National food control systems: Core elements and functions

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Food control systems

- Systems ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements:
  - Food safety
  - Essential food quality attributes
- Regulatory vs. non regulatory approaches
- Other elements that are closely related to the system: ex: voluntary standards (as opposed to mandatory requirements); certification bodies accreditations mechanisms...
Key concepts that shaped the evolution of food control systems

- Shift in the primary responsibility
- Food chain approach
- Risks – risk based; risk assessment, risk analysis
- Prevention

And…

- International obligations / regional agreements
Thinking about food safety along the chains

Ex. simplified value chain for maize: many stages along a value chain at which efforts are required to ensure food safety.

Only a coordinated approach by businesses, authorities, customers etc. can ensure safe and suitable products.
Some core elements of a national food control system

- Policy, legal and regulatory framework
- Institutional framework
- Control and enforcement programmes: data sets, conception and content
- Inspections services
- Analytical services
- Non regulatory approaches: information, education and training
Policy, legal and regulatory framework

Legislation

- Focusing on protection of consumers' health and economic interests
- Primary responsibility of producers to place safe food on the market (and related food safety management system, traceability and recall responsibilities!);
- Principles like: risk analysis, transparency; prevention; recognition of international obligations
- Checks and balances against abuse of powers (nature and limits of powers); enforcement powers and procedures; proportionate sanctions; appeal mechanisms
Regulations

- Science based
- Regulations affecting food products in general (generally complement basic food law – hygiene provisions…) – easier to update than the law
- Regulations affecting specific food products
- Fees, forms/certificates
- Relationship with Codex standards: need to **adopt** into national regulation; need to **adapt** to specific circumstances
Institutional framework

- Roles and mandates of different contributing ministerial department: clearly defined? Gaps/overlaps?
- Frequent issues in the definition of competencies between central/decentralized level
- Duties should be supported by specific technical competencies
- Coordination mechanisms: “authority”; agency”… different roles, fitting different needs-effectiveness of coordination mechanism
Policy/legal considerations

- Some countries do have an explicit food safety policy – others have it integrated with food security; some use the law as their policy statement; what matters is a clear commitment form the Government
- National legal frameworks vs. regional frameworks
- Interface between international processes/national processes (CNC, INFOSAN…)
- Clear understanding of the many committees’ roles (Codex, SPS, coordination of food control activities…)
Monitoring and control programmes: content and planning

- Use of the risk analysis framework
- Connect public health data back to data on food products and food production conditions (incl. agricultural/veterinary inputs)
- Conceived for a specific purpose
- Must be evolving over time
- Resources allocation
Monitoring and control programmes: Basic tools

- Database of food producing establishments
- Proper reporting and filing system for inspection/monitoring activities: follow up, data generation
- Build up databases: food hazards, food borne diseases
- Emergency preparedness basic plan? Channels of communication
Inspection services

- Technical competence / habilitated agents
- Frequent duplications
- Central/regional services duties and communication issues
- Risk categorization of food establishments/ Risk based planning
- Import controls shall be in dialogue with domestic controls
- Adequate coverage of national territory
- Efficient allocation of resources
  - Access to appropriate equipment, premises, tools, kits… including documents (regulations, procedures…)
  - Transportation and communication resources
- Delegation to third parties?
Analytical services

- Access to appropriate analytical resources (where? what? How much?)
- Routine labs/reference labs/laboratory networks
- Need to integrate laboratories into control planning and public health institutions
- Official recognition for labs (private or public) – procedure
- Importance of metrology, maintenance
- Accreditation?
Non regulatory approaches

- Policy and opportunity for dialogue with civil society, private sector
- Information programmes for consumers (generic, targeted) – channels of communication, support material – cooperation with consumers’ associations
- Training, information resources and support to private sector – in parallel with regulatory evolutions
- Academia- investing for the future (QA managers, continuing professional education)
For further reference

- FAO/WHO guide for application of risk analysis principles and procedures during food safety emergencies. (http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/ba0092e/ba0092e00.pdf)
Coming soon…

- Risk based Imported food control systems
- New tool on food control systems assessment