



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEx ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

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FAO GM FOODS PLATFORM

(<http://fao.org/gm-platform/>)

Introduction of the FAO GM Foods Platform

1. The FAO GM Foods Platform (<http://fao.org/gm-platform/>) is an online platform to share information on safety assessment of foods derived from recombinant-DNA plants authorized in accordance with the Codex "Guideline for the conduct of food safety assessment of foods derived from recombinant-DNA plants" (CAC/GL 45-2003, annex III adopted in 2008, available at http://www.codexalimentarius.org/download/standards/10021/CXG_045e.pdf).
2. The FAO GM Foods Platform is open to the public. Countries should officially nominate one Focal Point to the platform through their Codex Contact Point. Only nominated Focal Points are allowed to register and upload relevant data and information.
3. Each country is responsible for the accuracy of the information submitted to the Platform. FAO is responsible for management of the Platform including checking the format of the submitted records.

Current status of the Platform

4. In response to Codex members' feedback obtained during the side event organized at the Commission in 2014, FAO has further improved the Platform in terms of its user-interface. As of 18 June 2015, a total of 164 Members have nominated Focal Points for the Platform. 105 Members have completed their country profile, and the Platform hosts 733 national records of the results of GM food safety assessment.
5. If your country has not yet nominated a Focal Point to the Platform¹, you are requested to submit a nomination form through your national Codex Contact Point. Contact gm-platform@fao.org to initiate the process.

Evaluation of the Platform usage (July 2013 - June 2015)

6. Since the launch of the Platform (July 2013), FAO has been conducting active follow up with Codex Members on a daily basis and the Platform community has expanded significantly as of 18 June 2015 (Figure 1).

¹ As of 18 June 2015, 22 Countries that have not yet nominated a Focal Point to the Platform include: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Brunei Darussalam, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Fiji, Libya, Mozambique, Namibia, Nauru, Nicaragua, Oman, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Vanuatu.

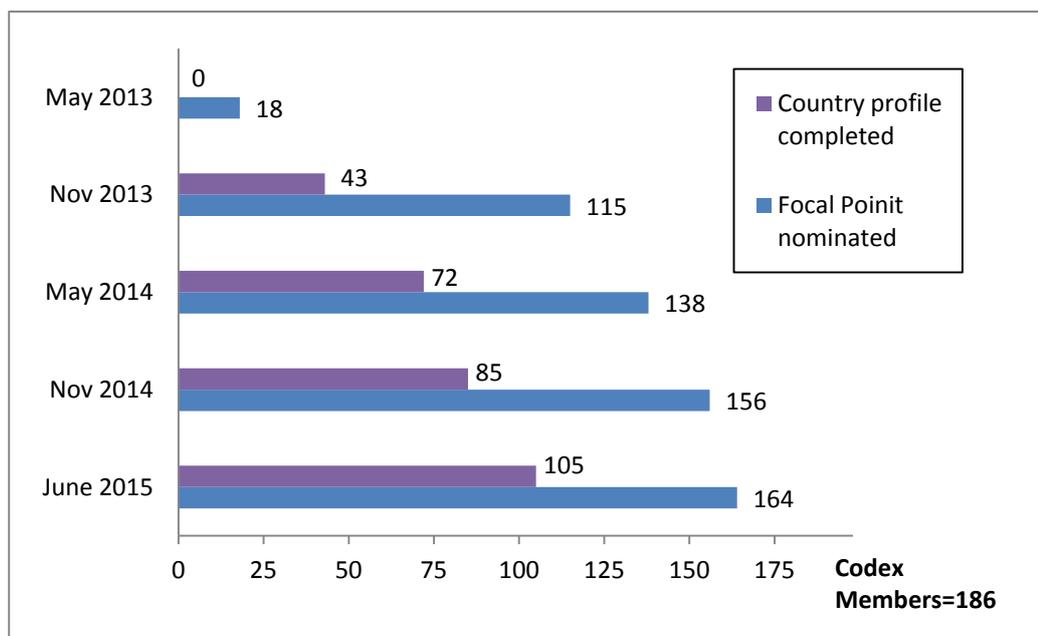


Figure 1. Progress in Focal Point nomination and country profile completion

7. Total number of the visitors to the FAO GM Foods Platform (<http://fao.org/gm-platform/>) webpage has been monitored since July 2013 (Figure 2). Each dot represents the total number of the visitors of each month and the dotted line indicates the trend in significant increase.
8. So far approximately 100 countries have completed/updated their country profile pages on the Platform. Feedback from Focal Points indicates that the country profile pages provide a quick yet useful and detailed source of information about the biosafety situation of the respective country, and thus there is a value to continue efforts to have all Codex Members provide such information.

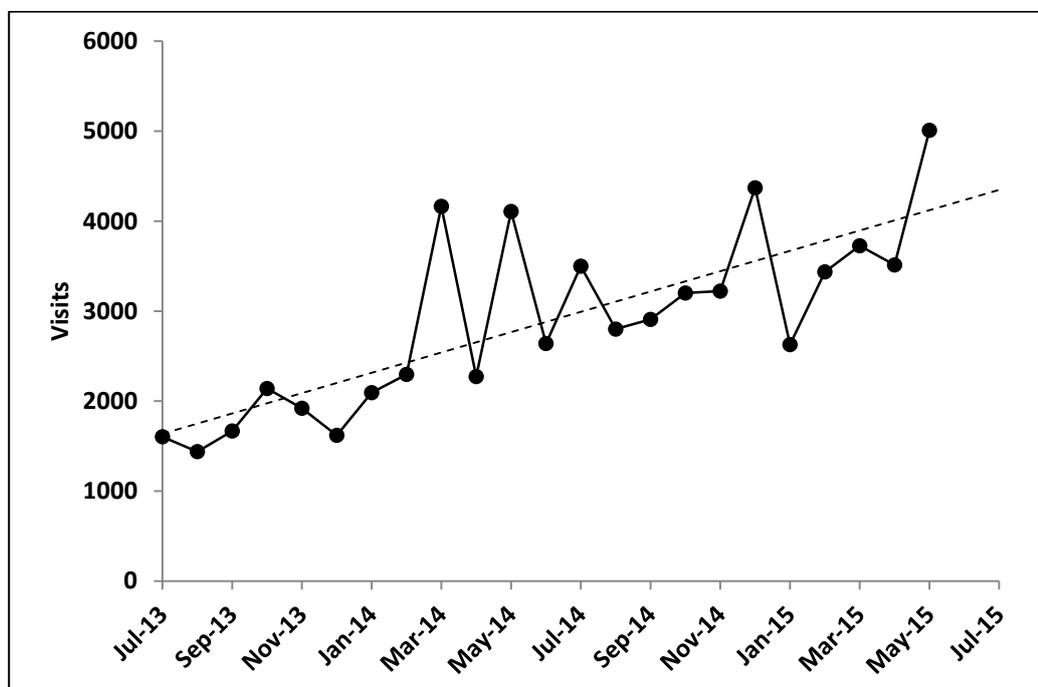


Figure 2. Monthly visits of all the Platform webpages

9. There are several outstanding peaks observed in the graph. The first peak in March 2014 possibly links to the increased awareness prior to and during the FAO Technical Consultation on low levels of GM crops in international food and feed trade held on 20-12 March 2014². The peak in December 2014 could

² Narrative report of the FAO Technical Consultation on low levels of GM crops in international food and feed trade available at http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/agns/topics/LLP/AGD803_6_Report_En.pdf.

be explained as the first joint FAO/Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD)/Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Webinar on international biosafety databases was organized on 12 November 2014. The total visitors to the Platform also dramatically increased in May 2015. This could be due to the second joint FAO/CBD/OECD Webinar held on 27 May 2015. This implies that when relevant international events are held, official data is sought from FAO on safety assessment foods derived from r-DNA plants and locate the FAO GM Foods Platform as one of the information sources.

10. In addition to the general visitors, the frequency of record submission was also analyzed (Figure 3). When a Focal Point submits a record, a “record submission page” must be accessed so that a form with all necessary data/information appears. Monitoring the visits to this page showed a steady increase in the trend line shown in the Figure 3.

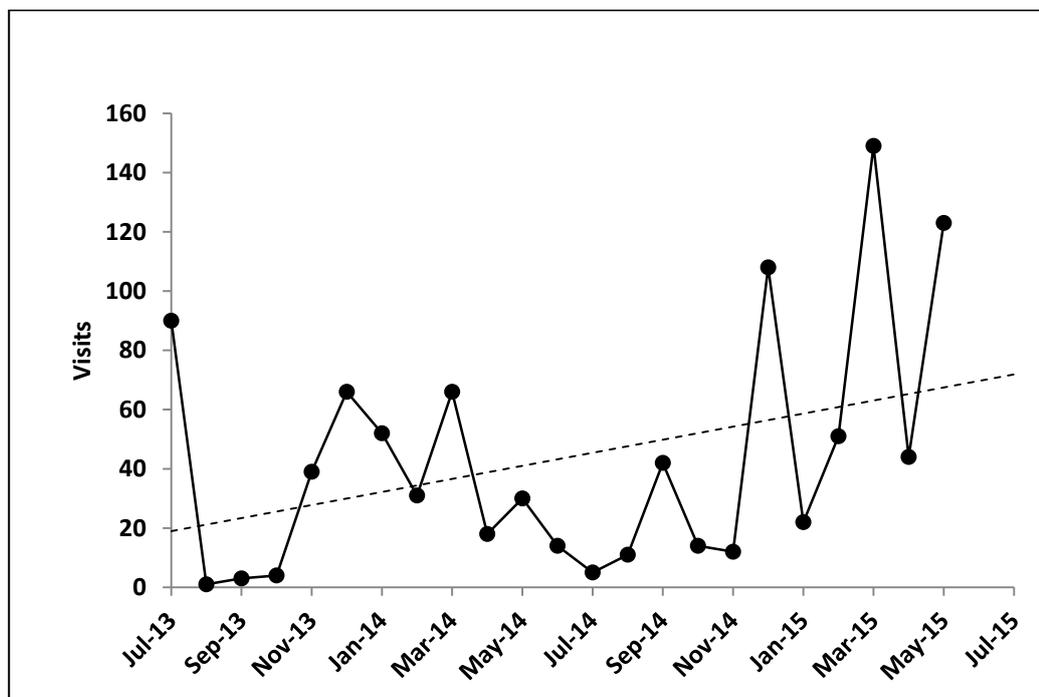


Figure 3. Monthly visits of the “record submission page” of the Platform

11. Considering that 88% (n=164) of the Codex Members have already joined the Platform, one of the key objectives in establishing a Platform Community with all Codex Members could to be achievable by the end of 2015. However in order to achieve this goal, a firm and sustained commitment by all Codex Members is essential. It is important for the Codex Members to ensure having their Platform Focal Points officially nominated and to ensure that the Focal Points are active in updating the country profile and sharing relevant data and information. The Platform has 15 active Codex Members who are constantly sharing national data/information on safety assessment of foods derived from r-DNA plants. This number is very close to the actual number of countries that have informed FAO that they regularly conduct relevant safety assessment.

FAO activities in strengthening the Platform (July 2014 – June 2015)

12. FAO followed up on a monthly basis with all Codex Contact Points who had not yet nominated their Focal Points to the Platform to assist the nomination process. FAO has also been communicating with each Focal Point officially nominated by the respective country on a regular basis to support their active participation in the Platform activities to share relevant data and information.
13. Monthly eNewsletters are being disseminated to all registered Focal Points and Alternate Focal Points. The eNewsletters include information on the Platform progress, latest news on the Platform community and upcoming international events on biosafety. All Codex Members are invited to subscribe the eNewsletter by sending an e-mail to gm-platform@fao.org. All eNewsletters are archived and available for download at <http://www.fao.org/food/food-safety-quality/gm-foods-platform/resources/> under the “FAO GM Foods Platform Monthly Newsletters” section.
14. FAO, in collaboration with CBD and OECD has conducted two joint webinar sessions on international biosafety databases. The first one held in November 2014 was attended by 120 participants from 55 countries and the second one held in May 2015 was attended by 88 participants from 55 countries. The

reports of those webinars are available at <http://www.fao.org/food/food-safety-quality/a-z-index/biotechnology/biosafety-events/>. One of the key outcomes of the first webinar was that the participants fully understood that three databases maintained separately by FAO, CBD and OECD have clearly different mandates, objectives and scope. Participants recognized that effective synergies have been already created among the three databases and thus they could co-exist without making duplication of efforts as long as the three organizations and their database Focal/Contact Points continue to communicate closely and collaborate at both national and international levels.

Maintenance and sustainability of the FAO GM Foods Platform

15. Throughout 2015, FAO will continue its efforts in 1) promoting the active participation of the Focal Points in the Platform activities; 2) improving the usability of the Platform; and 3) improving the visibility of the Platform community at the global level.
16. However, the success and completeness of the Platform largely depend on Members' efforts to share relevant data and information on the Platform. FAO encourage all Codex Members to be part of the FAO GM Foods Platform community.
17. It should also be noted that FAO has invested in developing, populating and maintaining the FAO GM Foods Platform over the past 3 years in terms of staff time and initial financial investment.
18. Maintaining the current infrastructure of the Platform (e.g. server cost, IT related maintenance cost) and providing basic support to users require approximately 30% of one staff member's time, leading to a total of approximately 80,000 USD financial resource requirement annually. This is to cover the basic requirement and any value-added services relating to, for example, the further strengthening of the Platform community would be additional.
19. Thus in order to maintain an active and high-quality Platform in line with the request of CAC/GL 45-2003/08 and Codex Members' expressed preferences, Members' sustained commitment to share data and information as well as both in-kind and financial support is essential.

Establishment of informal support groups in the Platform community

20. Several Platform community members have expressed their needs for assistance in capacity development on technical issues, such as development of policy and regulatory frameworks, food safety assessment procedures, documentation protocols and sampling and testing of GMOs. To address such capacity development needs, FAO proposes to establish informal support groups among the Platform community members to facilitate interactive communication and collaboration for their capacity development. Email to gm-platform@fao.org for more information about the support groups.

Invitation to the side event on the Platform

21. FAO will organize a side event on the FAO GM Foods Platform to report on progress and an evaluation of Platform usage at the occasion of the 38th session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission in Geneva, Switzerland. All official delegations, Codex Members and Observers to the Commission are cordially invited to attend the side event, which will be held on Monday, 6 July, 2015, at 13.00 – 15.00 hrs in Room 4 at the Centre International de Conférences Geneva (CICG). The side event will discuss the Platform progress, opportunities and challenges in the area of GM food safety and relevant capacity development needs.

Contact

22. For further information about the FAO GM Foods Platform (<http://fao.org/gm-platform/>), contact Dr Masami Takeuchi, Food Safety Officer of FAO, at masami.takeuchi@fao.org or gm-platform@fao.org.