

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR THE NEAR EAST

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INFORMATION ON THE ARAB FOOD SAFETY INITIATIVE FOR TRADE FACILITATION (SAFE) AND RESULTS ACHIEVED UNDER THE FAO-LED COMPONENTS

The Arab Food Safety Initiative for Trade Facilitation (SAFE) is a capacity development project funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and implemented by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in collaboration with the League of Arab States (LAS), the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO) and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) in the period of 2018-2019. The five areas of the project with key role for food safety include: (i) Risk assessment; (ii) Rapid alert system for food and feed; (iii) Regional coordination for Codex work; (iv) Inspection and certification system; (v) Assessment of national food control system.

Connected to SAFE and under its umbrella, at the request of UNIDO, FAO led the implementation of a regional United Nations Joint Project entitled "Enhancement of regional trade capacities in food through harmonized regional food control systems" which covered two components of the SAFE project related to the capacity development and coordination of Codex work in the region, and developing capacity for the comprehensive assessment of national food control systems. The beneficiaries of this project were 17 Arab countries, signatories of the PAFTA Agreement on trade facilitation. The FAO Food Safety and Quality Unit led and ensured technical quality for this joint project with close administrative and operational support of the FAO Regional Office for Near East and North Africa (FAO-RNE). Expert working groups for the two areas of the joint project have been set under the leadership of Lebanon for the Codex Initiative and of Egypt - for the Initiative on the Assessment of National Food Control Systems.

Outputs of the two FAO-led components of SAFE include the following:

- (i) A common understanding and base for assessing National Food Control Systems using the FAO/WHO national food control systems assessment tool in Arabic language as a means to promote stronger national food control systems has been developed;
- (ii) A glossary for food safety terminology in Arabic language to facilitate an effective regional dialogue on food safety and food control matters, and support harmonization of practices and standards;
- (iii) Performed in-depth assessments of the national food control systems in Tunisia and Sudan, using the FAO/WHO food control system assessment tool;
- (iv) Training of about 80 food safety professionals in Sudan and Tunisia on the desired features of national food control systems as per Codex Alimentarius standards (CAC/GL 82-2013), to further act as resource persons in the national assessment;
- (v) Training of about 40 food safety decision makers at regional level about the assessment approach, as a means to promote regional integration by adopting similar food control approaches, based on Codex
- (vi) Agreement of detailed plans with the high-level food safety decision makers in Tunisia and Sudan to continuously upgrade the system, using the assessment results as a baseline, and as a support to define targets.
- (vii) A set of six guidance materials in Arabic language have been developed aiming to strengthen Codex capacity at national level and improved coordination and engagement for Codex work in the Arab region;
- (viii) Regional and country - level activities with 150 professionals and decision makers (Codex Contact Points, secretariat/member of National Codex Committees, officials from governments and food control authorities, academia, professional associations).
- (ix) Support to some 30 officials and Codex Contact Points from Near East countries to participate in the 10th FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee meeting, held in Rome, at FAO HQ on 11-15 November 2019 and in the pre-session workshop on the Codex on-line tools (9-10 November).