAO in Trade Facilitation programmes as an important means for supporting the delivery of FAO's food safety strategy.
  - c) Advise on how to meet the challenge of the growing demands on FAO's food safety scientific advice programme.
  - d) Advise on FAO's role in contributing to global food chain intelligence and provide guidance on the role of FAO in assisting countries to contain the growing threat of AMR and the potential negative impacts on food and agriculture.