

# CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



World Health  
Organization

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Agenda Item 8.3

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## JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

### CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

#### Forty-fourth Session

#### WHO global strategy for Food Safety 2022-2030 - update of status

(Prepared by WHO)

#### I. INTRODUCTION

1. Food safety is a public health and socioeconomic priority. Foodborne diseases have a significant impact on public health. Unsafe food containing harmful levels of bacteria, viruses, parasites, chemical or physical substances makes people sick and causes acute or chronic illnesses – including more than 200 diseases<sup>1</sup> ranging from diarrhoea to cancers – and in some cases, leads to permanent disability or death. An estimated 600 million – almost 1 in 10 people in the world – fall ill after eating contaminated food, resulting in a global annual burden of 33 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) and 420 000 deaths.<sup>2</sup> Low- and middle-income countries are the most affected, with an annual estimated cost of US \$110 billion in productivity losses and medical treatment costs due to the consumption of unsafe food.<sup>3</sup>

2. Taking into account past experiences, current trends, and future needs in food safety and public health, resolution WHA73.5 on strengthening efforts on food safety adopted by the Seventy-third World Health Assembly in 2020 called on Member States to remain committed at the highest political level to recognizing food safety as an essential element of public health; to developing food safety policies that take into consideration all stages of the supply chain, the best available scientific evidence and advice, as well as innovation; to providing adequate resources to improve national food safety systems; to taking coherent actions across all relevant sectors in order to promote food safety, while recognizing consumer interests; and to integrating food safety into national and regional policies on health, agriculture, trade, environment, and development.

3. In turn, Member States requested the Director-General to update the WHO global strategy for food safety,<sup>4</sup> in coordination with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and in consultation with Member States and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), in order to address current and emerging challenges, incorporating new technologies and including innovative approaches for strengthening national food safety systems, and to submit a report for consideration by the Seventy-fifth World Health Assembly in 2022.

4. In response, the WHO Secretariat initiated the update of the WHO global strategy for food safety. The updated strategy aims to serve as a blueprint and guidance for Member States in their efforts to strengthen their national food safety systems and promote regional and global cooperation. This updated strategy will contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and will be reviewed in 2030 when the world reflects upon the progress made towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

#### II. UPDATING THE WHO GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR FOOD SAFETY

##### A. *The process of revising the strategy*

5. WHO established through an open call a new technical advisory group on food safety: safer food for better health. In total, 24 renowned food safety experts representing WHO's six regions were selected and appointed by the Director-General to provide technical advice on the update of the strategy. Two virtual meetings of the

<sup>1</sup> Key facts: food safety. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020 (<https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/food-safety>, accessed 10 June 2021).

<sup>2</sup> WHO estimates of the global burden of foodborne diseases: foodborne disease burden epidemiology reference group 2007–2015. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2015 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/199350>, accessed 10 June 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Jaffee S, Henson S, Unnevehr L, Grace D, Cassou E. The safe food imperative: accelerating progress in low- and middle-income countries. Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and The World Bank; 2019 (<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/30568>, accessed 10 June 2021).

<sup>4</sup> WHO global strategy for food safety: safer food for better health. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2002 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/42559>, accessed 10 June 2021).

technical advisory group were held on 8 to 10 February and on 19, 22, and 23 April 2021, to discuss the overall structure and content of the revised strategy and offer guidance. Besides the food safety experts and WHO staff, focal points from FAO, OIE and the Secretariat of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, Codex Alimentarius, also attended and provided their inputs at these two meetings. In addition, WHO and FAO have continued to hold fortnightly meetings since late September 2020 to share information on the update of the WHO global strategy for food safety and harmonize the strategic efforts of both organizations on food safety. The content of the updated strategy builds on previous global and regional food safety strategies, as well as the meeting outcomes of the two high-level international food safety conferences<sup>5</sup> convened in 2019.

6. As of 13 May 2021, WHO launched a two-month public web-based consultation on the updated strategy to collect feedback from all interested stakeholders, including Member States and governmental institutions, United Nations entities and other intergovernmental organizations, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, private sector entities, and individuals working in public health and food safety. All comments received will be considered in the revision of the strategy before its submission to the Executive Board at its 150th session.

### **B. Vision and aim of the updated strategy**

7. The vision of the updated strategy is to ensure that all people, everywhere, consume safe and healthy food to reduce the burden of foodborne diseases. The aim of the updated strategy is to guide and support Member States in their efforts to prioritize, plan, implement, regularly monitor and evaluate actions towards reducing the incidence of foodborne diseases by continuously strengthening food safety systems and promoting global cooperation.

### **C. Five strategic priorities to accelerate efforts in food safety**

8. Strengthening national food safety systems begins with **establishing or improving the most critical resources, infrastructure and various components of those systems**. For example, this can include regulatory infrastructure, enforcement, surveillance, inspection, laboratory capacity and capability, coordination mechanisms, and emergency response. In addition to these basic components of food safety systems, Member States need to consider and take account of four important characteristics/principles for the systems to be fully operational.

9. **Forward-looking.** The global changes and transformations that food systems are experiencing today and those that are predicted to occur in the future will have implications for food safety. Food safety systems should thus be adequately equipped to identify, evaluate and respond to existing and emerging issues, such as the growing threat of foodborne antimicrobial resistance. Food safety systems must be transformed from reactive to proactive systems and should adopt a One Health approach when addressing health risks emerging at the human-animal-ecosystems interface.

10. **Evidence-based.** Food safety risk management is based on science. The generation, collection, utilization, interpretation and sharing of data lay the foundation for building evidence-based food safety systems and strengthening international cooperation.

11. **People-centred.** Food safety is a shared responsibility that requires joint efforts to be made by all stakeholders of food safety systems. Successfully ensuring food safety from farm to fork requires a more inclusive approach encompassing all those involved in food safety systems, including empowered consumers.

12. **Cost-effective.** Food safety is a complex issue that is influenced by socioeconomic status. With the globalization of the food trade, foodborne pathogens and diseases can travel across borders and cause significant health and economic impacts. To ensure increased access to safe food in both domestic and international markets, food safety systems should be more cost-effective for both importing and exporting countries, while enhancing food safety in domestic markets.

These were reflected as **five strategic priorities**, namely:

- strengthening national food controls;
- identifying and responding to food safety challenges resulting from global changes and transformations in food systems;
- increasing the use of food chain information, scientific evidence, and risk assessment in making risk management decisions;

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<sup>5</sup> FAO and WHO. 2020. The future of food safety – Transforming knowledge into action for people, economies and the environment. Technical summary by FAO and WHO. Rome. (<https://doi.org/10.4060/ca8386en>, accessed 10 June 2021).

- strengthening stakeholder engagement and risk communication; and
- promoting food safety as an essential component in domestic and international food trade.

#### **D. Implementation of the updated strategy**

13. Implementation of the updated strategy would rely on the commitment and efforts of Member States, WHO and the whole international community. As food safety systems in Member States are at various stages of development, the prioritization of strategic priorities should be tailored to the respective country situation and Member States should modify, redesign or strengthen their national food safety systems as appropriate based upon the strategic priorities identified in the updated strategy. WHO will, together with other international partners, support Member States by providing global leadership and fostering policy dialogues among stakeholders; synthesizing evidence and generating normative guidance in food safety; enhancing technical cooperation and building stronger capacities for countries; and strengthening partnerships and fostering global collaboration.

#### **E. Monitoring and evaluation of the updated strategy**

14. Underpinning the updated strategy will be an accountability framework to measure the rate of implementation. The updated strategy encourages Member States to select indicators and set targets at the national level to evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of national food safety systems in achieving the objectives to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade. A global mechanism will also be established to measure the progress of the strategy using a set of global indicators and targets. Currently, the updated version of the strategy contains three high-level indicators:

- national foodborne disease surveillance in place for the detection and monitoring of foodborne disease and food contamination;
- multisectoral collaboration mechanisms for food safety events; and
- diarrhoeal diseases due to food consumption.

15. The first two of these indicators are already monitored and measured regularly through the International Health Regulations (2005), and the third is evaluated on an ongoing basis by WHO's Foodborne Disease Burden Epidemiology Reference Group.

16. Based on the existing data collected through WHO studies on the global burden estimates of foodborne diseases and the International Health Regulations (2005), the updated strategy also proposes three global targets for the aforementioned indicators. The proposed targets are attainable through the implementation of the strategy. By 2030, WHO is aiming to support countries to achieve:

- **a 40% reduction** of foodborne diarrhoeal disease incidence per 100 000 population;
- **a score of 3.5 or above** (with 5 being the full mark) in terms of the global average capacity score for national surveillance system of foodborne disease and food contamination under the joint external evaluation;<sup>6</sup> and
- **a score 4 or 5** for multisectoral collaboration on food safety events under State Party self-assessment annual reporting.<sup>7</sup>

WHO will provide a framework to monitor implementation and to validate the progress made towards these global targets. The full draft strategy is downloadable at WHO website at [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/food-safety/public-consultation/draft-who-global-strategy-for-food-safety-13may2021.pdf?sfvrsn=ac480bb9\\_5](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/food-safety/public-consultation/draft-who-global-strategy-for-food-safety-13may2021.pdf?sfvrsn=ac480bb9_5)

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<sup>6</sup> Joint external evaluation tool: International Health Regulations (2005), second edition. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO. (<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/259961/9789241550222-eng.pdf?sequence=1>, accessed 11 June 2021).

<sup>7</sup> International Health Regulations (2005) State Party Self-Assessment Annual Reporting Tool. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/272432>, accessed 11 June 2021).