

**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NEAR EAST**

Ninth Session

**FAO Headquarters,
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FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY SITUATION IN COUNTRIES OF THE REGION

On line platform for information sharing on food safety control systems

Introduction

1. During the last round of FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees (RCCs) in 2013-2014, a discussion and consultation of members' views took place on the standard agenda item during RCCs to share information on food control systems. There was general recognition that there is value in sharing this information, however the process of collecting information through a Circular Letter, was considered cumbersome and did not facilitate ease of access to information. Members agreed there could be benefits in developing a system to share information in a more structured and systematic way, and providing a long-lasting point of reference.
2. These views were subsequently supported by the 38th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and FAO and WHO were requested to develop in collaboration with the Codex Secretariat, a prototype for information sharing on food control systems, including a set of questions on food control systems and roles and responsibilities, which should be ready for testing at the round of RCCs in 2016-2017.¹
3. The primary use and purpose of the platform is to facilitate information exchange between member countries. Secondary uses may include informing FAO, WHO and Codex work, including allowing for analysis to be undertaken on information submitted for presentation and discussion at RCCs.
4. The platform's success will depend on member countries seeing a need for and buying in to the development process.

Proposed prototype and current questions

5. In determining the set of questions, FAO and WHO considered the following:
 - a. Information which countries will see a value and have an interest to share;
 - b. Feasibility of providing the information;
 - c. Clarity and focus in questions.
6. The prototype platform has been developed with a selected set of questions (see Annex). Information provided by Members (in the final form, i.e. when the country decides to publish the information) becomes accessible from the Codex website (from the Member detail page: http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/members-observers/members/en/?no_cache=1)
7. FAO and WHO's intention is that the platform should be developed progressively by adding relevant questions, based on member country feedback and needs.
8. In keeping with the notion of developing a less-labour intensive, sustainable platform, the questions related to legal framework will be linked and populated by use of the FAO database on legal instruments (FAOLEX). FAOLEX is managed by FAO, and has been an ongoing activity for over twenty years (<http://www.fao.org/legal/databases/faolex/en/>).

¹ REP15/CAC para. 118 and REP15/EXEC para. 67

9. The self-assessment questions in Part F are taken from the FAO/WHO Food Control Assessment Tool (November 2015 version), and are consistent with those in the draft International Health Regulations (IHR) Monitoring and Evaluation scheme.

Management of the platform

10. The platform is currently supported, managed and maintained by a team of staff from FAO, WHO and Codex Secretariat.
11. National Codex Contact Points (CCPs) will be responsible for gathering information on their countries. Only CCPs will be able to upload information for their country.
12. Once information is uploaded, and submitted by the CCP – the information will be accessible to all, except for Part F (the self-assessment questions) which will be kept confidential. FAO and WHO may prepare summary reports on the feedback to Part F, but names of countries will not be indicated.
13. CCPs will have the possibility to access the platform all year round to update their profile, add and, or change information, and to decide when the information provided should be published. <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/survey/>
14. Countries will be sent a reminder to update information in the platform at least two months in advance of the RCC of which they are a member, and a deadline for update of information will be set.

Recommendation

15. The Committee is invited to provide comments and feedback on the prototype platform (see Annex) and in particular:
 - a. Whether the prototype is fit for purpose;
 - b. Whether the questions included in the platform are suitable;
 - c. What other questions may be included (i.e. which type of information countries of the region are interested to share);
 - d. Suggestions for improvements and future development.

Annex

Information sharing on food safety control systems and roles and responsibilities

Proposal from FAO and WHO.

Survey/set of questions

Part A. Competent authorities

Q.1. Which are the competent authorities¹ with responsibilities related to food safety. Briefly, indicate the main mandate and sphere of their competence.

Competent authority	Mandate/competence (link to website if available)

Q.2. Provide details of the INFOSAN Emergency contact point responsible for food safety emergencies?

“INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point”

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Part B. Food safety and consumer protection – laws and regulations

Q.3. Which are the main food laws and regulations setting out the legal basis and controls for food safety and consumer protection?

<p><i>Please do not reply to this question. FAO maintains a database – FAOLEX – since 1995 that compiles legislation in the food and agriculture fields. We are working with the FAO Legal Office to extract the food safety and consumer legislation for each country. In due course, lists of legislation related to food safety and consumer protection in each country will be provided. Noting that FAOLEX may not be comprehensive and up to date because legislation is collected from a variety of sources, we would request you to verify the information and advise of updates, errors or omissions to ensure that the information available is as comprehensive and up-to-date as possible.</i></p>

¹ Codex defines Competent Authority(ies) as the official government organisation/agency(ies) having jurisdiction (CAC/GL 71-2009). The response to this question will be very country specific, but information may be provided on those authorities responsible for food production, imported food, exported food, prevention of fraudulent practices. They may be line Ministries or single agencies.

Part C. The national Codex programme

Q.4. Describe the national consultative mechanism for Codex programme of work to ensure input from government stakeholders, private sector, scientific community and consumers.

“National Codex consultative mechanism”

In providing answer, please identify main participants engaged regularly in consultation -

Q.5. Identify stakeholders providing core scientific and technical input during national consultation on Codex work. List which Codex issues input has been provided (indicator 2.1.2 in Codex strategic plan).

“Providers of scientific and technical input to national consultation on Codex”

Part D. Risk Assessments and Scientific Data

Q.6. Which bodies provide risk assessments and scientific advice to support risk management decisions by competent authorities?

“National bodies providing risk assessment and scientific advice”

Name bodies or laboratories:

Q.7. Please provide any risk assessments (quantitative or qualitative), risk profiles or scientific opinions available in public domain.

“Risk assessment, risk profiles, scientific opinions”

List, and provide links where available (or upload file):

Q.8. List the official laboratories² involved in food safety and scope of competence.

“Official laboratories”

Official laboratory	Official competence

Part E. Surveillance of foodborne diseases and monitoring of food contamination

Q.9. Which surveillance systems are in place to collect data on foodborne disease in humans?

“National surveillance systems – foodborne disease in humans”

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Q.10. Which monitoring systems are in place to collect data on foodborne hazards in the food chain?

“National monitoring systems – foodborne hazards in the food chain”

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Part F. National capacity in food safety

Q 11. “To what extent do you agree with the following statement?” Please respond using the five point rating on the extent to which you agree with the statement.

Questions	Answering Options				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Policy and legal frameworks					
Food safety legislation includes all the powers and responsibilities necessary to meet the objectives and enforce the various elements of food control ³					
Infrastructure and finances					
In case of a food safety emergency, food control laboratories have the capabilities and versatility to adapt to the resulting changes/surges in demand of tests to be performed					
Human resources					

² Could cover - pesticides, chemicals, veterinary drug residues, AMR, fish, microbiology. Include any private laboratories designated for official purposes. Where a country uses overseas reference laboratories, this can be indicated here.

³ The questions have been taken from the draft FAO/WHO Food control system Assessment Tool (November 2015 version). They are also consistent with those in the draft International Health Regulations (IHR) Monitoring and Evaluation scheme. This is for internal information only, access will be restricted to FAO, WHO and the responding country itself.

Questions	Answering Options				
Adequate number of competent staff are employed and receiving regular trainings to ensure the delivery of functions required for national food control.					
Implementation of core control activities					
A central coordination mechanism is documented (i.e. SOPs, manual, TOR, etc.) and includes all relevant Competent Authorities to address Food Safety emergencies					
Implementation of specific functions					
Competent Authorities design a coherent risk based programme for control measures, taking into account relevant information (i.e. on product type, country of origin and importer's history)					
Domestic stakeholders					
High risk categories of Food Business Operators (FBOs) are provided with special categories of communication channels ensuring that messages and important technical communiqués are delivered to FBOs					
International stakeholders					
An INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point is designated and registered on the INFOSAN Community Website.					
D.1. Evidence/risk base					
Data from routine monitoring and surveillance are utilized for informing new risk analysis activities or for the review of former risk analysis activities.					