Officials and staff of FAO, the Department of Agriculture, and other stakeholders at the presentation of the draft National Situation Report: Imported Food Control in the Philippines.

© Department of Agriculture

Strengthening national capacity for risk-based food import control within a One Health framework

Food products have been the third most valuable commodity group traded internationally, according to the report of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) International Trade Statistics 2014. Many countries, including the Philippines, import a significant proportion of their food supplies.

However, rapid urbanization, new processing and handling technologies, and emerging pathogens, among others, are driving the need for more effective food import controls. All food, including agricultural products that enter the countries are required to comply with protocols to ensure that they are fit for their intended use/consumption and contamination are mitigated or totally avoided.

Over the last decades, the World Trade Organization (WTO) has set two international agreements namely Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) that defined a framework for control measures to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in food trade. For the countries that are Members to WTO, including the Philippines, the international food standards developed by the Codex Alimentarius (Codex) have become significant food safety reference documents to follow the agreements.

Relatedly, according to the Food Outlook published in November 2017, the cost of importing food is set to rise in 2017 to USD 1.413 trillion, a six percent increase from the previous year, amidst the strong global food production trends. The higher import bill is being driven by the increasing demand for food and increasing freight cost rates. Countries including in Asia-Pacific are dealing with social and economic implications brought by rising import demands and, consequently, food prices.

FAO initiated a project to strengthen national capacity for risk-based food import control within a One Health framework in four

countries namely the Philippines, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri-Lanka, to provide guidance and introduce risked-based food import control systems with reference to Codex. Codex is a compilation of international standards, guidelines and codes of practice for food safety and trade.
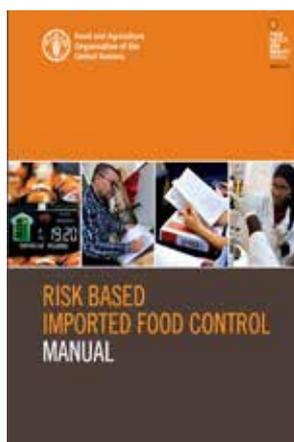
The Philippines' imported food control system has been governed by the Republic Act No. 10611, otherwise known as the Food Safety Act of 2013, and its Implementing Rules and Regulations as embodied in Joint Department of Health (DOH)-Department of Agriculture (DA) Administrative Order No. 1, s. 2015. Operating under the principle of consumer health protection and market access regulation, key government agencies such as the DA and the DOH lead the implementation of pertinent legislation, rules, and regulation on the Philippines' imported food control system.

Following the project's inception in the Philippines in 2017, FAO worked closely with the DA in conducting consultation meetings and field visits in major ports of entry for the drafting of the "National Situation Report: Imported Food Control in the Philippines". The report, which will soon be finalized, is an initial step to enable the Philippines to enhance and strengthen

its national imported food control system.

The report presents the current status for agriculture produce including livestock products (including relevant laws, regulations, relevant international/regional agreements, needs and gaps, among others). The information in the report is important to help relevant stakeholders to work more collaboratively and understand clearly the Philippines' progress on capacity development for imported food control.

FAO's support to this initiative is aligned with its thrust of assisting the Philippines in improving the policy/institutional environment for food and nutritional security through enforcement of rational food policies, including for food safety and early detection of threats to food/agriculture.

The approach for food controls in general has now shifted from being mostly reactive, based on end product inspection, to being preventative and risk based, taking into account the entire food chain. FAO has developed a global guidance for risk based imported food controls. The necessity of this guidance is based on the recognition that there is no "one size fits all" solution and that each country presents a particular set of challenges and opportunities. This FAO manual aims to support competent authorities in shaping a customized plan of action, based on an analysis of their specific country situation. Based on Codex texts, this guidance focuses on import control over food products. FAO recognizes that the impact of feed safety on food safety is essential. It should be noted that the majority of approaches developed in this manual for imported food control could also apply to feed.

Download a copy: http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5381e.pdf