CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION **E**

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

World Health Organization
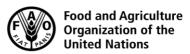
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Agenda Item 3.3

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Tenth Session

FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy, 11-15 November 2019

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

USE OF THE ONLINE PLATFORM FOR INFORMATION SHARING ON FOOD SAFETY CONTROL SYSTEMS; STATUS OF INFORMATION AND FUTURE PLANS/PROSPECTS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. During the 2013-2014 round of FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees (RCCs), a discussion and consultation among Members led to the general recognition that there was value in sharing information on food control systems. However, the process of collecting information through a Circular Letter was considered cumbersome and did not facilitate ease of access to information.

1.2. These views were subsequently supported by the 38th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC38). FAO and WHO were requested to develop, in collaboration with the Codex Secretariat, a prototype for information sharing on food control systems, including a set of questions (see Appendix I) on food control systems and roles and responsibilities, which was ready for testing at the 2016-2017round of RCCs.[1]

1.3. The 9th session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees for Near East (CCNE9) reviewed the first results and recognized the importance and usefulness of such a platform for information exchange, communication and sharing of best practices and contacts among Codex Members. The Committee agreed to continue work on the platform and asked FAO and WHO to take account of the suggestions made with a view to continuing its development.

1.4. Due to the medium response rate by countries to the online platform, it was decided for this cycle of RCCs to encourage Members to complete the country information and further discuss its use in the region.

2. OBJECTIVES AND BENEFITS OF THE PLATFORM

2.1. The primary use and purpose of the platform is to facilitate information exchange between Member Countries. Secondary uses may include informing FAO, WHO and Codex work, including allowing for analysis to be undertaken on information submitted for presentation and discussion at RCCs.

2.2. Countries also pointed out the value of having all information relevant to the national food control systems, including legislation, located in one place and easily accessible. Online access is a cost effective alternative for Member Countries to have a better understanding of their food control systems, specifically those with limited resources.

2.3 As far as feasible, the set of questions of the platform (Appendix I) was kept consistent with existing questionnaires such as the International Health Regulations (IHR) monitoring and evaluation scheme and the new FAO/WHO food control system assessment tool. The intention is that new questions would be added, based on priority areas of food control systems, where Codex Members see a value in sharing information.

3. MANAGEMENT OF THE PLATFORM

3.1. The platform is currently supported, managed, and maintained by a team of staff from FAO, WHO and the Codex Secretariat, while national Codex Contact Points (CCPs) are responsible for gathering information on their countries. Only CCPs are able to upload information for their country. The information is uploaded and submitted by the CCP in two stages: i) a draft version, which is not visible to anyone outside, and ii) a published version which is accessible to all, except for Part F (the self-assessment questions) which is kept confidential.

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[1] REP15/CAC para. 118 and REP15/EXEC para. 67

3.2. CCPs have the possibility to access the platform all year round to update their profile, add and, or change information, and to decide when the information provided should be published (http://www.fao.org/fao- who-codexalimentarius/survey).

4. STATUS OF RESPONSES BY MEMBERS OF THE REGION

4.1.   In the Near East region, tend of the 17 Member Countries (59%) have their information published on the platform (Table 1). These are: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Qatar, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The responses provided are made available on the Members page of the Codex Website (http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/about-codex/members/en/). The information is displayed by clicking on the Member Country name.

Table 1: List of countries that have submitted information on the online platform.

Country	Year of last modification	Level of completeness	Information missing	Status
1) Yemen	2019	Complete	/	Published
2) United Arab Emirates	2017	Complete	/	Published
3) Qatar	2017	Incomplete	Part A Q.2 Part C Part D Part E Part F	Published
4) Sudan	2019	Incomplete	Part D Q.8 (official competence of the laboratories)	Published
5) Tunisia	2017	Complete	/	Published
6) Bahrain	2017	Incomplete	Part D Q.7	Published
7) Algeria	2016	Incomplete	Part D Q.7	Published
8) Iran (Islamic Republic of)	2017	Incomplete	Part D Q.8 (official competence of the laboratories)	Published
9) Egypt	2018	Complete	/	Published
10) Syrian Arab Republic	2016	Incomplete	Part A Q.1 (mandate of the Competent Authority) Part D Q.8 (official competence of the laboratories)	Published

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1.   The platform's success depends on Member Countries' view on its usefulness and their willingness to update the earlier uploaded information in a timely manner. The Committee is therefore invited to provide comments and feedback on the utility of the platform, in particular:

a. Do countries confirm the value of exchanging information on their national food control systems?

b. If yes, is the online platform considered fit for purpose?

c. What are the issues preventing some 40 percent of Near East Member Countries from submitting information on their national food control systems?

d. What are the reasons that make it difficult for Member Countries to share information on Question 7 regarding risk assessments?

e. What could be improved and how?

f. How can FAO, WHO and the Regional Coordinator support countries to upload and utilize information on the online platform?

g. What additional questions on aspects of food control systems may be included, if further developed?

Appendix I

INFORMATION SHARING ON FOOD SAFETY CONTROL SYSTEMS AND ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Part A. Competent authorities

Q.1. Which are the competent authorities[2]

- Competent authority

- Mandate/competence (link to website if available)

Q.2. Provide details of the INFOSAN Emergency contact point responsible for food safety emergencies.

Part B. Food safety and consumer protection – laws and regulations

Q.3. Which are the main food laws and regulations setting out the legal basis and controls for food safety and consumer protection?

FAO maintains a database – FAOLEX – since 1995 that compiles legislation in the food and agriculture fields. FAO, WHO and Codex Secretariat are working with the FAO Legal Office to extract the food safety and consumer legislation for each country. In due course, lists of legislation related to food safety and consumer protection in each country will be provided. Noting that FAOLEX may not be comprehensive and up to date because legislation is collected from a variety of sources, you would be contacted and requested in due time to verify the information and advice of updates, errors or omissions to ensure that the information available is as comprehensive and up-to-date as possible.

Part C. The national Codex programme

Q.4. Describe the national consultative mechanism for Codex programme of work to ensure input from government stakeholders, private sector, scientific community and consumers.

In providing answer, please identify main participants engaged regularly in consultation

Q.5. Identify stakeholders providing core scientific and technical input during national consultation on Codex work. List which Codex issues input has been provided (indicator 2.1.2 in Codex strategic plan[3]).

Part D. Risk Assessments and Scientific Data

Q.6. Which bodies provide risk assessments and scientific advice to support risk management decisions by competent authorities?

- Name bodies and/or laboratories.

Q.7. Please provide any risk assessments (quantitative or qualitative), risk profiles or scientific opinions available in public domain.

- List, and provide links where available.

Q.8. List the official laboratories[4] involved in food safety and scope of competence.

- Official Laboratory

- Official Competence

Part E. Surveillance of foodborne diseases and monitoring of food contamination

Q.9. Which surveillance systems are in place to collect data on foodborne disease in humans?

Q.10. Which monitoring systems are in place to collect data on foodborne hazards in the food chain?

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[2] Codex defines Competent Authority(ies) as the official government organisation/agency(ies) having jurisdiction (CAC/GL 71-2009). The response to this question will be very country specific, but information may be provided on those authorities responsible for food production, imported food, exported food, prevention of fraudulent practices. They may be line Ministries or single agencies with responsibilities related to food safety. Briefly, indicate the main mandate and sphere of their competence.

[3] Codex Strategic Plan 2014-2019 (http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/sh-proxy/en/?lnk=1&url=https://workspace.fao.org/sites/codex/Shared%20Documents/Publications/Strategic%20Framework/Strategic%20Plan%202014-2019/Strategic_plan_2014_2019_EN.pdf)

[4] Could cover pesticides, chemicals, veterinary drug residues, AMR, fish, microbiology. Include any private laboratories designated for official control purposes. Where a country uses overseas reference laboratories, this can be indicated here.

Part F. National capacity in food safety[5]

Q. 11. "To what extent do you agree with the following statement?"

Please respond using the five point rating on the extent to which you agree with the statement.

Questions	Strongly Agree / Agree / Don't Know Disagree / Strongly Disagree
Policy and Legal frameworks	
Food safety legislation includes all the powers and responsibilities necessary to meet the objectives and enforce the various elements of food control[3]	
Infrastructure and finances	
In case of a food safety emergency, food control laboratories have the capabilities and versatility to adapt to the resulting changes/surges in demand of tests to be performed	
Human resources	
Adequate number of competent staff are employed and receiving regular trainings to ensure the delivery of functions required for national food control.	
Implementation of core control activities	
A central coordination mechanism is documented (i.e. SOPs, manual, TOR, etc.) and includes all relevant Competent Authorities to address Food Safety emergencies	
Implementation of specific functions	
Competent Authorities design a coherent risk based programme for control measures, taking into account relevant information (i.e. on product type, country of origin and importer's history)	
Domestic stakeholders	
High risk categories of Food Business Operators (FBOs) are provided with special categories of communication channels ensuring that messages and important technical communiqués are delivered to FBOs	
International stakeholders	
An INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point is designated and registered on the INFOSAN Community Website	
Evidence/risk base	
Data from routine monitoring and surveillance are utilized for informing new risk analysis activities or for the review of former risk analysis activities	

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[5] The questions have been taken from the draft FAO/WHO Food control system Assessment Tool (November 2015 version). They are also consistent with those in the draft International Health Regulations (IHR) Monitoring and Evaluation scheme. This is for internal information only, access will be restricted to FAO, WHO and the responding country itself.