
INFORMATION NOTE



TECHNICAL CONSULTATION ON FOOD SAFETY REGULATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN THE NEAR EAST REGION



15-16 DECEMBER 2003, CAIRO, EGYPT

Background

At its 26th Session held in Tehran, in 2002, the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East called upon FAO to continue to assist Member States in strengthening their national capacities to meet Codex requirements and WTO's Agreements including food quality and safety. Member countries were also called upon to adopt policies conducive to the strengthening of regional cooperation to increase intra-regional agricultural trade, to combat trans-boundary pest and animal health diseases and to implement joint research and biotechnology programs.

A similar request preceded the 46th WHO (World Health Organization) Regional Committee of the Eastern Mediterranean, which was held in Cairo, Egypt in 1999. The Regional Plan of Action for Addressing Food Safety in the 21st Century was adopted by the Ministers of Health representing their Member States. This plan of action puts emphasis on the human health consequences of ineffective food control systems in order to put in place strong food safety programmes that are efficient, effective and economic. The plan underlines the need for increased collaboration by all relevant authorities to put in place updated food legislation, adopt relevant food standards, ensure that food inspection focuses on preventive systems of food safety promotion, and to create awareness among food-handlers and consumers of proper food-handling techniques to avoid cross-contamination and foodborne illnesses.

Because of the importance that food safety has assumed in international trade negotiations, and its significance for the countries of the Near East Region, an item on food safety and trade has been placed on the agenda of the 27th Regional Conference for the Near East that will be held in Doha, Qatar in March 2004. A draft paper has been prepared by FAO, in consultation with WHO, on food safety and trade issues pertaining to the Region and will serve as a working document for the discussions at the Conference. The paper contains a proposed plan of action to promote food safety and food trade in the Near East Region. However, the details of the proposed plan of action have not been explicitly elaborated.

Objective

1. Review and discuss the draft paper on "Food Safety and International Trade in the Near East" Region to be submitted to the 27th FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (Doha, Qatar, March 2004)
2. Prepare an addendum to this paper, which would elaborate the details of the activities outlined in the proposed plan of action to promote food safety and food trade in the Near East.

Participants

Experts participating in this consultation come from countries in the Near East Region and have experience in one or more of the following areas: food safety management, Codex, food

inspections, food control laboratories, food and agricultural trade, and in surveillance of foodborne diseases.

Preparation for the Consultation:

For a more fruitful discussion and before arrival in Cairo, experts and temporary advisors are requested to prepare an overview of the following:

- Information about rejected food shipments, in the last five years, due to non compliance with food standards of the importing countries.
- Information about rejected food shipments, in the last five years, due to non compliance with food standards at the national ports of entry.
- Any bans or restrictions that national food products are faced with when destined for exportation.
- Any major food safety issues, whether from imported food or locally produced foods, that the country has faced within the last five years.
- Information about food-borne diseases, if available.
- How is inspection performed at the ports of entry.
- How is inspection performed in the local market.
- Problems and challenges facing harmonisation of national food laws with international standards.
- Human and physical resources available for food control.

Time and Venue

The Technical Consultation will take place from 15-16 December 2003 at the FAO Regional Office, El Islah El Zirai St., Dokki, Cairo, Egypt.

Languages

- English

Provisional Timetable

Day 1 (15 December 2003)

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| Morning | • Review and discussion of “Food Safety and International Trade in the Near East Region” (NERC/04/5) |
| Afternoon | • Working groups to finalise proposed plan of action to promote food safety and food trade in the Near East |

Day 2 (16 December 2003)

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| Morning | • Working groups to finalise proposed plan of action to promote food safety and food trade in the Near East |
| Afternoon | • Plenary session and closure |

For further information, please contact:

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