FAO works toward setting international standards in many areas connected with food and agriculture. It develops codes, norms and conventions and helps nations to implement them. It works with its international partners and member nations to:
- ensure the safety and quality of food;
- facilitate trade;
- maintain plant and animal health; and
- provide for the future of precious natural resources.

FAO plays an important role as an international forum and a repository of knowledge and expertise.

**International standards for food and agriculture**

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FAO helps to set those standards.

**Standards for the global market**

The safety standards currently in use in the global market are:
- the Codex Alimentarius for food;
- the International Plant Protection Convention for plants; and
- the World Organisation for Animal Health for animals.

These three bodies help countries to comply with the World Trade Organisation’s Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, also known as the SPS Agreement. The agreement recognizes a country’s right to restrict trade in order to protect human, plant and animal health. But regulations must be based on science and international agreements and not used simply to restrict trade.

FAO promotes international cooperation to reduce the hazardous effects of pesticides.

A technician performs food quality and safety tests on meat products.
International standards – codes, norms and conventions – must be set in all areas affecting food and agriculture. Food additives and pollutants, animal health, responsible management of natural resources such as fisheries and forests are only a few of the areas where international standards are needed.

The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries aims to ensure good fisheries management.

The recently adopted International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture ensures access to genetic resources for future generations and ensures that everyone shares the benefits.

FAO promotes the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, as well as the International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides to reduce the hazardous effects of pesticides.

The International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides helps countries to regulate these products, especially when laws are lacking.

The International Plant Protection Convention allows for the international movement of plant materials, while protecting against the spread of harmful plant pests and diseases.

Global standards set in many areas

How the Codex Alimentarius works

The Codex Alimentarius Commission, established jointly by FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO), has been setting food standards since 1963. These international standards serve as a basis for national standards. International application of the Commission’s standards makes food safer for consumers. It also ensures fair practices in the growing global food trade, which benefits food producers and consumers.

The Commission has 179 members countries, who represent more than 99 percent of the world’s population. FAO and WHO hold meetings with experts and conduct international risk assessments, which allows the Commission to set and update its standards based on the latest scientific knowledge in food safety.

- The Commission has set more than 1 000 maximum limits for hundreds of food additives and more than 3 000 maximum residue limits for pesticides and veterinary drugs found in foods.
- The Commission has set hundreds of food standards, guidelines and codes of practice covering all parts of the food chain including commodity standards for important internationally traded goods, safety standards to reduce contamination and ensure food hygiene during production, handling and transport, guidelines on food inspection and certification, and standards on food labelling that ensure that consumers have the information they need.

Government food regulators, health professionals, and representatives of consumer organizations and the food industry work together in the many specialized committees that help the Commission carry out its mission.

FAO and WHO help developing countries to participate in the standard-setting process and, once standards have been adopted, assist them in implementing these standards nationally.

Step-by-step safe food production

Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) system

1. Assemble HACCP team
2. Describe product
3. Identify intended use
4. Construct flow diagram
5. On-site confirmation of flow diagram
6. List all potential hazards
   Conduct a hazard analysis
   Consider control measures
7. Determine Critical Control Points (CCPs)
8. Establish critical limits for each CCP
9. Establish a monitoring system for each CCP
10. Establish corrective actions
11. Establish verification procedures
12. Establish documentation and record keeping

HACCP monitors critical steps in the food chain in order to identify where problems might occur and take precautions to avoid contamination. The Codex Alimentarius Commission has recommended the system since the mid-1990s.

Source: FAO