

## **Joint Statement by FAO, WHO and WTO**

### **International Forum on Food Safety and Trade**

**(23-24 April 2019, Geneva, Switzerland)**

1. Foodborne diseases have a significant impact on public health, food security, productivity and poverty. Nearly 600 million people fall sick and 420 000 die each year because of foodborne diseases, resulting in the loss of 33 million healthy life years. Low- and middle-income countries are the most affected, with an annual estimated cost of USD 110 billion in productivity losses, trade-related losses and costs on the treatment of illnesses due to the consumption of unsafe food.
2. Under the umbrella theme "The Future of Food Safety – Transforming Knowledge into Action for People, Economies and the Environment", two events were held: the First FAO/WHO/AU International Conference on Food Safety, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 12-13 February 2019; and the International Forum on Food Safety and Trade, held at the WTO, in Geneva, Switzerland, on 23-24 April 2019, with the support of FAO and WHO. They highlighted the magnitude of the challenges and proposed knowledge-based actions to address food safety-related issues. They also underlined the crucial role that investment in effective food safety systems, including in knowledge, human resources, institutions and infrastructure, can play in achieving food safety goals. While effective food safety systems have costs, the associated economic benefits and savings in public health expenditures outweigh these costs.
3. Global trade in food products has expanded more than threefold over the last two decades, rising to USD 1.5 trillion in 2017. Developing countries are increasingly participating in global food trade, both as exporters and importers. At the same time, global agricultural value chains have become complex, and food products are often grown, processed and consumed in different countries. While these trends have contributed to increasing the quantity and diversity of foods available to consumers throughout the world, they have also raised concerns with regard to the safety of the traded food. Consumers have the right to expect that both locally produced and imported food are safe. In this context, the development of international food safety standards for application at domestic levels and in international trade has become more important than ever before.
4. Food safety and trade are key enablers to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Together, the framework of international food standards and trade rules established by FAO, WHO and WTO supports Members in their efforts to achieve the SDGs, namely SDG 1 on poverty; SDG 2 on hunger, food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture; SDG 3 on healthy lives and wellbeing; SDG 8 on economic growth, employment and work; SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production, and SDG 17 on global partnerships.

**Participants of the *international Forum on Food Safety and Trade*, held at the WTO with the support of FAO and WHO, particularly underscored the following:**

5. The continuous progression of science and technology presents opportunities and challenges for both food safety and trade. Technology, including the use of "big data", allows for better detection, investigation, monitoring and surveillance tools and methods for food safety risks assessment. It facilitates consumers' access to new foods, produced with different plant varieties and animal breeds and through more efficient processes. It allows food systems to respond to climate change and environmental challenges. It also accelerates trade procedures and facilitates transactions. Digital technologies present opportunities to improve transparency and traceability in food supply chains and, thus, can contribute to enhancing food safety and facilitating safe trade. However, there are concerns surrounding data privacy, compatibility with existing regulatory frameworks and growing disparities in access to technology. Addressing these concerns and bridging the technological divide will require awareness-raising, significant public and private investments, and capacity development efforts.
6. Global trade is evolving rapidly, and the WTO Agreements on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, on Technical Barriers to Trade and on Trade Facilitation contribute to economic development by removing unnecessary barriers to trade in food. Food safety measures that are based on scientific principles and on Codex Alimentarius standards ensure optimal health protection and facilitate safe trade. Each 1 percent saving in trade transaction costs is estimated to result in a global trade benefit of USD 43 billion. The benefits are especially great on the trade of perishable products, including fresh food. Tools such as e-certification can be used to achieve greater efficiency in the way goods move across borders – without compromising effectiveness of food safety controls – while developments such as e-commerce open up new avenues for trade.
7. As scientific knowledge, technology and food trade continue to evolve. Effective governance is required to respond properly to these changes. Food safety regulations need to adapt continuously to these new realities and to the changing consumer needs, preferences and perceptions. The FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius is the single most important international reference point for food safety standards that guide Members in protecting consumers' health and promoting fair practices in food trade. With the constant evolution of food systems and trade practices, the role of Codex is more crucial than ever and the importance of its work is increasing.
8. Coordination and partnerships at the national, regional and international levels are required to build the necessary capacity to benefit from the opportunities arising from scientific and technological advancements and to address the challenges that they create. Public and private sectors, operators representing all parts of the food chain, civil society organizations and academic and research institutions have a role to play. They are essential in developing sound, effective and credible systems of food safety management. Creating an enabling environment for public-private partnerships is key, given their important role in stimulating private investments and fostering a more efficient use of public resources.
9. FAO, WHO and the WTO should continue their coordinated work, together with the World Bank Group and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), at the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF). This global partnership supports governments, farmers, processors and traders in developing countries to meet international SPS standards, thus facilitating safe trade and promoting public health.

**FAO, WHO and WTO are committed to sustaining the global momentum created by the events on *The Future of Food Safety* held in Addis Ababa and Geneva and to supporting our Members in this regard. In particular:**

- In line with our respective mandates, we will continue to provide neutral multilateral fora for dialogue, enabling Members to share knowledge and experiences related to the use of new technologies and regulatory options. Our objective is to promote a better understanding among Members and contribute to reducing disparities in their ability to benefit from these technologies, paving the way for regulatory convergence and harmonization.
- We call for increased support for capacity development to enable disadvantaged and vulnerable populations to benefit from technological progress.
- We stress the importance of capacity development to enable all Members to benefit from international trade and to promote collaboration between customs and national SPS agencies, both within and across borders, to ensure effective and efficient controls and thereby facilitate safe trade of food.
- We emphasize the importance of harmonization of national food safety requirements with Codex standards and invite all Members to continue engaging in Codex work to keep these standards relevant and up-to-date.
- We remain committed to supporting the standard-setting work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, so it continues playing its critical role in protecting public health and facilitating fair trade and it remains relevant by properly responding to changes in technology and trade.
- We are committed to enhancing the capacity of developing countries to engage effectively in Codex work. We count on Members and donors to continue supporting the efforts of the FAO/WHO Codex Trust Fund.
- We reaffirm our commitment to continue, through our capacity-development activities, providing support to developing countries in building strong food safety control systems, implementing measures to facilitate safe trade of food, and engaging in the FAO/WHO/WTO framework of food safety standards and trade rules.
- We stress the importance of integrating food safety into national public health, food security, environmental, trade and development agendas, and supporting the multisectoral "One Health" approaches. This includes building networks and incorporating socio-economic and environmental aspects into national food safety efforts, as a means to achieving public health and economic development objectives.
- We remain committed to continuing our joint work, based on our respective mandates and applicable policies, including through the STDF partnership platform, and to exploiting further synergies between our organizations and other agencies working in the area of food safety and trade for the benefit of our Members.

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