



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NORTH AMERICA AND THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC

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FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY SITUATION IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE REGION:

CURRENT AND EMERGING ISSUES IN THE REGION

(Prepared by FAO and WHO and the Regional Coordinator)

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1. Member countries need to address food safety issues in a timely and effective manner. These issues can include known, sustained critical issues, as well as unexpected emerging food safety issues. The 70th session of the Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CCEXEC70) noted the importance to identify emerging issues and to define priorities among them¹. Regional Coordinating Committees (RCCs) can play a role in catalyzing this process.

1.2. The CCEXEC70², and the 38th session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC38)³, requested FAO and WHO, in collaboration with the Codex Secretariat and the Regional Coordinators to develop a set of questions on needs and priorities in the region and to analyze the information collected for presentation at the next round of RCCs sessions.

1.3. This was done for the 14th session of CCNASWP, and the results of the first questionnaire were reviewed by the Committee. The latter agreed that the results were useful for the region and agreed that the five most frequent issues identified (see CX/NASWP 16/14/3: *Food Safety and Quality Situations in the Countries of the Region*) were the priority concerns to the region. The Committee agreed that the Member countries should take appropriate actions at the national level to address these issue, and acknowledged that certain priorities may need regional attention.

1.4. In an attempt to stimulate this ownership and proactivity by the Member countries, FAO and WHO in preparation of the second issue of the questionnaire:

- refocused the questionnaire on emerging issues (as the difference between emerging and critical issues were not always well perceived)
- simplified the survey
- changed the modality (using SurveyMonkey, instead of email exchanges)
- involved Regional Coordinators as the prime initiators and analysts of the information

1.5. The objective is to help the Member countries and regions to proactively identify prospective issues that could be of significance and lead to concrete actions where necessary.

1.6. This document presents an analysis of the responses from the Member countries in CCNASWP to this second questionnaire on emerging food safety and quality issues.

1.7. This document provides a complimentary list of emerging issues to the recommendations of CCNASWP14.

2. METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH TO THE SURVEY

2.1. For identifying the emerging issues related to food safety and quality worldwide, an online questionnaire using SurveyMonkey software was sent to the Codex Contact Points (CCPs) of all Codex

¹ REP 15/EXEC para 55

² REP 15/EXEC para 67

³ REP 15/CAC para 118 a)

Members across the regions inviting them to answer the following questions by consulting with the relevant stakeholders in their countries:

- Identify the three most important emerging issues that are expected to have an impact on food safety in the next 5 -10 years;
- For each of the issues identified, provide a title, a brief description and an explanation of why this was considered to be an important issue;
- Describe the process (who was consulted and contributed to responses) and the information sources that were used to identify the issues.

2.2. Definitions of “issue” and “emerging issues” used in the questionnaire were provided as in Table 1.

Table 1: Key terms and their definition

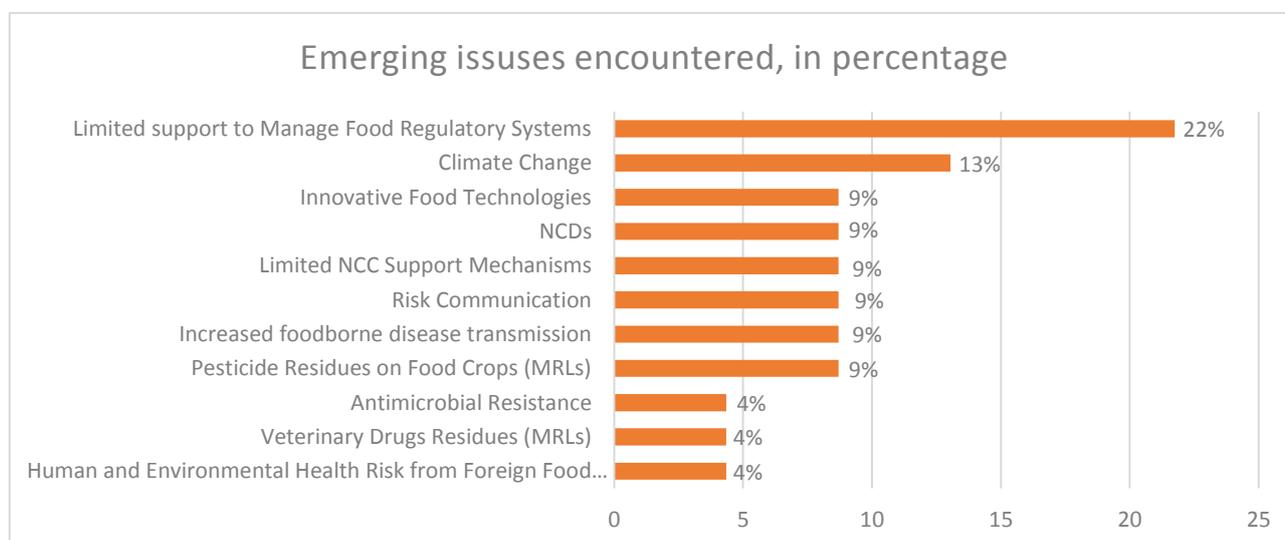
Key terms	Definition
Issues	With the word <i>issues</i> is meant hazards/challenges, but also opportunities or trends that might have an impact on food safety and quality.
Emerging issues	Those that are new or unexpected. Although their effect is currently not necessarily being experienced, these issues may cause a change in the status quo. Identification of these issues will help to provide proactive guidance and support to counties in addressing prospective issues that could be of regulatory significance.

3. SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF THE EMERGING REGIONAL ISSUES THAT ARE EXPECTED TO HAVE AN IMPACT ON FOOD SAFETY IN THE NEXT 5-10 YEARS

3.1. In 2016, responses were received from 12 out of 14 (86%) Member countries in the NASWP region. In the current year (2019), seven (50%) out of the 14 Member countries, namely Australia, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, United States of America and Vanuatu, responded to the survey. Based on the responses, the issues are grouped into different categories. A summary of the issues is tabulated in Appendix I.

3.2. In decreasing order of concerns by Member countries in the NASWP region, the following are the most important emerging issues expected to have an impact on food safety in the next 5-10 years in the region (Figure 1): Limited support to manage food regulatory systems (22%); Climate change (13%); Innovative food technologies (9%); Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) (9%); Limited National Codex Committee (NCC) support mechanisms (9%); Risk communication (9%); Increased foodborne disease transmission (9%); Pesticides residues on food crops (MRLs) (9%); Antimicrobial resistance 4%); Veterinary drugs residues (4%); and Human and environmental health risk from foreign food waste (4%).

Figure 1: Emerging issues in food safety identified to affect food safety in the NASWP region in the next 5-10 years



3.3. A summary of the emerging issues in food safety identified to affect the region in the next 5-10 years is as follows:

Limited support to manage food regulatory systems

3.4. Members identified that they lack the knowledge and resources to keep up with the fast-changing global food trade environment. Their NCCs and food safety officers need capacity building to advise governments to strengthen food safety and quality policies.

Climate change

3.5. Climate change poses the second greatest food safety and quality threat in the region. It could change the impact on hazards in the food supply chain, for example, increasing the range of biotoxins in shellfish. Climate change can also introduce new diseases to crops, which will impact of food quality, and national food safety management systems are ill-equipped to manage them.

Innovative technologies

3.6. Today certain animal products, such as meat and milk can be produced using cellular technologies. This food production method presents a new set of challenges, for example we do not have complete information on potential hazards, assessment of risks and we have not established control measures appropriate to each risk for cell-cultured food products. Traceability of products at the microlevel may enhance food safety, but there are still many challenges in communicating data.

Non-communicable diseases

3.7. Some Members are concerned that the imported stuffs are depleted of the important nutritional dietary requirements. Instead these foods are loaded with chemicals and they contribute to non-communicable diseases. Some Member countries in the region are amongst the countries in the world with the highest rates of NCDs. The current challenges are that the national food safety and quality management systems require updating to effectively address the current diets which promote NCDs issues.

Limited NCC support mechanisms

3.8. Because of their small population sizes and national food safety and quality structures, some Member countries continue to face difficulties sustaining their national Codex structures. Members of the NCCs should be selected from the relevant stakeholders so they can participate and contribute effectively to Codex work.

Risk communication

3.9. Increased use of social media is impacting on traditional food safety risk communication and can influence consumer behaviour and their interpretation of food safety information.

Increased foodborne diseases transmission

3.10. The ever-increasing global food trade increases the risk of foodborne diseases transmission between countries and regions. There is increased chance of transmitting new and emerging pathogens into naive populations through frozen and minimally processed foods. There is high likelihood of foodborne diseases caused by new pathogens (not previously recognized as foodborne, viruses in particular) and 'old' food pathogens such as *Campylobacter* in unexpected foods.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR)

3.11. AMR is a global crisis that threatens a century of progress in health including in bacterial infections, malaria, HIV and tuberculosis as well as the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in health, food security, clean water and sanitation, responsible consumption and production, poverty and inequality. Because the drivers of AMR lie in humans, animals, plants, food and the environment, a sustained One Health response is essential to engage and unite all stakeholders to act urgently and tackle the threat of AMR. Optimizing the use of antimicrobial agents in both human medicine and animal husbandry will help slow down the emergence and spread of AMR. Putting an immediate stop to the use of the antimicrobials categorized as the Highest Priority Critically Important Antimicrobial Agents on the WHO List of Critically Important Antimicrobials for Human Medicine as growth promoters is an essential first step towards completely phasing out the use of antimicrobials used for growth promotion⁴. Member states suggest strengthening surveillance systems and scaling up surveillance activities and improved oversight of antimicrobials prescribing and their use in countries in the region to determine the scale and impact of the problem and to ensure they are used responsibly.

Pesticide residues on food crops (MRLs) and Veterinary drugs residues (MRLs)

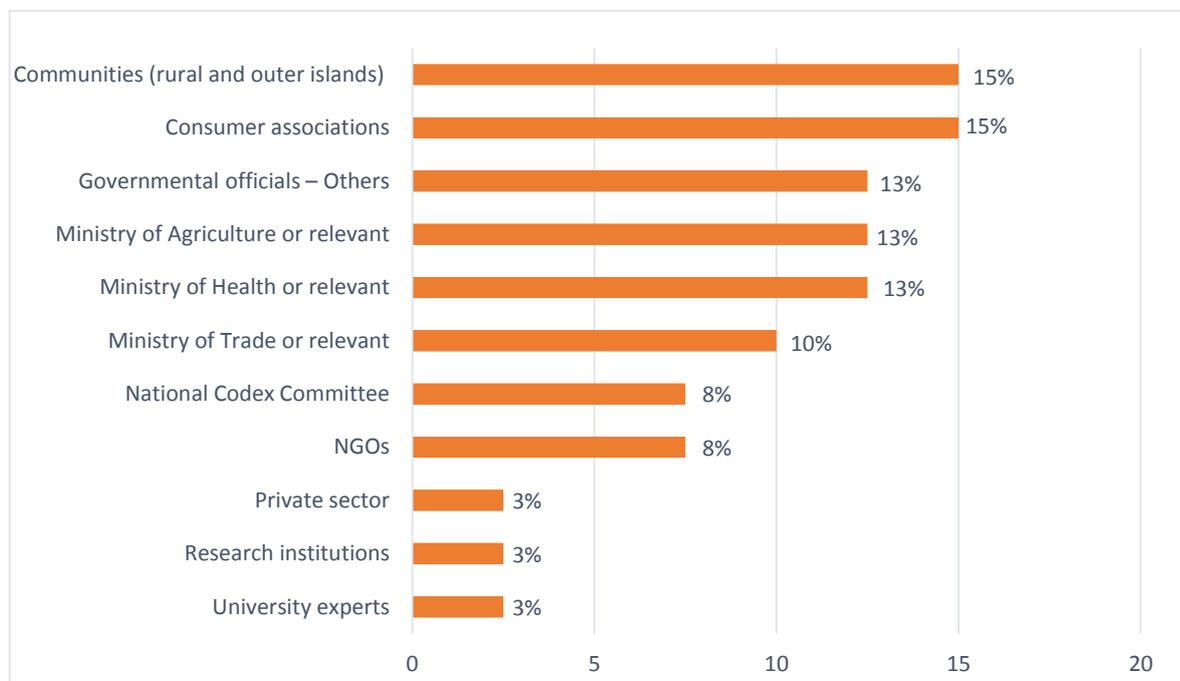
⁴ https://www.who.int/antimicrobial-resistance/interagency-coordination-group/IACG_final_report_EN.pdf?ua=1

3.12. Some Member countries do not have complete data on pesticide and veterinary drug use in their countries. Members are urged to adopt established pesticides and veterinary drug MRLs for crop pest and farm animal disease management.

Human and Environmental Health Risk from Foreign Food Waste

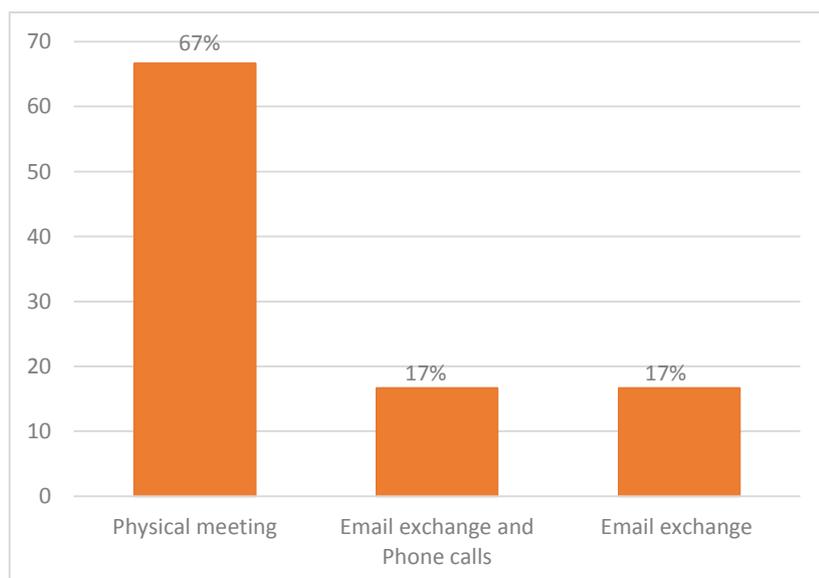
3.13. Foreign vessels (ships and aircrafts) which visit the Pacific Islands are required to dispose their food waste in the islands. These food waste poses a threat to human, plant and environmental health because these island states do not have the capacity to manage international food waste.

Figure 2: Participant in the consultation process at the national level

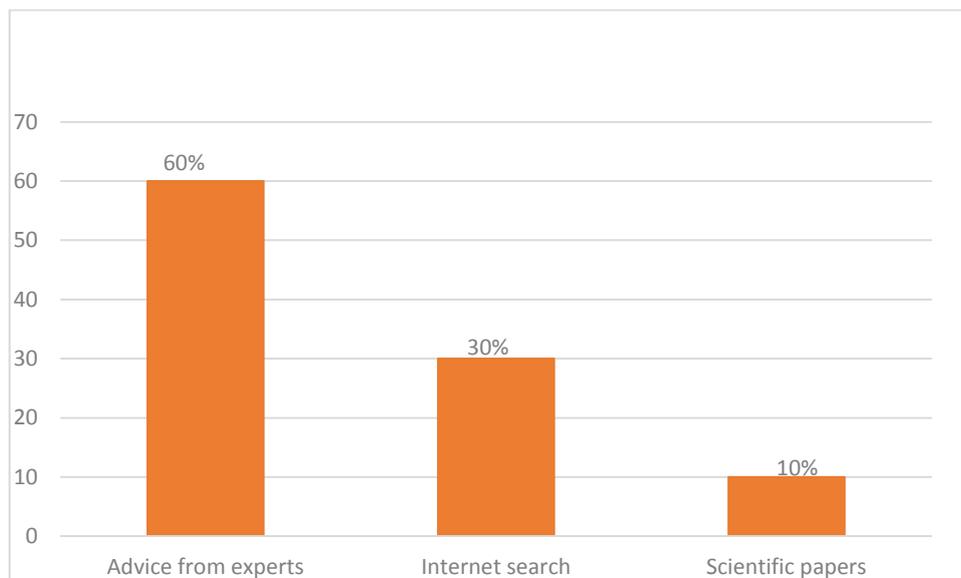


3.14. Figure 2 shows that the Rural and Outer islands Communities and Consumer Associations had the highest frequency of responses to the questionnaire (15%), followed by Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, Other Government Officials (13%), Ministry of Trade (10%), the National Codex committee and NGOs (8%), and lastly the Private Sector, Research Institutions and University Experts (3%).

Figure 3: Forms of consultation employed by Member countries to conduct the national surveys



3.15. Four countries (67%) conducted their national surveys through physical meetings with the different stakeholders. Two countries (17%) conducted their surveys through both email exchange and phone calls, and another two countries (17%) by email exchange only.

Figure 4: Sources of information used to collect information to complete the survey form

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1. The results of the survey reconfirm most of the food safety concerns raised in CX/NASWP 16/14/3, *Food Safety and Quality Situations in the Countries of the Region*. The concerns outlined require concerted efforts from all Member countries to work out solutions to and to address them in the next 5-10 years.

4.2. Limited support to manage food control systems (22%) remains a long-standing issue, especially for smaller Member countries and, greater emphasis must be place on addressing the matter.

4.3. All the island states are prone to the impact of climate change, which increases food safety and quality and food security concerns; agricultural pest and disease incidence; causes water salinity; and freshwater contamination problems.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. CCNASWP15 is requested to consider the following recommendations:

- (i) Some issues are specific to the NASWP region. A regional emerging issues framework could be developed to highlight the importance these issues and to develop strategies to address them.
- (ii) The impact of climate change on food safety and quality and food security must be raised at all national and regional platforms to attract more attention and resources.

Appendix I – Summary of Issues

The issues and corresponding explanations described in the questionnaire's responses were grouped into different categories. The table below contains a summary of the issues noted by the respondent countries in decreasing order of frequency.

Category	Description of the problem
Limited capacity to manage food regulatory systems	Members noted the weak enforcement of food control systems, food recall mechanisms, and lack of public awareness contribute to the prevalence of food safety concerns. Regulators face challenges managing street food vendors' activities. Food labelling remain problematic as follows: Countries are importing foods in foreign languages, Consumers have little knowledge on the importance of labelling, Many important foodstuffs are almost reaching their expiry dates with many being sold after their recommended expiry dates, some local food suppliers have no labels on their products.
Climate Change	Regional countries are concerned that climate change will impact on hazards in the food supply chain, lead to introduction of new foodborne pests and diseases and present a lot of challenges for many small island states. Some members are listed as the most vulnerable nations in the world due to other natural calamities, and the effects of climate change on their food security and food safety systems present some of the biggest challenges to their livelihood.
Increased foodborne disease transmission	CCNASWP members noted that Increasing globalisation of the food supply chain will possibly increase the risks of transmission of foodborne viruses to naïve populations e.g. Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) in frozen minimally processed produce and/or the increased magnifications of issues if they do occur; e.g. <i>Listeria monocytogenes</i> in frozen vegetables. The members emphasized that new foodborne pathogens (not previously recognized as foodborne, viruses in particular) or "old" pathogens in unexpected foods will impact on food safety and human health. A special emphasis was made on <i>Campylobacter</i> , which has long proven a difficult pathogen to prevent and control in meat and poultry products.
Risk Communication	Members expressed that food safety risk communication with consumers remains problematic in this rapidly changing digital world. Social media is influencing consumer consumption patterns which is leading to health deterioration.
Limited NCC Support Mechanisms	Some governments in the region are not providing enough support to the work of Codex and food safety. The national codex committees only meet on an ad hoc basis and need to be strengthened. Members to the NCC need to be selected from all relevant stakeholders.
Non-communicable diseases	The region of the CCNASWP has some of the highest rates of NCDs in the world. Members are raising the concern about the change in eating habits and consumption of low grade nutritional poor imported foods are contributing to this prevalence in the region. The NCD problems is contributes to up to 80 % of deaths in some of these island nations and it takes up approximately 70 % of national health budgets. The NCD problem is also affecting school-aged children. Some of the current food regulations are out of date and do not address the current NCD problems.
Innovative Food Technologies	Members noted that cellular agriculture is an emerging field which includes many foods safety challenge and labelling considerations. New ways addressing these problems must be developed, and digitalization could present such an opportunity to combat the emerging issues in food safety.
Pesticide Residues on Food Crops (MRLs)	Members raised concerns on the wide use of pesticides and herbicides in food crop production systems to manage insect pests, diseases and weeds. Pesticides could be the hidden cause of self-poisoning as they are intrinsically toxic and deliberately spread in the environment and no strict regulation and control are observed in some member states.
Antimicrobial Resistance	AMR is becoming an increasing health risk and members are concerned about its impact on their citizens. The region is calling for strengthening surveillance systems and scaling up surveillance activities and oversight of antimicrobial prescribing and use in countries to determine the scale and impact of the problem and to ensure responsible use of antimicrobials.

Veterinary Drugs Residues (MRLs)	The region is concern about veterinary drug residues in animals and antibiotics in animal feed, both of which ultimately end up in the human food chain. Members are calling for tighter regulatory frameworks to monitor the use of veterinary drugs and antibiotics in animals.
Human and Environmental Health Risk from Foreign Food Waste	Members are concerned that the smaller member states are ill-equipped to manage food wastes from aircrafts and cruise ships. The waste could cause foodborne disease etc., and represent a new health and environmental risk to the concerned states.