



STRENGTHENING LABORATORY SERVICES

Food control has evolved from a focus on end-product testing to preventative approach through adequate process controls along the chain. Nonetheless, testing remains an important component of any system which aims to produce safe food. Carefully planned programmes of sampling and testing provide us with the assurance that hygiene controls applied by food chain operators result in safe food products that comply with national regulations and meet international food safety requirements. Well-functioning laboratory services also assure the availability of reliable food contamination data contributing to the ability of national authorities to determine food safety priorities and orient food control programmes accordingly. FAO rarely works on laboratory services in isolation, but rather supports the more effective involvement of laboratory services within the overall national system of food control. This involves different levels of intervention: sensitising policy makers on the role of labs and issues linked to their sustainability; supporting national institutions to design, effectively manage and implement food analysis programmes; and ensuring that laboratory staff have the knowledge and skills required to carry out their functions.



Sustainability of Laboratory Services

- It is not rare to find in many developing countries' laboratories sophisticated analytical equipment standing idle due to poor maintenance or lack of staff able to use them.
- There is too often a focus just on equipping laboratories without adequate planning for running costs or for human resource development. FAO seeks to ensure sustainability
- of laboratory services by promoting a **long term** vision that takes full consideration of analytical needs as well as of existing national capacities and resources.





Aligning Testing Programmes with Food Safety Priorities

› Food control laboratories are only useful insofar as they contribute to a better understanding of the food safety/quality issues affecting public health and trade and they help solve these problems.

However, in many countries the services provided by food control laboratories do not correspond to the needs expressed by key stakeholders. We promote inter-ministerial collaboration and effective

engagement with the private sector to jointly define the analytical capacities most needed to protect public health and to support access to markets.

Strengthening laboratory management

› Good laboratory management is a key factor in working towards sustainability of lab services. In developing capacities of laboratory services, we work with laboratory managers:

› to improve the efficiency of their work processes and administrative procedures;
› to establish and monitor programme targets;
› to plan for laboratory upgrading including human resource development; and

› to communicate more effectively with decision-makers who determine annual budgets for the laboratory services.

Effective training

› Our laboratory projects include significant effort aimed at enabling laboratory staff to correctly carry out their functions. Learning objectives are carefully determined in partnership with the national counterparts and the training approach is tailored to the situation. Typically training covers the establishment of Laboratory Quality Management programmes involving a mixture of theoretical and hands-on work. Training events are often designed to encourage networking, for example, with national

universities/research centres or with regional/international laboratories. These informal networks have in many cases proven to be of great value in helping laboratory staff meet ongoing challenges and in supporting further staff development.

Monitoring impacts: our long-term relationships and contacts within countries allow us to monitor how laboratory function improves and how this contributes to more effective food safety programmes.

