

اجتماع رؤساء الجهات الرقابية على الغذاء  
HEADS OF FOOD AGENCIES MEETING

Meeting summary

## **Introduction:**

Food safety and nutrition are key determinants of health and human development. Food regulatory decisions have far-reaching implications on health, agriculture and trade agendas for countries at domestic and international levels. In recognition of the need for food agencies to collaborate in handling increasingly complex and interdependent issues related to health, food production and food trade environment, the Saudi Food & Drug Authority (SFDA), Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and Food Standards Australia New-Zealand (FSANZ), have agreed to jointly convene a meeting at heads of food agency levels with a view to facilitate engagement and discussions amongst leaders of food competent authorities and food safety and nutrition agencies, around the world.

## **Session one (Chaired by the CEO, SFDA):**

Co-conveners introduced the objectives of the current meeting as a foundation to the development of the Heads of Food Agencies meeting and presented their opening remarks. The CEO of SFDA, Prof. Hisham Aljadhey (Chair and co-convener) explained the importance of such meetings and collaboration between agencies and authorities given the increasing complexity of Food supply chain, continued emergence of Climate-related challenges and rapidly changing consumer behaviour. The CEO of FSANZ, Mr. Mark Booth (co-convener) started his opening remarks by thanking the SFDA for hosting the first meeting and the members for attending this event, and at the same time encouraging discussions on expected challenges and developments. Mr. Booth stressed the importance of incorporating food technology in the agenda, considering the role of science and technology in the food system.

**Dr. Pamela Byrne, CEO of FSAI** (co-convener) expressed appreciation to SFDA for hosting the first meeting, extending his thanks to members for participating. Dr. Byrne focused on global supply chain and mentioned that we need to meet rising consumer expectations and to consolidate an efficient food networking systems networking food system.

### Keynote lectures

The Keynote lecture was presented by Prof. Patrick Wall from the University College in Dublin. Prof. Wall shed light on the current and emerging food safety agencies challenges including:

- The impact of climate change on food safety.
- Sustainability of present production systems, and how contaminated water used for agriculture can threaten consumers' health.
- Food waste as a global issue.
- The Impact of political conflict/trade wars.
- Global standard setting in risk assessment.
- The increase of complexity of food supply chain.
- Tackling diet related disease.
- Outbreaks of animal/plant diseases disrupting supply chains.
- Antimicrobial resistance.
- Engaging with consumers.

## Session two (Chaired by The CEO, FSANZ)

In this session, the Food Safety Agencies discussed prioritization for a collaborative Agenda. This session included two presentations:

**1.** Presentation from Prof. Samuel Godefroy titled "Vision for the Heads of Food Agencies Forum as a Catalyst of a Collaborative Agenda" which discussed the drivers of change in food safety and nutrition. Furthermore, the need to create imperatives for food agencies to exchange information rapidly and effectively at both operational and strategic levels to collaborate and address the opportunities suggested in this meeting, which offers a unique option to engage at the senior and strategic level. The core content of the Heads of Food Agencies Meeting was about offering a unique opportunity to exchange on each agency's strategic plans/ direction, including their implementation, discussing issues with global ramifications and possible identification of potential areas for work sharing.

**2.** Mr. Tom Heilandt, Codex Secretary, explained how the heads of Food Agencies Forum can prop up an international Collaborative Agenda and Codex Activities. He reviewed Codex's best decisions in 2019 last year and he addressed some of Codex Strategic plan 2025-2020 in five major goals;

- Address current and critical issues in a timely manner
- Develop standards based on science and codex risk analysis principles
- Increase the impact through the recognition and use of codex standards
- Facilitate the participation of all codex members throughout the standards setting process
- Enhance work management systems and practices that supports the efficient and effective achievement of all strategic plan goals

**After the presentations, the members discussed opportunities and the best areas for potential future collaborations. These areas include:**

- Focusing on risk communication and food communication.
- Assessing the risk associated with using innovation and new technology in risk assessment.
- Innovations, biotechnology, and new technology in risk assessment.
- Working to support codex to enhance the adoption of standards.
- Dealing with food fraud and food security.
- The importance of transparency and consumer trust and Sharing ideas and data of risk assessment.

### Session Three (Chaired by the CEO, FSAI)

The session started with discussions about possible collaboration between food agencies. The two topics identified for discussions were: Risk Communication Challenges and Further alignment in food measures.

- **Dr. Hamoud Alnughaymishi**, the Head of Food Risk Communication section at SFDA, focused on the importance of risk communication and mentioned some of the challenges that face risk communicators. These challenges include difference in perceptions, lack of scientific background, information sources and credibility and the media. Dr. Alnughaymishi touched on the importance of risk perception surveys and the use of new technologies such as AI to communicate effectively with the public. Dr. Alnughaymishi suggested some areas for collaboration, which include sharing information and exchanging experts.

- **Dr. Scott Crerar**, the General Manager, Science and Risk Assessment at FSANZ, talked about further alignment in food measures. Dr. Crerar emphasised on the importance of the following:

- Provision of scientific advice.
- Scientific basis of Codex.
- International scientific advice/ risk assessment.
- Issues to consider.
- Sharing information regarding risk assessment.

The members concluded their discussions by addressing key messages such as Trust in evidence and information, raising the importance of food safety internationally. A major part of the discussion focused on risk communication due to its impact and importance. Members also agreed on the importance of ensuring that information is evidence based and social media can be a major issue for food safety. Finally, members emphasized on the importance of capability and capacity building in risk communication.

## Terms of reference

The Terms of reference for HFAF was reviewed and approved by the members.

## Session Four

Members reviewed and signed The Riyadh Declaration (joint statement of Heads of Agencies towards enhanced collaborative action) followed by Closing Remarks from CEO of FSANZ, FSAI and SFDA:

**CEO of FSANZ, Mr. Mark Booth** (co-convener) announced that Australia will host the next meeting in February 2021.

**CEO of FSAI, Dr. Pamela Byrne** (co-convener) mentioned the importance of focusing on short-term and long-term challenges, meeting the expectation of consumers, and learning from other countries and systems regarding risk assessment. Dr. Byrne expressed appreciation of the support of WHO, FAO and Codex. Dr. Byrne announced that Ireland will host the third meeting in February 2022.

**CEO of SFDA, Prof. Hisham Aljadhey** (meeting chair and co-convener) thanked the members and the organizing team, hoping that the meeting would continue for years to come.

