



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS



E

Agenda Item 4.2 a)

GF/CRD Vanuatu-1

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

FAO/WHO GLOBAL FORUM OF FOOD SAFETY REGULATORS

Marrakech, Morocco, 28 – 30 January 2002

COUNTRY PAPER PROPOSED BY VANUATU

The views expressed in the Global Forum documents are those of the author(s), and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of FAO or WHO. Designations employed and presentation of material do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of FAO or WHO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

1. GEOGRAPHY

The republic of Vanuatu is located in the western Pacific, between 13 and 23 degrees south, and 166 and 172 degree east. Its closet neighbors are the French territory of New Caledonia to the south, Solomon Islands to the North west and Fiji to the east. About 80 or so islands of varying sizes make up the Republic. The total land area is 12,361km². The biggest island in the group of islands is Espiritu Santo counts for 34% of the total land area. About 68 of the islands are inhabited meaning that there is enough land areas for subsistence farming.

The sea area covers 680,000 km² including the 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone. The population of Vanuatu is 200, 000 in the latest 1999 national census. Before independence in 1980 Vanuatu was formerly known as the New Hebrides jointly colonized by Britain and France as the only condominium in the world. The Capital, Port Vila is one of the fastest growing towns in the Pacific and a major tourist destination from around the globe due to its beautiful tropical climate.

Major means of revenue for the government is copra, cocoa and tourism.

2. FOOD SAFETY.

2.1 INTRODUCTION:

Vanuatu is a developing country which food safety is very new as preparing and growing food is very traditionally handled. However the country is beginning to adopt western laws to look into areas of food safety. In understanding the importance of food safety we begin to realize that food is a common factor in transmitting diseases. There is no proper data in the country to really see the extend to foodborne illness. We do admit that there is a lot of cases of food poisoning in the country that has not been reported due to lack of proper reporting procedures, testing facilities and qualified human resources in the field of Food safety.

2.2 CURRENT LEGISLATION.

A) Food Control Act N^o 21 OF 1993

The first food legislation was the Food Control Act N^o. 21 which was passed in parliament in 1994. This legislation has just come into force in 1999 after it has been gazetted in the National gazette. This is an Act to regulate and Control the manufacture, importation, Sale and distribution of food and to prevent for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

B) Food Regulations

The ministry of health with assistance from WHO has in draft now the following regulations:-

1. Standards for the Labeling of Prepackaged Foods
2. Food Hygiene Regulations
3. Licensing and Certification

C) Meat Industry Act N0.5 of 1991

It is an act to regulate the meat processing industries.

D) Municipal By-Law

Laws made under the Municipalities Act are food by-laws which provide for the regulation and control of food in the Municipality of Port Vila.

DJ Vanuatu Food Recall Protocol

These are guidelines to provide the minimum level of action required by Vanuatu government authorities and food business in carrying out food recalls.

2.3 IMPLEMENTATION AGENCIES.

- I. Public Health Department
- II. Vanuatu Quarantine & Inspection Services
- III. Local Authorities (Municipalities)
- IV. Food technology Development Center
- V. Agriculture department

These departments are safeguarded by the Acts and policies mentioned above which authorizes them to implement necessary procedures to ensure food safety practices. Below are some of the many tasks performed by the different stakeholders:

- Food hygiene trainings for food handlers.
- Investigation of food-borne illness
- Inspection of butcheries, hotels, restaurants, markets, retail shops etc... to ensure compliance to regulations and policies.
- Quarantine control on imported meat and poultry. (Note: There is no control on canned food staff. Inspections is only carried-out in retail shops, super markets etc...)
- Attend to complaints raised by the general public in relation to food safety issues.
- Carrying out basic microbial tests on suspected food premises.
- Conduct regular visits to the various food processing industries to obtain and observe conditions at the site.

2.4 FORMING PARTNERSHIPS

- All the different departments have come together to form the Vanuatu National Codex Committee (VNCC). This committee was set up in 2000 to introduce Codex Alimentarius Standards as a guideline to producing quality products and ensure general hygiene practices.
- An inspectors group has been set up to form joint visits to observe conditions at the processing sites, Visit restaurants, hotels etc...
- Vanuatu National Codex Committee is recognized by the government as a body to oversee food safety issues in the country.
- Need to work together more with food processing plants to install Control systems such as HACCP and others to ensure safe quality products.
- Strengthened network with different stakeholders to reduce duplication of duties.

2.5 PROBLEMS/CONSTRAINTS

- Financial difficulties to run an effective food safety program in Vanuatu.
- Lack of qualified human resources
- Lack of proper high standard testing facilities
- Implementation is sometimes weak due to shortage of manpower.
- Regulations need to be reviewed in-line with Codex Alimentarius Standards.
- Very little data on food-borne illness is available

2.6 CONCLUSION

Vanuatu has formed a food Safety Committee to oversee Food Safety programmes and this committee is working very hard to see that food safety is given priority in different government departments and private sectors activities who deals with food safety. Vanuatu still needs further assistance from developed countries and especially donor agencies such as WHO and FAO in developing food safety legislations and help train implementers to implement legislations and regulations. WHO has sent various consultants in developing the Food Control Act, Food Regulations and the Vanuatu Food Recall Protocol and the Vanuatu government through the Ministry of health would like to see this help continues in the future to ensure Vanuatu has a high standards of food safety in the Pacific and as well as in the international scene.