



**FAO Regional Workshop on Enhancing Early Warning Capabilities
and Capacities for Food Safety
01-04 June 2015
Budapest, Hungary**

Concept Note

Introduction

The consumption of unsafe foods is an important cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide. The potential for food safety hazards to cross borders and continents has increased with globalization and the growth of international trade in food and feed commodities. Countries and regions should have adequate capability and capacity to early detect adverse food safety signals or events, prevent food safety incidents and emergencies and be prepared to effectively manage, co-ordinate and communicate the response at the country level, and frequently at the regional and international level, as may be appropriate in order to improve public health and avoid negative economic impact of agri-food trade restrictions at the regional and global-levels.

The goal of national EW system for food safety is to prevent and effectively mitigate adverse signals or incidents through their early detection, verification, rapid assessment of potential risks, co-ordinated risk management, alert notification and communication, including linkages with relevant regional and global networks. Early warning system is essential element of efficient and resilient national food control systems and should not be developed in isolation but rather built on improving existing or anticipated elements of food control systems. Decisions on early warning system design should be strategically evaluated taking into considerations anticipated priorities for food safety and national food control systems, national/regional/global trends in agri-food production and distribution, and relevant overarching frameworks, goals, objectives and priorities at the national, regional and international levels. The EW system elements and processes cover the interface of agri-food and public health sectors, and their strategic enhancements requires well co-ordinated efforts among governmental and other food safety stakeholders from national agri-food and public health authorities.

The FAO Emergency Prevention System for Food Safety (EMPRES-Food Safety) has recently developed and started pre-testing a new Handbook entitled: ***Enhancing early warning capabilities and capacities for food safety***. The Handbook help countries to develop a strategy to improve their national early warning systems, including better linkages with regional or global rapid alert and communication networks. The focus of the Handbook is on early detection of signals or events, rapid assessment, provision of actionable options to risk managers, and to lesser extent to other elements and processes of the early warning system. Although the Handbook/training package provides sufficient detail to introduce or explain key concepts where it is warranted, the main objective is to stimulate discussions

and problem solving in support of developing and strengthening EW systems at the national levels, and relevant and appropriate linkages at the regional and global levels. To this end, the training workshop would provide a combination of actionable items, checklists, exercises and questions. It is recognized that unique national and regional contexts will drive the outcomes from these discussions.

FAO is pre-testing and improving the Handbook in collaboration with all FAO Regional Offices. The main aim of the FAO Regional Workshop in the Region of Europe and Central Asia is to raise awareness on holistic, practical and integrated approaches for enhancing national capacities to prevent adverse food safety events, to prepare for/respond to food safety incidents or emergencies, and to support sound, yet actionable risk management and decision-making.

The specific objectives of the workshop are to provide participants with:

- Increased understanding of an early warning system concept and its relevance to on-going improvement of national and regional food control systems;
- Practical tools and approaches for improving surveillance/intelligence for early detection of adverse signals or events, investigation/rapid assessment/communication (including risk communication) of potential actionable options with risk managers, rapid alert notification and communication networks, and over-arching co-ordination and communication, including linkages with regional and global systems or networks;
- Opportunity to share knowledge and experience on good surveillance/intelligence principles in food safety for improving prevention capabilities of national and regional early warning system(s).

Target audience

The target audience of the workshop is managerial or senior technical level professionals from national food safety institutions with the mandate (or in position to mandate) the food chain and public health surveillance, risk assessment, trace/back investigations, outbreak investigation, multi-agency communication and co-ordination, including direct interactions with national food safety risk managers.