

FAO/WHO INFORMAL CONSULTATION: DEVELOPMENTS IN FOOD SAFETY IN THE PACIFIC AND FUTURE PRIORITIES

1. Background

Globalization of the food chain and growing international trade has increased the complexity of the international food system and put pressure on national food safety authorities. Recognizing the changing context and emerging issues of food safety, Pacific island countries need to adapt and strengthen national food safety systems and work towards harmonization of food safety measures. This will require a common framework for action, evidence-based guidance and stronger focus on a systems-based approach.

Safe food is a prerequisite for sustainable development and access to safe and nutritious food is a basic human right. Ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition is one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To achieve this goal, access by all people to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round must be ensured.

As such, ensuring food safety and preventing foodborne diseases is an international public health priority and the SDGs provide an opportunity to strengthen national food safety systems. This underscores the importance of food safety for the achievement of many development outcomes including food security, sustainable agriculture and food production.

The WHO estimates of the global burden of foodborne diseases show that in the Western Pacific region, every year about 125 million people become ill and about 50,000 people die from contaminated food. A relative large proportion of these are children under the age of five. At the same time noncommunicable diseases are increasing in the region and food safety and health authorities need to consider the impact of food on long term health outcomes. Over the last decades, food production in the Pacific has been steadily falling. As a consequence, the region increasingly relies on imported food. However, Pacific island countries are experiencing various problems associated with imported food and limited resources are being allocated to ensure that only safe and wholesome imported food reaches the market. There is a need for countries to strengthen their controls of imported food – by developing robust food control systems and regulatory frameworks, improving the capacity of value chain operators and promoting informed consumers. Public and private sectors need to work in partnership.

FAO and WHO are key partners in the region (in addition to other UN agencies and bilateral partners) providing support through appropriate channels. The success and appropriateness of technical support requires a strong foundation of planning, discussion and agreement with governments on needs, priorities and solutions. The Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015¹ was adopted in 2011 by the sixty-second session of the WHO Western Pacific Regional Committee, and in 2015, it was agreed to continue to use the strategy to guide action on food safety until a new strategy has been developed.

¹ http://www.wpro.who.int/foodsafety/documents/docs/Food_Safety_Strategy_2011-2015_final.pdf?ua=1

In 2015, the Progress Report on Implementing the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015 was launched, and concluded that further efforts are needed by all Member States to prevent food safety events.

FAO's work on food safety and nutrition in the Pacific is agreed with Pacific sub –regional countries. Specific support to be provided is documented in each country's Country Programming Framework (CPF) and included in the FAO Pacific Multi-Country Programming Framework 2013-2017². Currently future needs are being considered and consultation is underway in each country to establish new CPF key priorities and outcomes. The new CPF 2018 – 2022 will be completed for endorsement in 2017.

This informal consultation builds on the experiences of strengthening national food safety systems in the Pacific as well as the outputs achieved. It provides an opportunity to discuss and share experiences on tangible progress and will facilitate countries' ongoing engagement through FAO and WHO channels to strengthen food safety systems. The consultation responds to the request from the sixty-sixth session of the WHO Western Pacific Regional Committee Meeting to develop a new regional food safety strategy. It also provides a forum for discussion and identification of key priorities and desired outcomes in the areas of food safety and nutrition for consideration in the new FAO Pacific Multi-Country Programming Framework 2018-2022.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the workshop are:

- 1) to review progress on strengthening national food safety systems in Pacific island countries and areas;
- 2) to identify future priorities and approaches for food safety system strengthening in Pacific island countries and areas;
- 3) to discuss, review and gain feedback from representatives on the draft Imported Food Control Guidelines for Pacific Island Countries which has been developed to support Pacific island countries improve the control of imported food.

3. Dates and site

Date: 21 September 2016 (on the occasion of the 14th session of CCNASWP)

Site: Port Vila, Vanuatu

Venue: Le Lagon Resort, Port Vila, Vanuatu

² ftp://ftp.fao.org/TC/CPF/Countries/SAP/SAP_PacificMulticountry_CPF_2013-2017%20docx.pdf

4. Agenda

Time	Agenda item
8.30-9.00	Registration
9.00-9.15	Opening Background and objectives Group photo
9.15-9.30	Food safety in the Pacific: Progress, issues and the way forward
9.30-9.45	Q+A
9.45-10.00	Coffee break
10.00-10.45	Food safety system development: Components and potential focus areas to continue to strengthen food safety in the region.
10.45-12.15	Plenary discussion: Enabling and constraining factors for food safety system strengthening in the Pacific.
12.15-13.15	Lunch
13.15 -14.45	Regional guidance to strengthen food safety in the Pacific <i>This will include;</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Regional framework for action on food safety in the Western Pacific region (WHO)</i> • <i>FAO Country Programming Framework (FAO)</i>
14.45-15.00	Coffee break
15.00-17.00	Addressing food safety issues associated with imported food in the Pacific. Refer Annex I. <i>This will include;</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>FAO Imported Food Control Guidelines for Pacific Island Countries - review and feedback on the draft;</i> • <i>WHO Operational guide for the recall of imported food in the Pacific – quick overview</i>
17.00-17.15	Closing and next steps

Annex I

Background: Addressing food safety issues associated with imported food in the Pacific

15.00-17.00; 21 September 2016; Port Villa

Objective: To discuss, review and gain feedback from representatives on draft **Imported food control guidelines for Pacific island countries** and present the newly developed WHO Operational guide for the recall of imported food in the Pacific.

Background: Many PICs increasingly rely on imported foods for their food security needs and significant increases in the volume and type of food being imported has been experienced by many PICs in recent years. The diverse, intermittent and lengthy supply and transport chains involved in food import, together with the limited resources and capacity for food control often available in PICs has increased the risk of unsafe and substandard food spreading across borders and resulted in a range of food safety and quality issues, including:

- Foods missing or having illegible labels preventing identification of the foods or ingredients by import authorities and consumers
- Foods containing ingredients and additives in contradiction to food laws, regulations and/or food standards
- Imported food offered for sale after the foods declared ‘use by’ or expiration date
- Food shipments arriving that have been subject to time-temperature abuse in transit resulting in spoilage and possible pathogen growth.

These problems pose health and economic risks to consumers, governments and businesses.

Recognising these problems, FAOSAP has commissioned development of **Imported Food Control Guidelines for Pacific Island Countries** that aim to assist relevant national authorities implement processes and procedures to maximise the use of resources and minimise the impact on importers, food businesses and consumers in the control of imported food.

The guidelines are based on Codex texts, on guidance material produced by FAO and WHO, and on a newly produced FAO Imported Food Control Manual (2016) which provides a framework by which countries can assess the performance of their imported food control system. The guidelines are in two parts that focus on: 1.) The essential components for operating imported food control in situations with limited resources, and 2.) imported food control operational procedures that can be applied by PIC agencies to effectively manage imported food control.

In 2016, WHO will launch the Operational guide for the recall of imported food in the Pacific. The guide provides guidance to countries in establishing and implementing an effective national food recall system to respond to food safety events and emergencies. The guide is tailored to the unique Pacific context and specifically focuses on recalls of imported foods and the use of INFOSAN as a mechanism for rapid exchange of information between countries.

Activities: A draft of the Imported Food Control Guidelines for Pacific Island Countries together with review criteria have been forwarded to PIC contact points. This session will present the rationale and content of the guidelines and involve discussion and Q&A session with the aim of gaining input on the key issues faced by PICs in imported food control, and feedback to review and finalise the Guidelines. The session will also provide an opportunity for countries to familiarize themselves with the Operational guide for the recall of imported food in the Pacific and discuss how the guide may support countries in strengthening national food recall systems.