



# HEADS OF FOOD AGENCIES FORUM

Extra-Ordinary Meeting for Updates and Coordination During COVID-19

 20<sup>th</sup> Aug 2020

## MEETING REPORT





**MEETING  
REPORT**

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## Introduction:

With the continued threat associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences on human health and on the food production sector, it is important to consider enhanced opportunities to share information and experiences amongst food regulators. One of the key objectives of the “Heads of Food Agencies Forum” is to develop a sustainable environment of food regulatory cooperation to address emerging issues of food safety and nutrition.

The Heads of Food Agencies Forum is therefore organized an extra-ordinary meeting through virtual attendance with the objective to:

- Promote sharing of experiences and lessons learnt amongst the community of regulators, as to how food regulatory functions had to be adapted to fulfill the requirements of COVID-19 risk mitigation, while preserving the integrity of the food regulatory mandate.
- Anticipate needs and shape opportunities for possible added collaboration, including resource-sharing between food agencies, members of the forum and beyond.

Participants to this meeting shared their action and interventions in relation with Covid-19 and food safety management, including lessons learnt, enablers and assets that supported their risk mitigation efforts, and the gaps and deficiencies that were identified and which would be targeted with enhancement.



# Opening Session

Welcome and opening Remarks, Chaired by the CEO, SFDA:

The CEO of SFDA, **Prof. Hisham Aljadhey** (Chair and co-convener) introduced the objectives of the emergency meeting and indicated the importance of collaboration between agencies during emerging issues of food safety to maintain the availability of a safe food supply. ””



## First Session

Updates on COVID19 Response, Chaired by the CEO, FSANZ:

The CEO of FSANZ, Mr. Mark Booth (co-convener) led the updates session where each representative of members of the HFAF offers a verbal update on their agency's action and interventions in relation with Covid-19 and food safety management including challenges, enablers/assets, gaps and deficiencies.

# A

## The main challenges that food agencies encountered were the following:

### I. Challenges regarding food regulators:

- Determine the impact of COVID-19 on food.
- Dealing with uncertainty.
- Access to safe food supply.
- Maintain industry production.
- Risk mitigation and guidelines for food companies.
- Overlap tasks between official agencies.
- The capacity of lab and its effect on the speed of shipments release.
- Limited number of inspectors to cover all food facilities.
- Managing food supply across borders.
- Introduction of additional requirements on food exports to control COVID-19.
- Resources needed to address COVID-19 control.

### II. Challenges regarding consumers:

- Community misunderstanding regarding transmission of COVID-19 via food sources.
- Providing scientific evidence about food safety and COVID-19 to the public in a timely manner.
- Communication to consumers and use of communication platforms.

### III. Challenges regarding food industry:

- Providing information about the importance of hygiene to protect the health of workers in food businesses.
- Managing food that has close contact of workers.
- The impact of shutdown restrictions and preventive measures such as temperature screening of personnel and safe distancing requirements on food service sector.
- The impact of disruptions of global trade lines (via land, air and sea), lockdowns, and certain trade restrictions on supply of food, agri-inputs, ingredients and food packaging materials.
- Global restriction in people movement as well as the infections in the workers created manpower issues for food industry.

# B

## **Assets / Enablers that support and facilitate risk mitigation efforts:**

- The presence of Business Continuity Plan.
  - The presence of Incident Response Team based on experience from Food Crisis Simulation exercises.
  - The shared information about risk assessments on COVID-19 by other countries.
  - The strong relationships with key stakeholders.
  - Existing relationships with retailers and food manufacturing industry to address food supply continuity.
  - The implementing of policies and measures for food businesses.
  - Strong team enabled to function remotely.
  - The availability of team competencies for public health response.
  - Previously established Networks of peers, nationally and internationally.
- The development of communication channels and coordination platforms that ensure a concerted effort to combat COVID-19.
  - Responding to consumer and industry concerns and providing consistent information.
  - Providing timely communications maintain confidence in food security strategies and assure the public that food supply is stable.
  - The presence of supplementary budgets to provide relief to businesses impacted by COVID-19.
  - Establishing sectorisation plans and measures in key food distribution sites/ establishments to localise the movement of workers, as part of food operators' business continuity plans.
  - Minimizing consumer visits to crowded areas by facilitating interim business models, like the sale of shelf-stable food via food trucks.



## Gaps and deficiencies that were identified, which would be targeted with enhancement:

- Limited technology platform for communication.
- Technology accessibility limited in some parts of the country.
- Ability to conduct audits of food businesses and official agencies.
- Ability to conduct investigations of food incidents.
- Timely responses to misinformation in the media regarding transmission of COVID-19 through food/packaging.
- Lack of consensus between countries on whether specific imported food controls in relation to covid-19 are appropriate.
- The need of technical and financial support to shift from paper to paperless practice.
- The need to have risk management plan in place.
- Overlap of inspection practices between official agencies.
- The need to build in resilience and business continuity components into the supply chain.  
The need for deeper scientific expertise to provide quick and reliable assessments.
- The need of international coordination to address public concerns on food safety.
- The risk of being dependent on a few countries for key food items.





## Second Session

Discussions, Chaired by the CEO, FSAI:

The CEO of FSAI, **Dr. Pamela Byrne** (co-convener) led the discussions on areas of added collaboration that could be facilitated through the HFAC, opportunities stemming from the challenges encountered to bolster food regulatory cooperation, and the role of HFAC for possible consideration to address food incidents and emergencies.



The members indicated the role of HFAF as a catalyst for enhanced collaboration within the food regulatory community to address emerging issues, incidents and crises. HFAF should be used as a forum for member countries to periodically exchange information on emerging issues. HFAF has an important role to play in the collaborative efforts played by food regulatory organizations around the world especially during pandemic. Members can share their results and lessons learnt from

the different approaches they have tried, to reduce duplication of efforts and provide an opportunity for countries to coordinate and formulate joint positions on food safety. A joint recommendation should be issued by HFAF stating all the lessons learned from this pandemic by food agencies. Regular meetings and follow-ups are needed by all HFAF members to be proactively involved in food safety issues.



## Lessons and recommendations based on this pandemic:

- Establishing Business Continuity Plan and Incident Response Team.
- Existing strong relationships with key stakeholders to facilitate maintain safe food supply.
- Open sharing of scientific reviews and knowledge from various international bodies and countries to address public concerns promptly and maintain food safety.
- The importance of risk communication and providing scientific evidence information to consumer in a simple way and in a timely manner. This can help to maintain public trust on food safety.
- The importance of responding to consumer and industry concerns and providing consistent information.
- Understanding the risk management decisions of different jurisdictions and their impacts on consumers.
- The importance of collaboration to make risk assessment strong and available for risk management to make decisions.
- Working on global standards for food traceability utilizing recent technology.
- Exploring the chances of providing temporary solutions for food business or considering regulatory flexibility to maintain the food supply chain.
- Maintain the availability of essential guidelines for food industry.
- The importance of local food production, which can serve as a buffer during supply disruptions and reduce reliance on imports.
- The importance of establishing expert network, nationally and internationally, and the availability of team competencies for public health response.



## Closing Session

Closing Remarks, Chaired by the CEO, SFDA:

The CEO of SFDA, **Prof. Hisham Aljadhey** thanked the members for the successful meeting and hoped that the meeting recommendations would have a huge impact on food safety.

# Meeting Agenda

TIME	TOPIC																
	Call / Meeting Coordinates to follow																
08:00 – 08:05 AM GMT	<b>Dr. Hisham AlJadhey</b> Welcome and opening Remarks from Co-chairs of the HFAF																
08:05 – 08:35 AM GMT	<p><b>First Session Chaired by: Dr. Mark Booth</b></p> <p><b>Updates on COVID19 Response</b></p> <p>Each representative of members of the HFAF offers a verbal update on their agency's action and interventions in relation with Covid-19 and food safety management (their lessons learnt, enablers / assets, gaps and deficiencies). It is advised that the update will follow the structured written input provided and would highlight key areas only from such input</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Time GMT</th> <th>Country</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>8:05 am</td> <td>Australia</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8:10am</td> <td>China</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8:15am</td> <td>France</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8:20am</td> <td>Ireland</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8:25am</td> <td>Kuwait</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8:30am</td> <td>Saudi Arabia</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8:35am</td> <td>Singapore</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Time GMT	Country	8:05 am	Australia	8:10am	China	8:15am	France	8:20am	Ireland	8:25am	Kuwait	8:30am	Saudi Arabia	8:35am	Singapore
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08:35 – 09:25 AM GMT	<p><b>Discussion Session Chaired by: Dr. Pamela Byrne</b></p> <p><b>Collective discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Areas of added collaboration that could be facilitated through the HFAF</li> <li>&gt; Opportunities stemming from the challenges encountered to bolster food regulatory cooperation</li> <li>&gt; Role of HFAF for possible consideration to address food incidents and emergencies</li> </ul>																
09:25 – 09:30 AM GMT	<p><b>Closing Remarks Chaired by: Dr. Hisham AlJadhey</b></p> <p><b>Meeting summary</b></p>																

# Organization



**Prof. Hisham Al-Jadhey**  
*Executive President*

Saudi Food & Drug Authority



**Mr. Mark Booth**  
*A Chief Executive Officer*

Food Standards Australia New Zealand



**Dr. Pamela Byrne**  
*A Chief Executive Officer*

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland



**Dr. Roger Genet**  
*Director General*

The French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety



**Dr. Toru Kawanishi**  
*Commissioner of Food Safety Commission*

Food Safety Commission of Japan



**Mr. Tom Heilandt**  
*Secretary of CAC*

Codex Alimentarius



**Dr. Markus Lipp**  
*Head, Food Safety and Quality Unit (FAO)*

Food and Agriculture Organization



**DR TAN LEE KIM, KIM**  
*Director General, Food Administration & Deputy Chief Executive Officer Singapore Food Agency*

Singapore Food Agency



**Dr. Peter Ben Embarek**  
*International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) Management Coordinator (WHO)*

International Food Safety Authorities Network



**Dr. Hamid Lachhab**  
*Director of Risk Assessment and Legal Affairs*

National Food Safety Office



**Dr. Reem Ghazi Al-Fulaij**  
*Deputy Director General for technical affairs*

Public Authority for Food and Nutrition



**Dr. Wu Yongning**  
*Chief Scientist*

The China National Center for Food Safety Risk Assessment

