

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 ASIA

Twenty-second Session

Virtual

12, 13, 14, 17, 18 and 21 October 2022

OPENING REMARKS

Dr Masami Takeuchi, Food Safety Officer, Food Systems and Food Safety Division, FAO

It is my great pleasure to provide the opening remarks on behalf of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to the 22nd session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for ASIA, CCASIA. I would like to start with warm welcoming all of you, and thanking all who have contributed to arranging this CCASIA session and providing various background papers.

I would also like to mention that for the last couple of months, it has been great to work with the Codex Secretariat as well as our FAO and WHO colleagues both in the region as well as the headquarters in supporting CCASIA.

Codex Coordinating Committee meetings are excellent opportunity to have such a great collaboration across the region and to share valuable experiences and updates each other.

At the last session of CCASIA in September 2019, Members discussed the future of food safety in the region, referring to the international conferences held in 2019.

The delegations at that time highlighted the importance of having collective efforts on food safety to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and for that, all agreed that data generation, collection, and identification of priority areas of future standard-setting work for Codex are important.

I can clearly see these are still our priority areas, however, because of the global pandemic that we have experienced and we are still experiencing, I can also see that the circumstances and the surrounding contexts have drastically changed. It can be said that developing resilience and sustainability in a strong collaborative approach has been becoming ever more important.

I have seen a quite full agenda for this year's CCASIA to discuss many proposals and to work on important documents being developed for the region. And I would like to highlight that agenda item 3 that we have an opportunity to discuss our direction towards a better normal.

In this region, Members reported that they are facing quite a few challenges in the area of food safety. We all know that many of them are quite fundamental and something that cannot be fixed by one person, one type of stakeholders, nor one country. That is why we have this regional coordinating to share and help each other.

FAO works at global, regional and country levels to improve food safety for consumer health protection, ensuring functioning of markets and supply of safe, nutritious foods.

Supporting policy development, and supporting value chain operators, academicians, and consumer representatives, the work can be focused on specific food safety regulations and parameters.

On the other hands, we have some other works linked to nutrition security, environmental issues and One Health, as part of achieving sustainable agrifood systems transformation that are more inclusive.

At the same time, through a long history in providing science-based guidance for standards, FAO also sees the evolving food production and supply systems that may not be identified as traditional. One where emerging food safety issues and changes in food production and consumption need to be kept in our sights.

For that reason, FAO has developed Strategic Priorities for Food Safety within the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-2031, with the vision to provide "Safe food for all people at all times".

FAO strategic priorities for food safety are important to all our work on food systems transformation and contribute to the 2030 Agenda.

During the development of the FAO Food Safety Priorities and the WHO Global Food Safety Strategy, FAO and WHO maintained a standing and rigorous information sharing and discussion mechanism.

We hope that this longstanding and strategic collaboration of FAO and WHO at global and regional level would provide a good role model for national and regional food and agriculture and health sectors in line with One Health approach where food safety is an integral part.

With this, I close my remarks and I wish you a great and fruitful meeting. Also let me wish you a week-early Happy World Food Day which is on 16 October 2022. Thank you.

Mr Gyanendra Gongal, Senior Public Health Officer, WHO Regional Office for South East Asia

Distinguished guests, representatives of FAO, WHO and Codex secretariat, Madam Chairperson, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening as it is virtual mode of meeting and many of us are attending from different time zones.

It is my great pleasure and honour to address you on the behalf of the WHO Regional offices for South-east Asia and the Western Pacific at the opening of the 22nd session of the FAO/WHO Co-ordinating Committee for Asia.

It is important to note that the previous meeting of the committee held in 2019, set out regional action towards the objectives of the Codex Strategic Plan for 2020 to 2025. Establishing and/or strengthening National Codex works in LMICs has been a priority and the Codex Trust Fund has been instrumental to capacity building and south-south cooperation. Bhutan, India and Nepal were first to get Codex Trust Fund group project at the global level and these countries shared their experience of CTF project implementation in the side event of the previous CCASIA meeting which encouraged many Asian countries to apply for CTF project support. Today, nine Asian countries are implementing CTF projects and WHO and FAO are jointly helping these countries to implement their projects. Last month, the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety of the Republic of Korea, in collaboration with Codex Trust Fund, organized a pilot Codex training which was attended by 15 participants from Bhutan, Gambia, Maldives, Mauritius and Nepal, all of which are implementing CTF projects.

Over the past 3 years, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the impact of health emergencies not only on health but on national economies and food systems. Little did anyone know in early 2020 that a global tragedy was about to unfold and would leave no country untouched. The impacts of the pandemic are so severe in this region that they threaten to undo the progress of the accelerated economic growth that we had experienced during the past couple of decades. Member states have recently shared impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on food safety activities through an online survey entitled "CCASIA22: towards a better normal". In 2021, FAO, WHO, WOH, WFP and UNEP collaboratively organized a webinar focusing on World Food Safety Day and distributed public awareness materials related to COVID-19 and food safety. The pandemic, along with other factors, has triggered renewed interest in the risks inherent in traditional food markets. WHO has organized advocacy meetings and developed the 'Five keys to safer traditional food markets' a manual to support the implementation of risk mitigation measures to public health threats at these facilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has shocked and wounded the economy, health and food system, but we have the opportunity to build back better and healthier based on lesson learnt from COVID-19 pandemic.

The WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety (to be launched this month) and the Regional Frameworks for Action on food safety from both WHO regions are designed to support Member states to strengthen national food safety system in coming years and dribble eventualities to allow them to adjust to "new normal" circumstances.

We wish a grand success of this meeting as we are confident that this meeting will productive and forward looking to strengthen food safety system in Asia.

Thank you.

Mr Steve Wearne, CAC Chairperson

Distinguished guests, representatives of FAO and WHO, Madam Chairperson, Codex and committee secretariat colleagues, delegates and friends – good morning, good afternoon and good evening to you all.

It is my great pleasure and honour to address you at the opening of the 22nd session of the FAO/WHO Co-ordinating Committee for Asia. Warmest wishes go to you all from me and from vice-chairpersons Allan Azegele, Diego Varela and Raj Rajasekar.

I remember fondly my participation in the previous meeting of the committee in Goa, India in September 2019 at which this region set out its own ambitious priorities for regional action towards the objectives that

had been set in our Strategic Plan for 2020 to 2025. Our first strategic goal remains to address the current, emerging and critical issues that are identified by our members. I note with interest that the topic for the invited presentation at this session is “emerging issues in food safety in the region”. This is a key issue for each of the Regional Coordinating Committees, whose agendas should provide the time and space to discuss issues for food safety and quality that are most relevant for each region, sharing perspectives and catalysing action. I hope the presentation sparks a productive discussion.

Before I close, Madam Chairperson, I want to acknowledge the important work that you do as Regional Coordinator and the work done by your predecessors in this role, including my dear friend Sunil Bakshi of India. The Regional Coordinator, elected by Members of your region, is at the heart of CCASIA. You are responsible for chairing the committee, leading engagement and outreach within the region and ensuring the views of members of the region are brought to the table in the Codex Executive Committee. You have my complete support in this role.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.