

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



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 NORTH AMERICA AND THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC

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FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY SITUATION IN THE REGION - UPDATES:

FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY ISSUES IN THE REGION

(Prepared by FAO and WHO)

1. OVERVIEW

Food safety and quality issues in the NASWP region are shaped by various factors. These include the existing regulatory frameworks, environmental conditions, food production practices, and consumer behavior. Each of these elements plays a significant role in determining how food is produced, handled, and consumed, ultimately impacting the overall safety and quality of food within the region.

1.1 Key Challenges Faced in North America (USA and Canada)

a) Foodborne Illnesses

¹The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regularly reports outbreaks of foodborne illnesses caused by pathogens such as *Germ*, *Salmonella*, *E. coli*, *Listeria*, and *Campylobacter*. Contamination often occurs in raw meats, poultry, fruits, vegetables, and dairy products.

b) Food Fraud and Adulteration

²*Labeling Issues:*

³There are concerns about food fraud, where products are misrepresented in terms of origin, quality, or content. This includes mislabeling seafood, honey, olive oil, and other high-value foods, leading to consumer deception and potential health risks.

Contaminants:

⁴Food contamination can come from multiple sources, including antibiotics and hormones in meat and dairy products, and microbial contamination that can lead to illness. In addition, a wide variety of chemicals from manufactured sources may be found in or on foods, typically at low levels. Chemicals in foods may come from the application of pesticides to crops, from the transport of industrial chemicals in the environment, or chemicals used in food packaging products.

A number of persistent environmental contaminants tend to accumulate in all types of animals and are frequently found in meat, poultry, fish, and dairy products. Other chemicals, such as perchlorate and a variety of pesticides, are often found in fruits, vegetables, and other agricultural commodities. Some chemicals in food, such as mercury and perchlorate, have naturally occurring and manufactured sources. The health risks

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/foodborne-outbreaks/active-investigations/index.html>

² <https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/cool/questions-answers-consumers>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/may/20/food-companies-nutrition-labels-truth>

⁴ Information on contaminants in food is available at:

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm103263.htm>; and

http://www.fsis.usda.gov/fact_sheets/Foodborne_Illness_&_Disease_Fact_Sheets/index.asp

from chemicals in food are dependent on both the actual level of a chemical in the food as well as the amount of the food consumed by individuals.

c) Food Labeling and Allergens

Inaccurate Labels:

⁵Even with strict regulations in place (e.g., Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act in the U.S.), there are ongoing challenges with allergens being unintentionally included in food products, leading to severe reactions.

Nutrition Claims:

The rise of 'health-conscious' consumer trends has led to confusion over the meaning and regulation of terms like organic or natural, which can potentially impact food quality.

d) Climate Change and Environmental Impact

Crop Quality:

Extreme weather events, like droughts or floods, affect crop yields and quality, influencing the safety and availability of produce.

Sustainability Practices:

There is a growing push for sustainable farming practices and improved animal welfare, but balancing cost and environmental sustainability remains challenging for the industry.

1.2 Key Challenges Faced in South West Pacific (Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Islands)

a) Foodborne Illnesses

⁶In Australia and New Zealand, foodborne illnesses such as those caused by *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella*, and *Norovirus* remain prevalent, particularly in raw or undercooked seafood and poultry products.

Imported Foods:

Pacific Island nations often rely on imported food, which may not meet local food safety standards, contributing to an increased risk of contamination and public health incidents.

b) Indigenous and Traditional Foods

Indigenous foods, while rich in nutrients, sometimes pose food safety risks due to limited regulation. There are concerns about traditional food preservation methods not meeting modern safety standards, especially in remote areas.

c) Seafood Safety

Overfishing and unsustainable fishing practices, particularly in the Southwest Pacific, threaten food security and safety. Additionally, seafood can be contaminated by pollutants like mercury or microplastics, which pose health risks to consumers.

d) Natural Disasters and Food Security

Cyclones, Flooding, and Drought:

The Pacific Island nations are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, with rising sea levels, cyclones, and droughts threatening local agriculture and the safety of food supplies. This results in food scarcity and a reliance on international aid, which may not always meet safety standards.

e) Regulatory Gaps

⁵ <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-allergensgluten-free-guidance-documents-regulatory-information/food-allergen-labeling-and-consumer-protection-act-2004-falcpa>

⁶ <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/65046-Annual-report-concerning-Foodborne-Diseases-in-New-Zealand-2023#:~:text=Campylobacteriosis%2C%20yersiniosis%2C%20infection%20caused%20by,2022%20to%2077%20in%202023>; and [https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/CA1DBF11D71F5F3ECA258ADE0019B036/\\$File/cdi-2024-48-19.pdf](https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/CA1DBF11D71F5F3ECA258ADE0019B036/$File/cdi-2024-48-19.pdf)

While countries like Australia and New Zealand have strong food safety systems in place, smaller nations in the Pacific face challenges due to a lack of infrastructure and resources to enforce food safety regulations. This can result in inconsistent food quality and safety across the region.

1.3 General Trends and Future Concerns

1.3.1 Consumer Awareness and Demand for Transparency

There is an increasing demand from consumers for greater transparency in food production practices, including sustainable sourcing, ethical treatment of animals, and clear labeling regarding food safety in the NASWP region.

1.3.2 Technological Advances

Advances in food safety technology, such as Geographical Indicator (GI) for traceability, are being explored to enhance food monitoring and quality control from farm to table.

1.3.3 Globalization and Trade

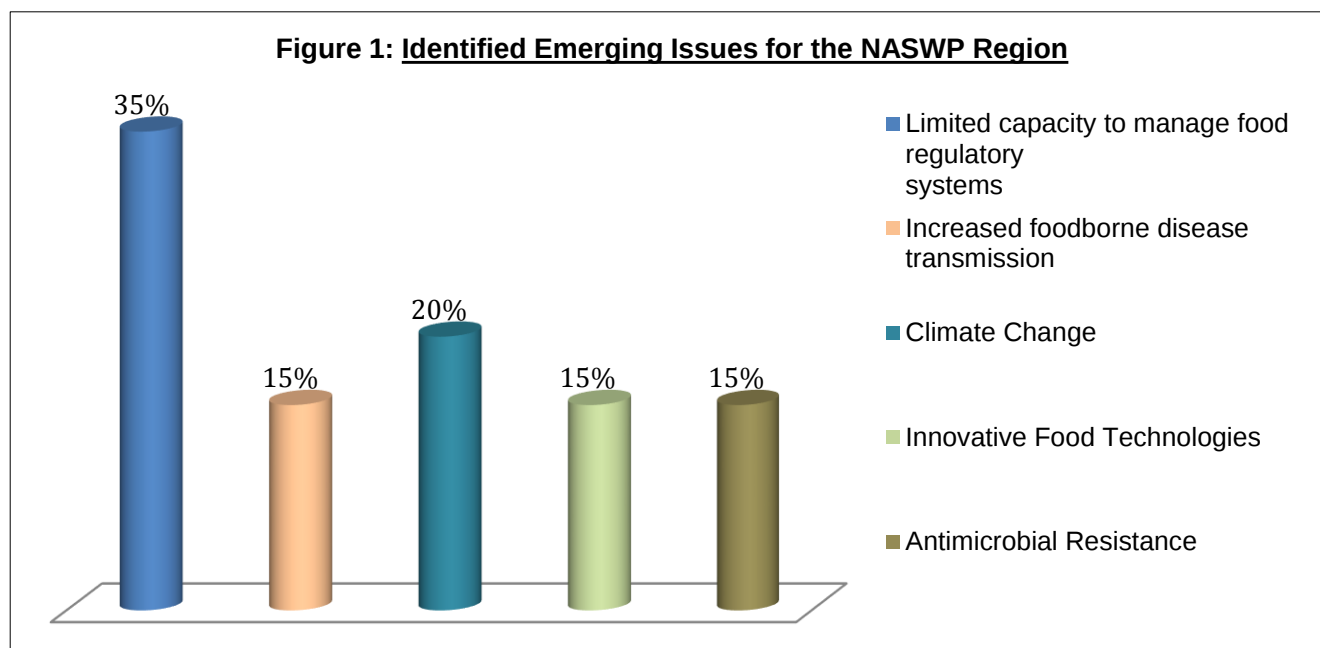
With increased global trade and food imports, food safety risks tied to international supply chains are increasingly obvious. There is a growing focus on harmonizing food safety standards and enhancing the capacity of regulatory agencies to handle these challenges.

The NASWP region continues to evolve in its approach to managing food safety and quality issues, but challenges remain in areas such as regulatory consistency, consumer education, and environmental sustainability.

2. EMERGING ISSUES IN THE NASWP REGION IN THE NEXT 5-10 YEARS

The graphical analysis on Figure 1 summarizes the issues expected to impact food safety in the region in the next 5-10 years.

It could be noted from Figure 1 that limited capacity to manage food regulatory systems (35%) is a major issue expected to be faced in the region with regard to food safety, followed by climate change (20%), innovative food technologies, increased foodborne disease transmission, and antimicrobial resistance (15%).



2.1 Description of Emerging Issues in the NASWP Region in the Next 5-10 Years

2.1.1 Limited capacity to manage food regulatory systems

Members noted the weak enforcement of food control systems and lack of public awareness on food safety concerns.

Regulators face challenges managing street food vendors' activities especially with traditional food sold in markets.

Members requested support on Food safety policy and legal frameworks related to reinforcement of the multi-sectorial approach and collaboration and strengthening national food safety control systems in national policies and regulations.

2.1.2 Climate Change

Few members have noted its concern that climate change will impact hazards in the food supply chain, lead to the introduction of new foodborne pests and diseases, and present many challenges, especially for many small island states.

While other members have noted that the region is the most vulnerable region in the world due to other natural calamities, and the effects of climate change on their food security and food safety systems present some of the biggest challenges to their livelihoods.

2.1.3 Innovative Food Technologies

New Food Production Systems:

Regarding the issue with novel foods, the 46th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC46) (2023) discussed how Codex could contribute to addressing the issues related to new food sources and production systems and undertake such work.⁷ As reflected in Paragraphs 195-206 of the Report of CAC46 (2023) (REP23/CAC), CAC46 concluded the discussion:

- Highlighting the importance of addressing challenges posed by new food sources and production systems and the important role Codex can play in this;
- Noting that the current working mechanisms in Codex were adequate to address any new work on new food sources and production systems that Members might propose and
- Encouraging Codex Members to submit discussion papers or new work proposals to active Codex committees or the Executive Committee through the Codex Secretariat.

Codex develops standards with general provisions and principles on the safety and quality of foods for guidance to national authorities. Codex leaves it to Codex Members to establish their own national/regional rules and approaches to control or authorize foods before they can be placed on the market. CAC47 (2024) approved New work on a standard for microbial omega-3 oils, which is considered a “*new foods*.” There were some concerns raised about the safety aspects of this new commodity, and specifically noted that Codex has not yet put in place a mechanism for the safety assessment of new foods. This product is already traded internationally, and a number of countries have completed a safety evaluation, and there was already sufficient information on product safety without the need to undertake an international risk assessment.

Also, in the new foods realm, Singapore indicated at CAC47 that it will submit two new work proposals related to new food production systems to the next sessions of CCFH (proposed Code of Hygienic Practice for the Manufacture of Cell-Based Foods) and CCFA (proposed Guideline for the Conduct of Food Safety Assessment of Cell Culture Media Components Used in Production of Cell-Based Foods).

Availability of food safety information with supporting evidence to help improve food consumption data collection and reinforce food analysis laboratory capacities in the region.

2.1.4 Increased Foodborne Disease Transmission

The global burden of foodborne disease caused by pathogens is considerable and remains a significant public health challenge. As some diseases are controlled, others emerge as new threats. Changes in microorganisms lead to the constant evolution of new pathogens, and globalization of the food supply has led to the rapid and widespread international distribution of foods. These emerging challenges require public health officials to adapt to a changing environment and use improved methods to combat these threats. Many countries are implementing preventive controls and new technologies to strengthen their food safety systems. As these changes occur, it will be important that countries work together to address the challenges of the global food supply. Up-to-date, science-based international standards can play an important role in addressing these challenges to protect public health and facilitate trade.

⁷ CAC46 (2023) (REP23/CAC)

Members have also expressed the need to support Small Pacific Island Nations in their effort against foodborne diseases, especially on neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). Members believe that foodborne diseases, being NTDs, are taken lightly in Small Pacific Island Nations.

2.1.5 Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

The USDA Strategy to Address AMR was released in November 2023 and focuses on three priority areas⁸:

- 1) reducing disease and pathogen transmission;
- 2) improving scientific knowledge on AMR; and
- 3) enhancing communication and collaboration.

The region is appealing on the need to provide support to strengthen surveillance systems and scaling up surveillance activities and oversight of antimicrobial prescribing and use in the region, determine the problem's scale and impact, and ensure responsible use of antimicrobials.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The region, especially the Pacific Islands, faces many food safety issues. However, two main aspects should be taken into consideration due to their threat to public health and food security: limitations to detect and react to unsafe or non-compliance with standards foods, as well as the consequences of climate change. Below is a list of the priorities for the region:

- Reinforce the multisectoral approach and collaboration, through the use of the One Health approach and strengthening national food safety control systems in national policies and regulations and in the incident response
- Development of Food Safety Emergency Response Plans, including recall systems and simulation exercises. The plan should consider emergencies due to natural disasters.
- Review and update of national/local legislation and regulations in order to strengthen national capacities.
- Implementation of risk-based food inspection systems (i.e. imports activities), including training of food inspectors.
- Improve food consumption data collection and data sharing.
- Reinforce food analysis laboratory capacities (e.g. accreditation, laboratory personnel capacities, etc.)
- Create/strengthen a network for the capacity exchange in the region regarding food safety actions (i.e. laboratory and intellectual capacity, as well as experience exchange).
- Implement digital systems, platforms and applications to ease access to information.
- Development of food safety risk communication plans and materials adapted to the region.
- Engagement in World Food Safety Day activities and public awareness actions to the general population and targeted stakeholders in the food supply chain.
- Scholarship opportunities in food-related courses for academics and in-service staff.

Pacific Island countries would benefit from a strengthening of their food control systems, including their legal frameworks and food analysis capacity to deal with unsafe or non-compliance in imported foods. In this context, the Codex Alimentarius Guidelines for National Food Control Systems (CAC/GL 82-2013) in conjunction with the FAO/WHO Food control system assessment tool allows countries to determine how best to design their food control systems. Similarly, Codex and associated FAO/WHO guidance exists for the development and implementation of specific control measures such as risk-based imported food control and national food safety emergency response plans. Regarding the climate change challenge, there is an urgent need to understand its impacts and to prepare Pacific Islands to detect, adapt and respond to the impact on food safety, food production and thus to their livelihoods. As part of the modernization of legal frameworks, an integrated approach for

⁸ <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/amr-2023-strategy.pdf>

surveillance and food monitoring, taking into consideration data from environmental surveillance, is key for the early detection of the impacts from climate change.

Strengthening food safety systems in the region is crucial to address the above-mentioned issues and to prepare the region for future challenges.