CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION E

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

World Health Organization

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA

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FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY SITUATION IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE REGION

Online platform for information sharing on food safety control systems

(Prepared by FAO and WHO)

Introduction

1.   During the round of FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees (RCCs) in 2013-2014, a discussion and consultation of members' views took place on the standard agenda item during RCCs to share information on food control systems. There was general recognition that there is value in sharing this information, however the process of collecting information through a Circular Letter, was considered cumbersome and did not facilitate ease of access to information.

2.   These views were subsequently supported by the 38th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. FAO and WHO were requested to develop in collaboration with the Codex Secretariat, a prototype for information sharing on food control systems, including a set of questions (attached in Annex) on food control systems and roles and responsibilities, which was ready for testing at the round of RCCs in 2016-2017.

3.   The 22nd session of CCAFRICA reviewed the first results and recognized the value of this platform as an instrument supporting information flows, and addressing the challenges related to information sharing. Countries also recognized the usefulness to have more than one contact point to populate the platform, taking into account: the diversity of key stakeholders at national level; existing national policies and strategies that support food quality and safety; and other factors.

4.   Due to the medium response rate by countries to the online platform, it was decided to allow for this cycle of RCCs to complete the country information.

Objectives and benefits of the platform

5.   The primary use and purpose of the platform is to facilitate information exchange between member countries. Secondary uses may include informing FAO, WHO and Codex work, including allowing for analysis to be undertaken on information submitted for presentation and discussion at RCCs.

6.   Countries also pointed out the value of having all information relevant to the national food control systems, including legislation, located in one place and easily accessible. Online access is a cost effective alternative for member countries to have a better understanding of their food control systems, specifically those with limited resources.

7.   As far as feasible, the set of questions of the platform were kept consistent with existing questionnaires such as the IHR Monitoring and evaluation scheme and the new FAO/WHO food control system assessment tool. The intention is that new questions would be added, based on priority areas of food control systems, where Codex member countries see a value in sharing information.

Management of the platform

8.   The platform is currently supported, managed, and maintained by a team of staff from FAO, WHO and Codex Secretariat while national Codex Contact Points (CCPs) are responsible for gathering information on their countries. Only CCPs are be able to upload information for their country. The information is uploaded and submitted by the CCP in two stages: i) a draft version, which is not visible to anyone outside, and ii) a published version which is accessible to all, except for Part F (the self-assessment questions) which is kept confidential.

9.   CCPs have the possibility to access the platform all year round to update their profile, add and, or change information, and to decide when the information provided should be published (http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/survey/).

Status of responses by members of the region

10.   In the AFRICA region, only 9 out of 49 member countries (18.4%) have their information published on the platform (Table 1). Three (3) countries have submitted incomplete information (one to two parts missing). The responses provided are made available on the Codex Webpage on the Members page (http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/about-codex/members/en/).

Table 1: List of countries that have submitted information on the online platform.

Country	Year of last modification	Level of completeness	Information missing	Status
1) Gambia	2016	Complete		Draft
2) Senegal	2019	Complete		Published
3) Benin	2016	Incomplete	Part A Q.2 Part D Q.7	Published
4) Cabo Verde	2016	Complete		Published
5) Kenya	2016	Complete		Draft
6) Nigeria	2019	Complete		Published
7) Zimbabwe	2019	Complete		Published
8) Mauritius	2019	Incomplete	Part D Q.7	Published
9) Burkina Faso	2019	Incomplete	Part E	Draft

Recommendations

11.   The platform's success depends on member countries understanding of its value and the importance of uploading/updating baseline information. The Committee is therefore invited to provide comments and feedback on the utility of the platform, in particular:

   a.   Do countries confirm the value of exchanging information on their national food control systems?

   b.   If yes, is the online platform considered fit for purpose?

   c.   What are the reasons preventing more than 80% member countries from submitting information?

   d.   For those countries that have submitted a draft, what are the reasons preventing them from making the information public (by proceeding to "publish" the information)?

   e.   What could be improved and how?

   f.   What type of support is needed, and that can be provided by FAO, WHO or the Regional Coordination?

   g.   What additional questions on aspects of food control systems may be included, if further developed?

ANNEX

INFORMATION SHARING ON FOOD SAFETY CONTROL SYSTEMS AND ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Part A. Competent authorities

Q.1. Which are the competent authorities[1]

- Competent authority

- Mandate/competence (link to website if available)

Q.2. Provide details of the INFOSAN Emergency contact point responsible for food safety emergencies.

Part B. Food safety and consumer protection – laws and regulations

Q.3. Which are the main food laws and regulations setting out the legal basis and controls for food safety and consumer protection?

Please do not reply to this question now. FAO maintains a database – FAOLEX – since 1995 that compiles legislation in the food and agriculture fields. We are working with the FAO Legal Office to extract the food safety and consumer legislation for each country. In due course, lists of legislation related to food safety and consumer protection in each country will be provided. Noting that FAOLEX may not be comprehensive and up to date because legislation is collected from a variety of sources, we would request you to verify the information and advise of updates, errors or omissions to ensure that the information available is as comprehensive and up-to-date as possible.

Part C. The national Codex programme

Q.4. Describe the national consultative mechanism for Codex programme of work to ensure input from government stakeholders, private sector, scientific community and consumers.

In providing answer, please identify main participants engaged regularly in consultation

Q.5. Identify stakeholders providing core scientific and technical input during national consultation on Codex work. List which Codex issues input has been provided (indicator 2.1.2 in Codex strategic plan[2]).

Part D. Risk Assessments and Scientific Data

Q.6. Which bodies provide risk assessments and scientific advice to support risk management decisions by competent authorities?

- Name bodies or laboratories.

Q.7. Please provide any risk assessments (quantitative or qualitative), risk profiles or scientific opinions available in public domain.

- List, and provide links where available.

Q.8. List the official laboratories[3] involved in food safety and scope of competence.

- Official Laboratory

- Official Competence

Part E. Surveillance of foodborne diseases and monitoring of food contamination

Q.9. Which surveillance systems are in place to collect data on foodborne disease in humans?

Q.10. Which monitoring systems are in place to collect data on foodborne hazards in the food chain?

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[1] Codex defines Competent Authority (ies) as the official government organisation/agency (ies) having jurisdiction (CAC/GL 71-2009). The response to this question will be very country specific, but information may be provided on those authorities responsible for food production, imported food, exported food, prevention of fraudulent practices. They may be line Ministries or single agencies with responsibilities related to food safety. Briefly, indicate the main mandate and sphere of their competence.

[2] Codex Strategic Plan 2014-2019

[3] Could cover - pesticides, chemicals, veterinary drug residues, AMR, fish, microbiology. Include any private laboratories designated for official purposes. Where a country uses overseas reference laboratories, this can be indicated here.

Part F. National capacity in food safety[4]

Q. 11. "To what extent do you agree with the following statement?"
Please respond using the five point rating on the extent to which you agree with the statement.

Questions	Strongly Agree / Agree / Don't Know Disagree / Strongly Disagree
Policy and Legal frameworks	
Food safety legislation includes all the powers and responsibilities necessary to meet the objectives and enforce the various elements of food control[3]	
Infrastructure and finances	
In case of a food safety emergency, food control laboratories have the capabilities and versatility to adapt to the resulting changes/surges in demand of tests to be performed	
Human resources	
Adequate number of competent staff are employed and receiving regular trainings to ensure the delivery of functions required for national food control.	
Implementation of core control activities	
A central coordination mechanism is documented (i.e. SOPs, manual, TOR, etc.) and includes all relevant Competent Authorities to address Food Safety emergencies	
Implementation of specific functions	
Competent Authorities design a coherent risk based programme for control measures, taking into account relevant information (i.e. on product type, country of origin and importer's history)	
Domestic stakeholders	
High risk categories of Food Business Operators (FBOs) are provided with special categories of communication channels ensuring that messages and important technical communiqués are delivered to FBOs	
International stakeholders	
An INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point is designated and registered on the INFOSAN Community Website	
Evidence/risk base	
Data from routine monitoring and surveillance are utilized for informing new risk analysis activities or for the review of former risk analysis activities	

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[4] The questions have been taken from the draft FAO/WHO Food control system Assessment Tool (November 2015 version). They are also consistent with those in the draft International Health Regulations (IHR) Monitoring and Evaluation scheme. This is for internal information only, access will be restricted to FAO, WHO and the responding country itself.