



INTERNATIONAL HEADS OF FOOD AGENCIES FORUM (IHFAF)

Towards a Collaborative Leadership in Food Safety, Nutrition
and Risk Analysis at the Global Level

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Edition 4.1

Contents

1- Background and Rationale	3
2- Purpose of the Forum	4
3- Vision	4
4- Objectives	4
5- General Provisions	5
6- Membership.....	5
7- Meetings of the IHFAF	7
8- Roles and Responsibilities	8
9- Communication and Information Channels.....	10
APPENDIX 1: Procedure for Appointing Full Members	11

1- Background and Rationale

Food safety and nutrition are key determinants of health and human development. Therefore, 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 limits. These issues require food safety agencies involved in assessing, managing, and communicating food risks to address an increasing number of issues to meet the increasing obligations of their regulatory mandates, but also to act as the reference source aimed at guidance for 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, considering Codex standard setting workings, there is a limited opportunity to discuss and resolve issues of strategic importance in relation to food risk analysis that are encountered by food safety agencies on a daily basis. Therefore, this forum provides an opportunity for the global heads of food safety agencies to come together voluntarily to shape a collaborative agenda with a view on exploring how these challenges can be resolved. Recognizing that collaboration among agencies and organizations supporting food safety and nutrition management (including food regulators and food risk assessment agencies) is a key mechanism and indeed imperative to address an increasingly complex and interdependent health, food production and food trade environment.

Thus, 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 mandates.

2- Purpose of the Forum

The IHFAF is an annual convening with the purpose of fostering strategic dialogue and the exchange of insights. Established in 2020, IHFAF held its inaugural meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The objective of the Forum is to foster deliberations amongst Heads of Food Agencies from various nations to address matters pertaining to food safety, food standards, nutrition, and risk communication.

IHFAF serves as a platform that unites distinguished Heads of Food Agencies worldwide, aiming to facilitate engagement and the exchange of experiences in addressing complex challenges related to food safety.

3- Vision

To enhance communication and cooperation between leaders of international food regulatory agencies in order to share knowledge and experiences to address current and emerging food safety risks.

4- Objectives

The objectives underpinning the goal of IHFAF are the following:

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

5- General Provisions

- 5.1. The Forum aims to develop an agenda of collaborative work among some or all of its members. Work items will be managed in a transparent and inclusive manner.
- 5.2. The Forum is not intended 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 support the development of international standards under the auspices of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC).
- 5.3. The Forum will embrace Codex Values of transparency, inclusiveness and collaboration in all of its proceedings.
- 5.4. These terms of reference are not legally binding terms for consenting members, and can be amended or updated as deemed necessary.
- 5.5. IHFAF meeting outcomes are voluntary, and do not have the power to make any binding pronouncements or create legitimate expectations on behalf of the members.
- 5.6. All costs of participation in the forum will be covered by individual participant/member organizations. Forum members may support each other to enable effective participation and further inclusive representation at the forum.

6- Membership

- 6.1. The Forum has three membership categories:

6.1.1. Founding Member

The founding members of IHFAF are the Saudi Food and Drug Authority

(SFDA), the Food Standards Australia New-Zealand (FSANZ), and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI).

6.1.2. Full Member

Being a full member typically entails having met the requirements or criteria set forth by the forum's Executive Committee.

6.1.3. Observer Member

International organizations such as Codex Alimentarius Commission (CODEX), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and World Health Organization - International Food Safety Authorities Network (WHO - INFOSAN).

6.2. Membership requests are evaluated based on the following criteria:

6.2.1. National Agencies/Departments with the primary responsibility of development and/or implementation of food safety and food standards.

6.2.2. For each country, one agency will act (represent or participate) as the 'lead agency'. accordingly, only one agency per country can join IHFAF as a full member. Other agencies could attend IHFAF annual meetings as observers. However, the 'lead agency' would need to comply with the requirement "National Agencies/Departments with the primary responsibility of development and/or implementation of food safety and food standards'.

6.2.3. The entities commitment to providing representation at a senior executive level IE or EO or CEO equivalent level.

6.2.4. Emphasis on the value of equal global representation.

6.2.5. The process for appointing Full Members is outlined in Appendix I.

7- Meetings of the IHFAF

- 7.1 The forum will convene one in-person meeting each year, hosted by one of its members.
- 7.2 Each meeting of the Forum will feature a high-level discussion among senior regulators .It will focus on the theme proposed that highlights important issues including current practices, challenges and strategic directions of their respective food risk assessment, risk management, risk communication and regulatory programs.
- 7.3 Each invited agency delegation should be a maximum of three senior officials.
- 7.4 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 organizations (as needed). These sessions aim to identify opportunities for collaboration, share experiences, and a collective work agenda in the specified area.
- 7.5 The plenary meeting is set for one day.
- 7.6 A one (1)-day bilateral meeting will be convened to promote dialogue and cooperation among international leaders
- 7.7 Meetings will be chaired by the senior representative of the agency hosting the forum meeting during a given year.
- 7.8 Agendas of meetings, are to be prepared by the host agency 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.
- 7.9 Food agencies invited to annual meeting by the host country that are not currently members.
- 7.10 The host country can invite up to three observer countries to the meeting.

8- Roles and Responsibilities

8.1 Executive Committee

8.1.1 The Executive Committee is comprised permanently of the three founding members.

8.1.2 The Executive Committee includes temporarily three additional members, representing host countries from the past, present, and future meetings.

8.1.2.1 The expansion aims to ensure continuity, facilitate the sharing of hosting experiences, and encourage members to host future meetings.

8.1.2.2 The rotation of these committee members will take place at the end of each annual meeting.

8.1.2.3 The effectiveness of this approach will be reviewed after three years to assess its impact and relevance.

8.1.3 The Executive Committee meets every three months or when needed to review and approve the membership requests, update the Terms of References and approve the upcoming annual meeting agenda and arrangements.

8.2 Secretariat

8.2.1. IHFAF secretariat is managed by the Saudi Food and Drug Authority in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, serving as the administrative hub to support the Forum's activities and coordination among its members.

8.2.2. IHFAF secretariat responsibilities include the following:

8.2.2.1. Management of the EC Meetings: to prepare the agenda, new members requests, hosting requests, documents update and any other relevant tasks.

8.2.2.2. Coordination with Host Country: to facilitate the annual meeting, and acting as the primary link between the host's organizing team and the Executive Committee.

- 8.2.2.3. Media Promotion: to promote the work of IHFAF through all communication channels (Traditional media, Social media and official website) to all stakeholders.
- 8.2.2.4. Reporting: to support and coordinate with the host country team in preparing and issuing the Annual Report that summarizes the annual meeting activities.
- 8.2.2.5. Policy and Documentation: to draft and update the internal policies of the secretariat (Terms of Reference, Hosting, Annual Report) and making sure all documents are reviewed and approved by the EC and circulated to all members if needed.
- 8.2.2.6. Forum Promotion: to promote the benefits of joining and demonstrating the current international cooperation and knowledge sharing.

8.3 Host country

- 8.3.1. Each year, one of the IHFAF member states hosts the IHFAF Annual Meeting.
- 8.3.2. The host country responsibilities include the following:
 - 8.3.2.1. Issuing formal invitations for the annual meeting.
 - 8.3.2.2. Managing meeting logistics, including preparation of a comprehensive handbook outlining details such as the meeting program, venue, bilateral meeting room locations, and other practical information.
 - 8.3.2.3. Facilitating an online registration link enabling delegates to register their participation and related activities.

Further information can be found in the Hosting Guidelines.

9- Communication and Information Channels

The forum utilizes various digital communication platforms to facilitate information sharing and engagement. These may include the forum's official website and selected social media channels.

Detailed links to these platforms are maintained on the forum's official website.

APPENDIX 1: Procedure for Appointing Full Members

1. Countries interested in joining the forum as Full Members shall submit a letter of intent to the Executive Committee via the IHFAF Secretariat's email: HFASFsecretariat@sFDA.gov.sa.
2. The letter of intent must cover the following areas:
 - a. An overview of the entity.
 - b. Entity's responsibilities that are directly related to food safety.
 - c. Added value provided by the entity's membership in return for joining the forum.
 - d. Examples of the Entity's international activities associated with food safety.
3. The IHFAF secretariat will only consider a maximum of four requests for membership in IHFAF annually,
4. The letter of intent will be reviewed by IHFAF secretariat.
5. The IHFAF secretariat shall forward the reviewed letter of intent to the Executive Committee with its recommendation.
6. The Executive Committee will review the letter of intent and adopt a decision by consensus
7. The Executive Committee will ask the secretariat to respond back to the agency with their decision.
8. IHFAF secretariat holds the responsibility of notifying current IHFAF members – via email – with the Executive Committee 's approval regarding new membership requests.
9. IHFAF will endeavor to promote membership in order to ensure the balanced representation from all continents.

Dated / Last amended on:

April 22, 2026

IHFAF Secretariat

