

# codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE  
ORGANIZATION  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD  
HEALTH  
ORGANIZATION



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## JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

### CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

*Twenty-Eighth Session, FAO Headquarters*

*Rome, Italy, 4- 9 July 2005*

#### **Report of GF3- E discussion forum**

(4 April-27 May 2005)

#### **Introduction:**

The delegates at the FAO/WHO Second Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators (Bangkok, 14-16 October 2004: GF2) expressed their appreciation that GF2 had provided the opportunity for regulators from countries of all regions of the world to meet and exchange information and share experiences on food safety issues of particular importance to them. Delegates were also generally supportive of holding a Third Global Forum (GF3), and provided feedback on the objective, themes and arrangements for such a Forum. The Secretariat took note of these comments and, as agreed at GF2, convened an electronic discussion forum (4 April-27 May 2005) to further solicit the views of the member countries and all interested parties on the subject. Interested parties that have not already provided their comments to the e-forum are invited to fill out the attached feedback survey (Annex 1) and return it to the FAO/WHO secretariat during the 28<sup>th</sup> Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) or send it by email to: [Londa.Vanderwal@fao.org](mailto:Londa.Vanderwal@fao.org) by 22 July 2005.

#### **Messages received:**

A total of 30 messages were received (all messages received are available in their entirety in their original language from the GF3 e-forum website: [http://www.foodsafetyforum.org/global2/eforum\\_en.asp](http://www.foodsafetyforum.org/global2/eforum_en.asp)), from 26 participants representing member governments from the following regions: (number in parenthesis indicates the number of messages received)

Africa: 9  
Asia: 3  
Near East: 3  
Western Europe: 3  
Eastern Europe: 2  
Pacific: 2  
North/South America and the Caribbean: 1

In addition, messages were received from:

Consumer groups: 4  
WHO regional offices: 2  
Academia: 1

**General comments received:**

- All e-forum participants expressed their appreciation to provide and read comments through the e-forum
- Most participants indicated their appreciation for the opportunity to take part in GF2 and meet other food safety regulators from around the world, better understand their challenges and share experiences
- Most emphasized the value of holding a GF3
- A few participants noted the following:
  - The overall theme for a GF3 should remain “Building effective food safety systems”
  - The Global Fora could be a means to build partnerships, provide advice and guidance, make recommendations, and monitor progress of reforms
  - The Global Fora could become a global alliance of all stakeholders concerned with the promotion of food safety.

**Comments received on the objective of a possible GF3:**

- Most agreed on the importance of sharing experiences/successful models/information
- A few participants (3) preferred that GF3 make recommendations
- One noted the need to make conclusions, but no recommendations
- Two indicated that regional strategies could be developed
- One suggested that GF3 could allow for constraints to safer food for all to be identified and dealt with.

**Format:**

- Most emphasized the need to greatly increase the time for open discussion and reduce the length of the formal presentations
- Many indicated that GF3 should address general themes (2-3) with a few focused sub-themes
- Regarding workshops, the following points were discussed:
  - workshops should not be held in parallel, so that small delegations would be able to participate in all workshops
  - workshops could be repeated so that participants could participate in the discussions on all the themes; and
  - more workshops on well-defined themes are needed.
- The need for a wrap-up/conclusions/results session in plenary was noted
- Presentations/documents should be made available electronically to all participants in adequate time before the event.

**Themes:**

Participants were asked to comment on/rank a list of seven themes that were proposed by the FAO/WHO secretariat (Annex 2) or to propose alternative themes. It was noted that themes should be selected which allow the widest exchange of information. All seven themes received at least one supportive comment, with the following three themes receiving the most support:

- Food safety - doing more with less
- The food chain approach to promote food safety; and
- Application of risk analysis in food safety.

A number of participants also noted the value of the following theme:

- Reaping the benefit of new national food safety systems - reducing the risk from food

Many participants suggested that some of the listed themes could be included as sub-themes of one of the selected themes. Additional themes/sub-themes proposed include the following:

- risks from genetically modified foods
- consumer participation in food safety matters
- the HEART of the SPS Agreement: Harmonization, Equivalence, Assessment of Risk and Transparency
- the criteria to consider a food safety system as 1) safety-focused and 2) effective
- the technical assistance to member countries to build food safety systems that can be considered as effective
- the procedures needed to maintain a food safety system as effective.

During GF2, participants were also surveyed regarding their preference of themes for a possible GF3. 68 replies were received out of 90 countries in attendance at GF2.

- 1<sup>st</sup> priority: 15 delegations indicated “Food safety - doing more with less”
- 2<sup>nd</sup> priority: 22 delegations - “The food chain approach to promote food safety” and 17 delegations - “Food safety systems - a renewed focus on small scale (rural) production”
- 3<sup>rd</sup> priority: 10 delegations - “Dealing with emerging and forgotten risks in food”.

Other themes were also proposed by the GF2 participants, including the following:

- Risk Communication
- Food Safety: Defining responsibilities/Food Safety: Responsibility for all
- Safety of food aid during times of emergencies
- Prospects for support to LDCs to develop food safety schemes including food laws
- Understanding import/export control and certification systems: application of principles and problems and risk-based approaches (possible sub-theme)
- Reaping the benefits of equivalence as a WTO- SPS concept (possible sub-theme)
- Conformity assessment procedures for official control bodies.
  
- Benefiting from food safety strategies: sharing experiences and working together  
sub-themes:
  - identifying appropriate priorities for food safety at the global and national level
  - applying the risk analysis principles within a food safety strategy
  - integrating a full food chain approach with special consideration of the challenges of small and medium sized enterprises (e.g. street vendors)
  - communicating risks/benefits and engaging all stakeholders in development and implementation.

**Timeframes/locations:**

- Most participants noted that the Global Fora (GF) should be held separately from Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) meetings
- A few indicated that GF should be held in conjunction with CAC meetings, and one noted that this should only be done in case of serious financial constraints
- Many emphasized the importance of holding the GF in developing countries
- Other locations such as Rome, Tokyo, the Americas, and Europe were also mentioned
- Some participants suggested a 4-5 day event, with a few supporting a 3-4 day event.

- Most indicated that the GF should be held in 2 year intervals (GF3 in 2006), with a few suggesting 3 year intervals.

**Other comments received:**

- Some expressed their hope that additional GF would be convened after GF3
- Some participants asserted that more low income countries should be supported to attend and that GF3 should be more inclusive of all stakeholders
- Participants emphasized the need for further stakeholder input before a GF3 to determine the themes and format of the meeting, possibly through an extended e-forum.
- One participant indicated that GF3 should begin with an e-forum, followed by satellite meetings, then 2 days of discussions with scientific/technical personnel, followed by 2 days of high-level discussions with policy makers.

**Possible conclusions of the E-forum and survey conducted during GF2:**

- There is value in convening a GF3
- The objective of a GF3 should continue to be to share experiences, as it was for GF1 and GF2
- A GF3 should include more time for open discussion and less time for formal presentations
- A GF3 should cover a few key main themes, with additional sub-themes addressed in focus workshops
- Possible themes for a GF3 could be:
  - Food safety - doing more with less;
  - The food chain approach to promote food safety
  - Application of risk analysis in food safety; and
  - Benefiting from food safety strategies: sharing experiences and working together.
- Further input from all stakeholders should be sought on the specific themes for a GF3.
- A GF3 should be held in a developing country, separate from CAC meetings, approximately every 2 years, with a length of 3-5 days.

**Feedback survey on the convening of a third Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators**

Interested parties that have not already provided their comments to the e-forum are invited to fill out the survey below and return it to the FAO/WHO secretariat during the 28<sup>th</sup> Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) or send it by e-mail to: Londa.Vanderwal@fao.org by **22 July 2005**. Anonymous responses will also be accepted.

The FAO and WHO secretariat of GF2 request the views of member countries and interested organizations regarding the following areas:

- 1) Objective  
*(sharing of information, making recommendations, etc)*
  
- 2) Format  
*(forum on general themes or workshop on particular topic(s); approximate number of themes to be addressed; proposed length of discussion time; etc.)*
  
- 3) Themes  
*(please comment on/rank the attached themes which have been proposed by the FAO/WHO secretariat (Annex 2) or propose alternative themes.)*
  
- 4) Timeframes/locations  
*(held in conjunction with CAC sessions; approximate year to convene; length of forum; proposed locations; etc)*
  
- 5) Other comments  
*(comment on the usefulness of a GF3, other pertinent comments)*

## GLOBAL FORUM 3 - PROPOSED THEMES

The themes are presented in a non-prioritized sequence.

### **1. Reaping the benefit of new national food safety systems - reducing the risk from food**

Given the variety of potential contamination sources in the food production chain, it is unrealistic to imagine for the foreseeable future a situation where food will not cause disease. Although many advances in the twentieth century have contributed to continuous improvements in the safety of many foods, food-borne disease remains a significant cause of morbidity and mortality both in the developed but most certainly also in the developing world. In some areas existing data even seem to suggest that the burden of emerging and re-emerging diseases could be increasing, while the burden of diseases relating to e.g. chemical contaminants is still in essence un-known.

The new framework for food safety systems promoted by FAO and WHO, and now implemented in many countries, is specifically focused on an analysis of human health risk related to food and the best ways to prevent such risks. The framework also pre-supposes improved collaboration between the governmental sectors dealing with health, food production and primary production. The sharing of experience related to food safety risk management strategies aimed at controlling or lowering disease risk would therefore seem pertinent at this stage, most notably with a focus on how to apply such experience in developing countries.

### **2. Food safety - doing more with less**

In most countries there is still a need to build more efficient food safety control programmes, in many cases with decreases in available funds for this purpose. In doing so national systems can benefit from important international activities in this area. Examples include:

- introducing priorities based on risk-based assessments,
- using efficiently international scientific advice, e.g. from JECFA and JEMRA,
- integrating Codex standards and guidelines into national legislations,
- developing more targeted compliance programmes,
- maximizing effectiveness of expensive laboratory resources,
- using new electronic reporting and management systems,
- applying standardized methodology, etc.

The sharing of experience between countries in these areas would constitute a truly international cost-sharing exercise with direct health benefits for national food safety, but also for food safety related to international trade.

### **3. Dealing with emerging and forgotten risks in food**

Food-borne disease is one of the widespread public health problems in the world affecting all countries through a wide range of food-borne hazards. Over recent years new hazards have emerged related to foods - notably some important (new) micro organisms, such as E. coli O157 or multi-resistant Salmonella typhimurium DT104, but also new chemical hazards, such as acrylamide, now known to be formed in certain foods at high temperatures. At the same time a number of well-known, but sparsely investigated problems in food remain major problems in many parts of the world. The importance of viruses and parasites, but also the real burden of cancerogenic chemical hazards in food is generally overlooked. The need for food safety systems to strengthen activities in these emerging areas warrants a concerted effort based upon a mapping of existing efforts and initiatives.

#### **4. Food safety systems - a renewed focus on small scale (rural) production**

While many traditional regulatory systems, including systems exported to developing countries take outset in a certain food production structure, new problems in certain parts of the world have exposed the inability of such traditional systems to deal efficiently with such problems when part of a small-scale food production structure. The systems of production where the farm to fork chain is few meters or where live animal markets represents the most important distribution chain are not well covered by standards food safety regulatory systems. Experience from countries having initiated new efforts to ensure food safety also in small-scale rural production systems should be shared with a view of strengthening this sector of growing food safety importance.

#### **5. The food chain approach to promote food safety**

In recent years, food safety incidents have highlighted the need to address food safety issues along the food chain, in a systematic and comprehensive manner. Many countries have recognised the importance of applying the food chain approach and have introduced programmes to promote this approach in their food systems.

For the purpose of food safety, it is now generally accepted that food chains cover all inputs into the production of the food, including feed for animals, chemical treatments at the production and post-harvest stages, and even the land or water from which the food is harvested. Nutrient values also may vary within species and different growing conditions, with implications for level of nutrition that may be expected from foods from different sources. The food chain approach must also address urban and peri-urban production and marketing systems which provide special problems due in part to the close confinement of production, the close proximity to human dwellings, the lack of adequate sanitary conditions, the use of unsafe water, and the absence of normal agricultural technical support systems.

#### **6. Science as the basis for food safety measures**

The WTO Agreement on SPS has emphasized the need for food safety measures to be based on science. The Codex Alimentarius Commission has also emphasized the need for Codex standards and related texts to be based on science and to have regard, where appropriate, to other legitimate factors relevant for the health protection of consumers and for the promotion of fair practices in food trade.

At the national level, many countries have established scientific committees and panels to provide risk managers with the necessary advice to make science-based decisions. Other countries rely on the advice provided by FAO and WHO through the work of expert bodies such as JECFA, JMPR, JEMRA and the FAO/WHO ad hoc expert consultations. The FAO/WHO consultative process on the provision of scientific advice to member countries and to Codex had identified a number of issues which need to be addressed to improve the process and ensure the integrity of the scientific advice. Increasing the participation of developing countries (experts and data) has been highlighted as important objective that requires the support of all concerned. Case studies on how other legitimate factors have been considered in decision-making concerning food safety could be shared among food safety regulators.

#### **7. Application of risk analysis in food safety (revised from GF1 proposal)**

Several countries have, in recent years, adopted a risk-based approach to food safety management. Experience in this field is increasing and lessons learned by some countries are valuable to share with other countries.

Countries that have not yet adopted a risk-based food safety system will undoubtedly be affected by actions taken by other countries that have adopted such a system and could share their experience with others. Because of the novelty of the approach, many countries will be interested in information and experiences from which they can learn and eventually apply to their food safety systems.