

FAO's unique position

IN ORDER TO ENHANCE the safety of the global food supply and minimise the socio-economic losses due to food safety threats, the early identification of vulnerabilities in the food chain, and implementation of effective preventive systems are essential to securing the safety of the world's food supply.

As food chains and food safety threats are now very often global in nature, FAO is in a unique position to assess such vulnerabilities from production to consumption, and provide advice on potential threats and guidance on addressing these. In addition, as not all threats can be forecast, it is also critical for all countries to have in place appropriate mechanisms to respond to food safety crisis in a rapid and coordinated manner.

FAO has a strong experience of efficiently implementing food safety related programmes. At both the headquarters and field level, there is strong collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) on food safety issues. FAO and WHO, working together, ensure that the agriculture and health sectors collaborate at national level to address food safety crises and threats.

Improved global food safety monitoring, regional and institutional collaboration and coordination, strengthened national food control systems, emergency preparedness and response planning at all international, regional and national level are all important pillars to support and strengthen the overall global food safety system.



Emergency Prevention System for Food Safety

EMPRES Food Safety benefits

Benefits of EMPRES Food Safety for members:

- Identification and prioritization of food safety threats
- Advice and guidance on prevention of threats
- Information on early containment of hazards and threats
- Technical assistance for emergency preparedness and response
- Advice on research needs

EMPRES Food Safety beneficiaries

- Food safety, health, agriculture and other national authorities
- Trade associations and their member companies
- Food producers and processors
- Consumer organizations
- Partners and additional intergovernmental organizations

EMPRES Food Safety partners with:

- EMPRES animal and plant health
- International Portal Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health (IPFSAPH)
- Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping (FIVIMS)
- The International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN)
- Other UN agencies
- Regional networks
- Relevant FAO departments

Contact

For further information
EMPRES-FS@fao.org

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EMPRES

FOOD SAFETY



EMPRES Food Safety

Early Warning
Emergency Prevention
Rapid Response

Global food safety

The globalization of the food supply and the increased complexity of the food chain have heightened public concern about food safety, particularly for foods traded on a transboundary basis. A greater awareness now exists among the public and food safety agencies about the impact of contaminated food on both human health and the economic well being of the agri-food industry.

The most recent global crisis triggered by melamine contamination of foods resulted in at least six deaths and 300 000 illnesses. Approximately 115 types of food products were contaminated. The crisis resulted in human morbidity and mortalities, trade disruptions and huge economic losses for all concerned.

Food chain approach for emergencies

RECENT INCREASES in the number of outbreaks of transboundary animal diseases, plant pests and diseases and food safety emergencies have raised public awareness of their potential impact on human health as well as on livelihoods, food security, national economies and on global markets. These outbreaks have enhanced the recognition of the need to address such threats in a comprehensive approach, oriented to the entire food chain.

Changing agro-ecological conditions, intensifying food production systems and the expanding global trade supplied by these systems increase the likelihood of animal and plant diseases and pests emerging and spreading farther and faster than ever before, and for unsafe food to reach numerous consumers in distant markets.

Within this context, a plan to achieve an integrated, coordinated and streamlined process in FAO for the

prevention and management of crises along the food chain was developed.

The goal is to address the challenges posed by the increased magnitude and frequency of large-scale emergencies emanating from transboundary animal diseases and plant pests and threats to food safety and to provide coordinated and timely assistance to Member countries in their emergency prevention and response efforts. FAO's food chain emergencies framework includes the creation of an EMPRES programme for food safety (EMPRES Food Safety) to complement the existing EMPRES programmes for animal health and for plant health.

EMPRES Food Safety

THE MAIN AIM of EMPRES Food Safety is to prevent and control food safety risks. Central to this is the early



detection, early warning and rapid response to food safety emergencies at global, regional and local levels. A primary objective is to leverage FAO's comparative advantage and establish an international programme that enables horizon scanning to identify emerging food safety hazards, provide guidance to countries on what to watch out for, how to prevent emerging food safety risks and facilitate preparedness to react in a timely manner.

Established within FAO's Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division, the main tasks of the EMPRES Food Safety programme are to:

- identify the sources of potential and imminent threats to human health associated with the safety and wholesomeness of the food supply and assess the likelihood of such threats occurring and their consequences;
- determine which risks, identified in the assessment process, require action and advise on the specific actions required to ensure that these risks are controlled;
- support the dialogue between relevant stakeholders to provide necessary comprehensive information in support of successful emergency action;
- develop and implement strategies for risk mitigation, field assessment and strategic analysis for intervention measures (control and containment, detection and diagnosis, preparedness and contingency planning at national and regional levels); and
- develop and maintain links with reference centres and regional support units and networks; in particular the FAO/WHO International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN).

Recent food safety incidents

The melamine crisis was not unique and food contamination events with global impact have occurred many times in recent years. While food safety threats pose a tremendous challenge to developing countries, many of which are only in the process of building their food safety infrastructure, they also have significant impact on developed countries with strong food control systems.

The **Salmonellosis** outbreak linked with peanuts in the United States of America in 2009 resulted in an estimated nine deaths and more than 22 000 illnesses. Hundreds of products were affected.

Dioxin contaminated Irish pork in 2008 exposed consumers to dioxin levels of 80 to 200 times above the safety limits. Estimated economic losses are in excess of USD 1 billion.

Hepatitis A contaminated green onions from Mexico in 2003 resulted in three deaths and over 600 illnesses in the United States of America and closure of markets for Mexican products.