



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NORTH AMERICA AND SOUTH WEST PACIFIC

Fifteenth Session

Port Vila, Vanuatu, 16-20 September 2019

Opening remarks from FAO and WHO Representatives

(Delivered by Mr. Sridhar Dharmapuri, Senior Food Safety and Nutrition Officer, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, and Ms. Shashi Sareen, Food Safety Technical Officer, WHO Western Pacific Region)

Opening remark from FAO Representative

Respected dignitaries, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to join the Regional Committee Co-ordinator and WHO in welcoming you to the 15th session of CCNASWP in this picturesque location. On behalf of FAO, I am also pleased to convey warm greetings from Ms. Eriko Hibi, the Co-ordinator of the Subregional Office for the Pacific Islands in Apia, Samoa. Vanuatu is hosting this regional co-ordination committee meeting for the second time and is undoubtedly a very conducive location for intense deliberations as well as decisions that will be taken in this week.

The keynote speaker will highlight how climate change is affecting global food chains and consequently food safety. This derives from the recognition accorded by Pacific Islands Forum leaders who in 2018 reaffirmed, through the Boe Declaration on Regional Security, that climate change is the single greatest threat facing the region. As we discuss on food standards and good practices, we must not miss the larger message that food safety will need to be improved in a complex environment that includes fast-paced drivers such as global trade, online retail, urbanization and of course, climate change. A key trend is the influence of technology, particularly in North America, which is bringing about profound change the way food is produced, processed and retailed. We can order a taxi through a phone app and food along with it. We can shop for groceries online and get our lunches without stepping out of our homes and workplaces. Is this food safe and who is ensuring that? And when it comes to processed food what's in it? What are we actually eating? These are questions that consumers are concerned about. When we travel through countries, we surely do not fail to note that food safety is on the front pages of many newspapers and of course on social media. The fundamentals of food control therefore constantly need upgradation and improvement. Naturally, this means that sectoral approaches alone will not be sufficient. Food safety needs to be well integrated with national and regional agriculture development programmes so as to have maximum positive impact on public health and trade.

The FAO sub-regional office in Apia, Samoa has been active since 1996. In collaboration with the Regional Office for the Asia Pacific in Bangkok and our headquarters in Rome, FAO is supporting small island developing states (SIDS) in this region through the Global Action Programme (GAP) that was developed as a follow up to the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway. FAO is providing policy advice, analysis and technical assistance. We are working to strengthen the building blocks of food safety in many countries be it Codex standards formulation, laboratory analysis, good practices across food chains or import control as well as emerging areas such as food safety indicators. FAO is working with the Pacific Island Forum and other regional agencies, as well as UN partners to create enabling environments for food security, food safety and nutrition, transform food systems to improve nutrition-sensitivity, resilience and sustainability and empower people and communities to lead healthy and productive lives. In this context, we are pleased to note that there are several items of importance on the agenda for the rural agricultural and economic development of countries in the region, in particular the draft standards for kava and noni.

The Codex Secretariat together with FAO and WHO are continuing the process to revitalize the Regional Co-ordination Committees in the different region around the globe. This meeting is, in fact, among the first of the RCCs, which are being held after a gap of three years. As part of the process, updates will be provided on during the session on the outcomes of the two international food safety conferences held earlier this year in Addis Ababa and Geneva. These two high level events have underlined that achieving Zero Hunger or SDG2 is not simply about providing adequate food for everyone but ensuring safe and nutritious diets for all. Results of the survey on emerging issues in the region will also be presented and that is expected to throw up new

and emerging subjects including those possibly linked with climate change as well as known regulatory and capacity building matters.

Lastly, this session will nominate a new co-ordinator for this Regional Co-ordination Committee. We will have the opportunity to thank our hosts, Vanuatu, for their able leadership over two terms and look forward to a new spearhead to continue the important work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission in the NASWP region. We look forward to an engaging and productive week in beautiful Port Vila.

Opening remark from WHO Representative

Honorable Chairman, distinguished delegates, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the World Health Organization Western Pacific region, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this 15th session of the FAO and WHO Coordinating Committee for North America and the South West Pacific, or CCNASWP, as it is commonly known.

I take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to the Government of Vanuatu as Coordinator and Chair of this Session. I also would like to highlight their hard work put in to ensure the success of this meeting. Our appreciation goes to all members of the Vanuatu secretariat.

Pacific membership of Codex has steadily grown to 10 Pacific Island members and 6 are represented here today. We wish to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of the ten island members of Codex; (Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu) as well as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States.

The role of Codex standards in the area of food safety, as you are aware, has become specifically important with globalization, especially since these are referenced in the WTO Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures Agreement as the baseline for the purpose of human health. This implies that countries need to, not only develop or align national standards with Codex, but also participate in international standards setting so as to be able to influence such standards.

All Regional Coordinating Committees (RCCs) (including CCNASWP) meet every 2 years to discuss regional issues related to food safety and food trade. These (RCCs) have a major role to play in relation to food standards and food control at both regional and global levels.

RCCs provide the link between the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) and technical committees, and the regions to ensure that Codex leads global policy on food safety and quality and is also responsive to country and regional needs. RCCs are also a useful forum for FAO and WHO to engage with countries, and discuss priority needs and challenges which subsequently inform the planning and monitoring of their food quality and safety activities in the regions.

As you will have noticed, the Agenda for the Session has changed considerably since the last couple of sessions and various new initiatives have been introduced. The keynote address by a distinguished speaker is a highly informative addition to these meetings. This year's keynote address is on a very relevant subject 'Managing food safety in an era of accelerated climate change'. I am sure delegates are eagerly looking forward to getting insights on this important global focus area and sharing their own experiences to address food safety and food security challenges caused by climate change. It will also give an opportunity for delegates to identify areas and mechanisms for regional cooperation and collaboration.

Another important addition is the identification of key current and emerging issues and concerns in the region. These have been identified through surveys and discussions, both in the last session and also prior to this session, and will be further discussed in this meeting. However, it is important to go a step further and identify key areas that need actions over the next decade or so in the region. This is covered under Agenda item 3.2 and it is expected that concrete actions required will emerge during these discussions along with expected timelines.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you are aware, earlier during the year there have been 2 global food safety events – the Food Safety Conference in Addis Ababa and the WTO International Food safety and Trade Forum in Geneva. Both these contributed to raising the profile of food safety. It is expected that the discussion in this meeting will help to identify actions to further sustain this momentum of bringing food safety to the forefront.

Over recent years, good progress has been made in the Pacific to strengthen food safety and quality. However, frequent food safety incidents and emergencies are still affecting the region. Unfortunately, we do not have good estimates of the burden of foodborne diseases in Pacific island countries. However, the WHO estimates of the global burden of foodborne diseases, which were released in 2015, show that every year approximately

125 million people become ill and about 50 000 people die from contaminated food in the Western Pacific region. A significant proportion of these are children under the age of five.

Ladies and gentlemen

FAO and WHO have been continuously supporting countries in the region (through both regional and country activities) towards food safety capacity development. These initiatives have covered various aspects of food safety including food legislation and regulation, food safety policies, food standardization and Codex, and strengthening the supporting implementation infrastructure such as for example, strengthening the risk-based food inspections based on Codex standards and lab testing amongst others.

An “Operational Guide on the Use of Referral labs for the Analysis of Foodborne Hazards in the Pacific” has recently been developed which guides countries to have access to appropriate food analysis capacity. A side event is being organised on the subject on the 19th, the objective of which is to raise awareness of the guidance document and how the same can be used by countries. As the document is still in draft format, the side event will also encourage feedback and any comments or suggestions from member states to improve the document. It is also hoped that some Pacific island nations (as well as countries where the referral labs are located) will be willing to trial the procedures described in the guidance document to validate its utility.

A mention also needs to be made here on the Regional Framework for Action on Food Safety in the Western Pacific which was endorsed by the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific in 2017. This Framework, serves as a guidance document to countries on strategic action and a stepwise approach to strengthen food safety systems to better manage food safety risks, and respond to food safety incidents and emergencies. The progress of implementation of this framework will be reviewed in the next couple of months through questionnaires sent out to countries and responses will be discussed in a regional meeting proposed early next year. (The meeting will look to review emerging issues and progress on strengthening nat food control systems; share experiences and identify success factors and challenges; recommend common priorities & action to strengthen food safety in the region.)

Ladies and gentlemen

I thank you all for coming to this very important session of North America and the South West Pacific (CCNASWP) and for showing your commitment to strengthen food safety and quality through the work of Codex. FAO and WHO are committed to work with you and to support your endeavours towards securing a safer and more nutritious food supply in the region.

Thank you