



**FOOD AND  
AGRICULTURE  
ORGANIZATION OF  
THE UNITED NATIONS**

**WORLD  
HEALTH  
ORGANIZATION**



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ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

**FAO/WHO PAN-EUROPEAN CONFERENCE  
ON FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY**

*BUDAPEST, HUNGARY, 25 – 28 FEBRUARY 2002*

**CONFERENCE ROOM DOCUMENT**

**Food Quality and Safety Activities in Albania**

An international conference on food quality and safety was organized under the auspices of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture by the Veterinary Research Institute “Bilal Golemi”, Food Research Institute and the Institute of Public Health, in collaboration with the IFDC/AAATA Project, Land O’Lakes, GTZ, and the Technological Education Institute, Thessalonica, Greece. Several Albanian and foreign business institutions, including INSIG, SOROS, HIT, Floryhen, AM-Grup, EHW GmbH, EN-ZY, AJKA, JAL, BLOJA, Meat–Master, Delta S.A (Greece), Hellenic Catering (Greece), Tsantalis (Greece) and Nestle & Co (Greece) also contributed to organising the conference.

The goals of the Conference included the following:

1. Identify the progress already made in improving food safety and quality control and develop recommendations for improvements.
2. Facilitate the establishment of contacts and information exchanges related to experiences with neighbouring provinces and countries (Kosova, Greece, Italy, and FYR Macedonia), and international institutions such as the World Bank, European Union, USAID, GTZ, etc.
3. Harmonize the application of new food quality and safety control techniques by Albanian research institutions, which are in actual use in many other countries.

Approximately 200 specialists, researchers and entrepreneurs participated in the Conference from the following sectors:

- Albanian research and educational institutions;
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- Ministry of Food and Agriculture - veterinary and food quality control inspectors from 12 prefectures (local and national level);
- Ministry of Health - primary health care inspectors from 12 prefectures (local and national level);
- Representatives of private businesses (meat processing, milk production and processing, egg production, fruit and vegetable processing, edible oil processing, milling industry, etc.);
- International donors operating in Albania (USAID, GTZ, EU, World Bank and Italian and Greek companies and individual contributors);
- Researchers from Kosovo, FYR Macedonia, Greece, Italy, Israel, etc.

The two-day conference addressed issues related to quality and safety of foodstuffs of animal and plant origin with special emphasis placed on the safety of locally produced food products.

The importance and relevance of the issues related to food safety and quality, which were addressed by the Conference, were emphasized by high level Government Officials, including the President of the Republic of Albania, Prof. Dr. Rexhep MEIDANI, and the Minister of Food and Agriculture, Mr. Agron DUKA. Emphasis was placed on the work done thus far in regard to the food industry in Albania and the need for further measures to be taken to improve the industry.

The discussions of scientific papers presented in both sessions of the Conference focused directly on major concerns of the food industry. The following proposals were generated by the Conference regarding a range of further improvements required for the industry in the area of legal issues; the role, construction and strengthening of control services; and, the need for collaboration between national and foreign institutions.

## 1. Legal Issues

- The present Law on Food should be revised in order to harmonize it with respective European laws. This step would lead toward eventual integration of Albania in the European Union. It was specifically pointed out that revision of **Chapter 7** “Governmental Control of Foodstuffs” should be directed at the reorganisation of national food control services into a single control structure.
- Drafting should be completed on governmental laws necessary for the proper implementation of the Law on Food.
- The Draft Law on Olive Oil should be sent for legislative approval while continuing the work on drafting corresponding governmental laws.
- Work should begin immediately on the Albanian Codex Alimentarius (national regulations on food safety, standards and practical rules). The Codex will serve the needs of Albanian consumers and exporters as well. Efforts should be made so that the standards would be fully recognized by food producers. This approach would ensure that producers recognize which standards are obligatory and must be met in order to produce higher quality and safer food products that could be accepted on EU markets, thus creating greater export opportunities.

## 2. The Role of Food Control Services

- The role of the existing food control services should be strengthened to improve the effectiveness of the controls and law enforcement to avoid their withdrawal due to pressure or non-legal actions, which were seen as harmful.
- Control services should pay greater attention to preventing product adulteration, particularly for products such as olive oil, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, dairy and meat products and to avoid false or misleading labelling, etc.
- Control services should also focus on food safety issues for canned products; especially can sterilization and control of hazardous metals.
- Control Services should exercise their legal authority to halt the marketing of eggs that do not meet standards due to: small size; the amount of time kept under refrigeration; or marketed when they do not meet the standards, etc.
- Special attention should be given to controlling the radioactive levels of foods of animal and plant origin. As emphasized in both sessions of the Conference, the level of radioactivity is an issue as it hurts every kind of product despite its origin, but it is even more serious for those products originating from areas close to where the Chernobyl accident occurred.

## 3. *Organization and strengthening of Controlling Services*

- Current control services should be reorganised into a national food control service that would include the veterinary, quality and public health inspectorates, possibly to be named the National Food Control Centre. The reorganised control service would require a new executive law.
- Existing control services, such as the National Board of Foodstuffs, should actively analyse and evaluate actions in order to improve the food industry and the Law on the National Board of Food Control should be revised, especially those articles having to do with its composition and authority. The Board should be composed of well-experienced and reputable individuals, including representatives from private businesses. The authority of the Board should be increased to give it executive authority in addition to its power to co-ordinate and advise.
- The control and enforcement role of food inspectors should be significantly increased. With the strengthening of the responsible governmental control services, the authority of food inspectors must increase.
- Control services should have the possibility to impose monetary fines against violators of the Food Law. The system for the collection of fines should be organized and obligatory.
- Reference point laboratories should be supported with appropriate equipment (laboratory supplies and diagnostic means) in order to strengthen their role. Thus, reference points should be able to carry out rapid and accurate diagnostic analysis at the level of European laboratory institutions. Reference point laboratories should incorporate training courses for regional laboratory specialists in their work programs and the quality of the analyses of the specialists should be monitored afterwards.
- Training of reference point laboratory personnel should be required and it should be continuous.

- Institutions involved in food control should collaborate closely with the aim of co-ordinating their work for the benefit and improvement of the food industry sector, resolving any past disagreements.
- Investments to set up new laboratories and control services should only be with the approval of the specialised research institutes charged to function as reference point laboratories. The establishment of new laboratories and their efficacy should be the responsibility of the National Board of Foodstuffs Control.

#### ***4. Collaboration among Albanian Institutions and with Foreign Institutes***

- Collaboration and interactions among Albanian institutions concerned with foodstuffs should be increased.
- Cooperation should increase between Albanian research institutions, control services and law enforcement entities and their foreign counterparts. The government should organize this collaboration.
- Support research institutes with qualification programs for their specialists in order for them to be able to apply new methods and techniques that are rapid and efficient for food control.
- Support research institutes in establishing new laboratories, which do not yet exist but are a necessity, as a priority task and a requirement of the European Research Institutions (ERI). For example, setting up a product adulteration identification laboratory at the Food Research Institute, or a BSE laboratory at the Veterinary Research Institute. This approach would improve compatibility and enable Albanian researchers to closely cooperate with European scientists and solve existing problems in due time.
- The government should financially cover food control. The present practice of payment on an individual basis for food control analysis is not acceptable and it does not comply with European legislation.
- Border Customs offices should not be referred to as the Interior Customs office as this creates confusion in regard to food importers check up.
- The government should support monitoring food toxins and hormones as well as the quality and safety of imported seafood in order to ensure business continuity and exportation of items such as meat or molluscs.
- Producers' awareness should be increased regarding the necessity of GMP and HACCP implementation to ensure business continuation and to improve export opportunities. These systems should be a high priority in the work of local specialized and administrative authorities and entities that are closely related with the private business sector.