



International Heads of Food Agencies Forum (IHFAF)

Towards a Collaborative Leadership in Food Safety and Nutrition Assessment
and Management at the Global Level

Terms of Reference

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1- Background and Rationale

Food safety and nutrition are key determinants of health and human development and regulatory decisions made by Governments and food authorities across the world can have far-reaching implications on the health of national and regional populations, agricultural production systems and the trade of agri-food products within an increasingly complex global food system.

Emerging food safety issues, increasing consumers' interests and concerns about the safety, nutritional quality and authenticity of the food they purchase, and information dissemination about the risks or the virtues of food products and diets have no boundaries. Food safety agencies involved in assessing, managing and communicating food risks, are required to address an increasing number of issues in order to, not only meet the increasing obligations of their legal and regulatory mandates, but to also act as the reference source for guidance to be provided to food business operators, consumers, as well as other intermediaries e.g. service providers, food traders, etc.

The FAO / WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) provides an important forum for regulators and risk assessment bodies to meet and discuss the development of international standards. However, as the Commissions agendas focussed on standards development, there is limited opportunity to discuss and resolve issues of strategic importance which those involved in food risk analysis are faced with on a daily basis. These issues can only be resolved through working collaboratively. Therefore, this forum provides an opportunity for the heads of food safety agencies globally to come together voluntarily to shape a collaborative agenda with a view to exploring how these challenges can be resolved.

Recognizing that collaboration between agencies and organizations supporting food safety and nutrition management (including food regulators and food risk assessment agencies) is a key mechanism and indeed an imperative to address an increasingly complex and interdependent health, food production and food trade environment, a group of food safety agencies agreed to convene an International Heads of Food Agencies Forum (IHFAF) to work collaboratively on issues of strategic importance and in line with their legal mandate.

2- Objectives of the IHFAF

The IHFAF is an informal gathering of like-minded international food safety agencies at the heads of agency level, convened with the aim to facilitate engagement and dialogue targeting to advance:

- Information sharing concerning current work priorities of food safety agencies food authorities and risk assessment agencies;
- Shaping an agenda of collaborative initiatives to be developed in various forums, including in the context of international standard setting under the auspices of the CAC;
- Exploring opportunities for working collaboratively to address common challenges, with the potential of sharing resources.

3- Membership

The heads of agencies forum was founded by the Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA), Food Standards Australia New-Zealand (FSANZ), and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI). The first meeting was hosted by the SFDA in Riyadh and representatives from different countries and organisations were invited to participate in the first meeting. During the meeting, participants considered the objectives under Section 2 above. Other members can join the forum by submitting a proposal to the executive committee for review and approval.

Annex I provides a record of food agencies and organizations that are part of the forum at a given date. The list of participating agencies will be maintained and updated on a regular basis.

Members of the forum express their commitment to such collaborative action by actively participating in the forum. The absence of a member from two (2) consecutive physical meetings will be considered as a forfeiture of the membership into the forum.

4- Meetings of the IHFAF

- The Forum will hold one physical meeting annually, hosted by one of its members, acting as the coordinating member.
- Each country delegation may be composed from 1-3 participants of senior officials of the relevant food competent authorities and/or food risk assessment agency, including the head of the agency / department.
- Each meeting of the Forum will include a high-level exchange between senior regulators focused on the themes proposed and identified of importance by participating agencies, including current practices, challenges and strategic directions of their respective food risk assessment and regulatory programs. Certain agreed-upon collaborative areas/ themes can be expanded upon through facilitated discussion sessions that would involve not-only heads of agencies, but also other representatives of their respective organization (as needed), with the intent to reach possible recommendations for opportunities of collaboration, sharing experiences and a collective work agenda in the given area.
- Meeting duration will vary between 1-2 days based on the requirements of the agenda.
- Meetings will be chaired by the senior representative of the agency hosting the forum meeting during a given year.
- Members of the forum will reach their conclusions and recommendations by consensus, facilitated by the Chair.
- Each member organization will strive to fund its participation to the forum
- Forum members may mobilize additional resources to support participation of some other members into the forum, as may be possible.
- Where required, working groups or task teams can be created to work on delivering some activities and outputs agreed to by heads of agencies
- Virtual meetings can be organized between two physical meetings to maintain engagement between some or all members, as deemed required.
- Agendas of meetings, whether physical or virtual, are to be prepared by the secretariat from the host organization and shared with all members, at least one week before the meeting. Agenda items can be suggested by any member of the forum and considered for inclusion, as part of the discussions planned.
- The host country can invite up to 3 observer countries to the meeting.

5- Forum Management and Secretariat

- The forum is an informal gathering of heads of food agencies. A host country will volunteer to host the forum's annual meeting and will offer to manage the secretariat enabling engagement between forum members, before and after the meeting throughout the year.
- All costs of participation into the forum will be covered by individual participants/member organizations. Where possible, access to additional funding sources may facilitate the participation of more member organizations. Forum members may support each other to enable effective participation and a more inclusive representation at the forum.
- The management of the forum and its secretariat will be rotating based on the volunteering host organization of the forum.
- The secretariat functions offered by one organization will span for a period covering the time between the meeting hosted by the same organization to the hosting of the following meeting, where the new host will take over those responsibilities at the end of the physical meetings.

6- Work Management and Other Considerations

- The Forum may develop an agenda of collaborative work between some or all of its members. Work items will be managed in a transparent and inclusive manner.
- Where required, task teams or working groups can be created to facilitate delivery on some outputs agreed upon by Forum members. Participation to such working groups is voluntary, and is the responsibility of each organization. Each task team or working group leader will strive to maintain a transparent and inclusive approach in the conduct of the agreed upon tasks.

The Forum is not meant to replace or compete with any proceedings managed by the

- FAO/WHO Food Standards Program, rather to enable additional support for international collaboration between food agencies, in a manner that may bolster the Program and the development of international standards under the auspices of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex / CAC).

- The Forum will embrace Codex Values of transparency, inclusiveness and collaboration in all of its proceedings
- These terms of reference do not represent any binding terms between members that agree to them, and are subject to change, as per the discussions and recommendations of Forum Members.

Dated / Last amended on:

Mar 1, 2021.

Secretariat

Annex I
Members of the International Heads of Food
Agencies Forum Date: 20-01-2020

Countries	Agencies	Membership Status
Saudi Arabia	Saudi Food & Drug Authority (SFDA)	Founding Member
Australia New Zealand	Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ)	
Ireland	Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI)	
China	China National Center for Food Safety Risk Assessment (CFSA)	
France	The French agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health Safety (ANSES)	Associate member
Japan	Food Safety Commission of Japan (FSCJ)	
Kuwait	Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN)	
Morocco	National Office of Food Safety (ONSSA)	
Singapore	Singapore Food Agency (SFA)	
International Organizations	Codex Alimentarius Commission (CODEX)	
	Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)	
	World Health Organization - International Food Safety Authorities Network (WHO - INFOSAN)	