



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON EVALUATION OF FOOD SAFETY SYSTEMS

Importance of assessing and monitoring national systems of food control

Setting up, developing and strengthening national food safety systems in countries have been most intense in recent years. Reasons of this situation include the improvement in the detection and registration systems of foodborne diseases, demand from food buyers and distributors to meet food safety standards, consumer request for access to healthy food, increased global food trade, awareness of health and agricultural authorities of the need to strengthen prevention in primary production and processing rather than react to outbreaks, as well as increased cooperation between countries and regulatory authorities on this matter.

The system in its design and/or its evaluation should consider legal basis for the control of fresh and processed foods, role and structure of the regulatory authority, monitoring system of both producers and processors, as well as of food distribution and marketing, third party participation if applicable, analytical infrastructure and the existence of national communication networks. The system must have sufficient authority, command capacity and administrative structure to allow the application of approved regulations.

In order to comply with governments requirements, it will be necessary to evaluate if the system can prevent and eliminate food safety risks using principles such as mandatory registration of growers and packers having the possibility to rely on a national traceability system and the respect of minimum food safety standard for fresh produce or with limited processing

The food surveillance program should consider all stages of the production and supply chain. It is recommended to work with comparable methodologies among the countries and them on international standards such as those of FAO and WHO.

Countries should have a safety alert plan which consider participation of different regulatory and decision-making agencies. The plan should be evaluated and validated through field and office exercises. It is useful that the plan considers both domestic and imported foods and in the same way includes those foods for which notification is received from another country or from an international alert network.

In this regard, countries should work to strengthen their technical capacities through closer collaboration with countries and regions cooperating with systems developed for a better understanding of their alert models, such as the RASFF of the European Union, Pulsnet and the CDC monitoring system of the United States. A better outcome will be achieved by increasing national training and renewed commitment to WHO systems such as INFOSAN.

Use of international standards in monitoring programs provides a greater strength to the systems. It allows to compare national technical and scientific standards and helps to settle disputes in cases of controversy.

The development and evaluation of the system under these principles will reduce the risk of outbreaks due to foodborne diseases and implement prevention and mitigation strategies based on the safety risk analysis.