



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR EUROPE

Thirty-second Session

Virtual, 16-20 May 2022

**FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY IN THE REGION INCLUDING CURRENT AND EMERGING ISSUES –
COUNTRY UPDATES**

(Prepared by FAO and WHO)

1. Current and emerging food safety and quality issues

1.1 A 2019 survey¹ on emerging issues expected to have an impact on food safety and quality in the European region in the next 5 to 10 years among Codex Members in that region, identified the following five issues of highest interest:

1. Food fraud
2. Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)
3. Contaminants and food additives
4. New technologies/scientific progress
5. Climate change and related issues

1.2 Additional emerging issues identified in the survey included; limited resources to manage food safety risks, non-communicable diseases, legislation and implementation, new distribution channels, and problems of food safety management along the food chain.

1.3 During discussions of these emerging issues at the 31st Session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Europe (CCEURO31) in 2019, it was noted that the outcome of the survey was relevant to guide strategic and operational planning at global, regional, and national level. The importance of exchanging information and good practice between countries and stakeholders on how to address emerging issues was also noted. The session encouraged Members to actively engage and contribute to the work of the Ad Hoc Codex Intergovernmental Task Force on Antimicrobial Resistance (TFAMR).

1.4 There are benefits and challenges to implementing surveys and an important aspect to securing engagement in such surveys is to ensure follow-up and use of the results. Much of the work since CCEURO31 has been overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic and further time is needed to review and consider follow-up of the areas of particular interest identified in 2019. It was therefore decided not to conduct another survey to identify emerging food safety and quality issues for this cycle of FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees (RCCs). Instead, it was deemed appropriate to provide countries with the opportunity to discuss the actions being taken to address the previously identified emerging issues and determine any further follow-up needed. In this context, Members are encouraged to use the opportunity of CCEURO32 to update each other on new developments, experiences, and good practices in addressing these issues.

1.5 Work is ongoing at the global and regional levels to address the emerging issues identified in 2019. Examples at the global level include the new work underway in the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS) on tackling food fraud in the context of food safety and fair practices in food trade; the recent FAO/UCLA publication "[International and national regulatory strategies to counter food fraud](#)", and the development of the CCEURO repository of contact points on food fraud and other relevant information². The FAO/WHO Side Event on Food Fraud that will be held during CCEURO32

¹ CX/EURO 19/31/3, 31st CCEURO

² <https://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/committees/codex-regions/cceuro/about/food-fraud/en/>

provides a further opportunity to discuss this important topic³. The TFAMR has finalised the revision of the code of practice to minimize and contain foodborne AMR and the guidelines on integrated monitoring and surveillance of foodborne AMR, FAO has updated its Action plan on AMR⁴, and further information on FAO and WHO global activities on AMR are available on the respective webpages.⁵ On the other areas highlighted, FAO has issued a publication on Climate change: unpacking the burden on food safety (FAO, 2020⁶). A new FAO publication “Thinking about the future of food safety – A foresight report”, was released in March 2022, outlining how major global drivers and trends will shape food safety in tomorrow’s world (FAO, 2022)⁷.

1.6 For further regional updates on FAO and WHO work relevant to these emerging issues, refer to CX/EURO 22/32/5.

1.7 Members may provide updates from the country perspective on the emerging issues identified in 2019 and advise on whether the list remains valid.

2. New issues relevant to food safety and quality in the European region

2.1 Since CCEURO31, new developments and changing dynamics may need to be considered by food safety regulators in the European region. These include, but are not limited to, new food sources such as plant-based foods and insects, evolving science and technologies, and advances in agriculture and farming systems. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to increased use of e-commerce and an increased interest in local markets and short supply chains.

2.2 COVID-19 is not a foodborne illness, although in the early stages of the pandemic there was concern about any direct health risk of COVID-19 through food consumption. The COVID-19 pandemic did however, mainly due to lockdown restrictions to prevent human to human spread, affect the management of food safety risks by governments, food businesses, consumers, and others. Food control officers were restricted from travelling and conducting on-site inspection and auditing activities. As a result, food safety authorities needed to prioritize their routine food safety functions to critically important work and services such as maintaining the safety and integrity of the food supply chains and facilitating international food trade.

2.3 Food business operators were required to implement preventative measures, such as ensuring physical distance in the workplace, enhanced hygiene requirements for protecting occupational safety of workers and protecting the customers, preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the population. During the comprehensive lockdowns in many countries in the region, consumers’ food purchasing patterns changed, leading to increased sales of take-away meals and online shopping.

2.4 The ongoing war in Ukraine affects the safety and quality of food supplies and in some areas it is challenging to maintain official food controls. In some parts of the country, food shortages affect food security, while at the same time, food safety and quality is compromised by limited access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, appropriate food storage and food preparation facilities. Rising food prices may also result in some consumers having difficulties to afford a balanced healthy diet.

2.5 Through the ongoing work of FAO and WHO, as well as Members’ experiences, new issues may continue to be identified. CCEURO provides the opportunity for Members to both identify and discuss emerging issues. In this context, Members are invited to provide feedback on how CCEURO may optimise the approach to identify and subsequently discuss and share information on new and emerging food safety issues in the region.

3. Status and changes to national food control systems

3.1 In line with the Terms of Reference of the RCC’s related to mutual exchange of information and as part of the process of revitalization of the RCC’s, FAO and WHO in collaboration with the Codex Secretariat developed an online platform on Member Countries food control systems (<https://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/about-codex/members/en/>). The purpose of the online platform is to facilitate the exchange of information among Codex Members on the current status of national food control systems, providing updates when appropriate, and to inform FAO and WHO capacity development work.

3.2 During CCEURO31, countries agreed that the online platform was useful for information sharing but recognized that not all countries used it optimally. All Members were encouraged to provide information to the

³ https://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/sh-proxy/it/?lnk=1&url=https%253A%252F%252Fworkspace.fao.org%252Fsites%252Fcodex%252FMeetings%252FCX-706-32%252FLinks%252FCCEURO32_side_event2_EN_V03.pdf

⁴ <https://www.fao.org/3/cb5545en/cb5545en.pdf>

⁵ FAO AMR (<https://www.fao.org/antimicrobial-resistance/en/>) and WHO AMR (<https://www.who.int/health-topics/antimicrobial-resistance>)

⁶ <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/es/c/ca8185en/>

⁷ FAO. 2022. *Thinking about the future of food safety - A foresight report*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb8667en>

platform and to keep the information updated. CCEURO31 also provided practical suggestions on how to improve the platform.

3.3 The RCC's terms of reference promote Members to mutually exchange information on proposed regulatory initiatives and problems arising from food control to stimulate the strengthening of food control infrastructures. Members are therefore invited to provide updates to CCEURO32 for the purposes of information exchange and sharing good practices.

4. Conclusion

4.1 While progress has been made towards addressing the emerging issues identified by CCEURO31 in 2019 that were expected to affect food safety and quality in the European region, CCEURO32 provides an opportunity for countries to provide updates and share experiences on how to address these issues and their ongoing validity as issues of particular interest.

4.2 CCEURO32 also provides an opportunity for countries to highlight and discuss new emerging issues expected to affect food safety and quality in the region in the years to come, taking account of continuing advances in science and technology, regional and global food trade patterns, the COVID-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine, among others.

4.3 The process of identification of emerging issues is important to guide work priorities at country, regional and global levels. Members views are welcomed on how to maximise the role of CCEURO on identification and information exchange on emerging issues.

4.4 Exchange of information among countries on regulatory initiatives and food control systems improvements and challenges is beneficial. The FAO/WHO online platform on food control systems is one modality and facilitates sharing of information and good practices between Codex Members of the region to stay up-to-date on changes in national food safety systems.

5. Recommendation

5.1 Members are encouraged to share information and updates on the following issues:

- i. experiences and best practices obtained in addressing the identified emerging issues that are expected to affect food safety and quality in the region;
- ii. new issues affecting food safety and quality in the region that have emerged since CCEURO31 and how are they being addressed;
- iii. new developments and/or changes to national food control systems that have taken place at regional and country level since CCEURO31; and
- iv. the role of CCEURO in, and any approaches to identify new emerging issues in the region.