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Standard setting and other normative work

Key facts

World trade in agricultural, fisheries and forestry products amounts to US\$552 billion annually.

In industrialized countries, as much as one-third of the population suffers from food-borne diseases every year.

Hazards include *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*, both of which often contaminate foods from animals, and *Listeria*, which contaminates raw meat, milk and vegetables.

Food and waterborne diarrheal diseases are leading causes of illness and death in less developed countries. They substantially contribute to malnutrition and kill approximately 1.8 million people annually, most of them children.

In 2002, guidelines were established for the wood packaging used for shipping up to 70 percent of cargo, to ensure that no unwanted pests were transported with the packaging. The guidelines are being revised in 2009.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission has 179 members who represent more than 99 percent of the world's population.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission sets hundreds of food standards, guidelines and codes of practice covering all parts of the global food chain from the producer to the consumer. It has also set more than 1 000 maximum limits for food additives and more than 3 000 maximum residue limits for pesticides and veterinary drugs.

Striving for safe food for all

As globalization has increased the trade in food and agricultural commodities, the task of keeping them safe has become more complicated. Food safety concerns everyone including farmers, processors, retailers, consumers and governments. When consistently applied throughout the food chain, internationally harmonized standards based on sound science protect consumers. FAO helps to set those standards.

International standards for food and agriculture

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.



A technician performs food quality and safety tests on meat products.

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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.



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

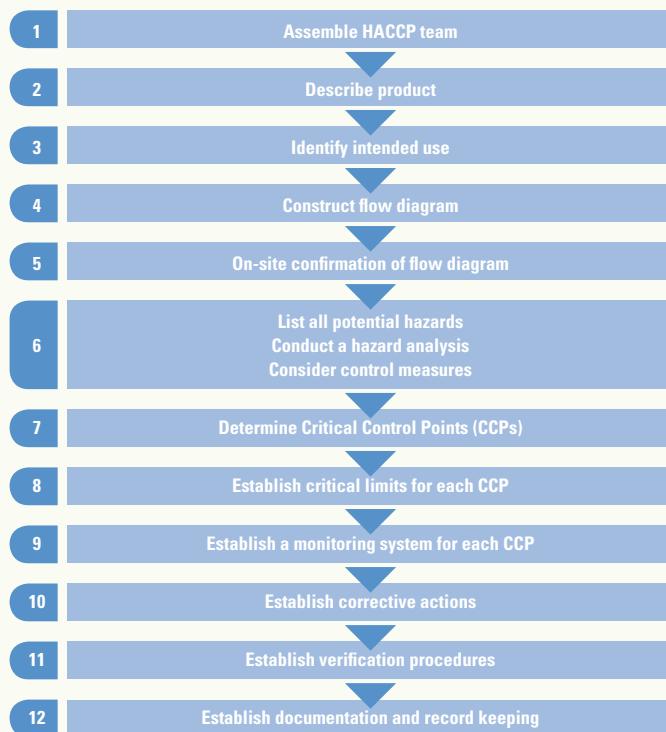
How the Codex Alimentarius works

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.
- The Commission created a standard for assessing the safety of genetically modified foods.
- 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



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

Global standards set in many areas

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.

