From Project Team

Welcome to the first edition of the newsletter of the Japanese funded FAO regional project “Support to Capacity Building and Implementation of International Food Safety Standards in ASEAN Countries” (GCP/RAS/280/JPN).

This project was launched on December 2011 as a five-year project to aim at strengthening the capacities of ASEAN countries in contributing to Codex standards-setting and implementing the adopted Codex standards. With a grant of USD 2 297 075 from the Government of Japan (the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries), the project is being implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAORAP). The project outcomes include Increased contribution of ASEAN Countries in Codex Activities; Refined implementation of Codex standards in ASEAN Countries; and Improving ability for quality assurance of data.

The project has already established national focal points of the project in the ten ASEAN countries and collated information on the status of implementing international standards at national level based on inputs received from the countries. In addition, the inception workshop of the project was held during 17-19 September 2012 in Bangkok, Thailand wherein some subjects/areas were discussed and identified for trainings, workshops, case studies and guidance documents based on inputs from participants (Summary of the workshop is given below).

Through this newsletters and the recently launched project website, it is proposed to share recent activities of the project as well as the important information relating to food safety with stakeholders. For achieving project objectives, communication and visibility are a vital part of the project. A full range of tools such as gathering of information, publication and dissemination of reports and documents to strengthen overall programme development have been envisaged.
The project team expresses its sincere gratitude to Mr. Hiroyuki Konuma, Assistant Director General of FAO and regional representative of Asia and the Pacific for his kind encouragement, and a special thanks to Japanese Government for generous funding to the project and to national focal points of ASEAN countries for coordinating the activities on behalf of their countries.

Project Team

Report of recent events

The Inception workshop
“Principles and further activities for Codex implementation”

The workshop was held during 17 to 19, September 2012, in Bangkok which had 44 participants (including 11 observers) representing mostly the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture in nine ASEAN countries, viz., Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The objectives of the workshop were as follows;
i) To enhance understanding of implication of the SPS agreement, its relationship with International standards and the current activities in the area of Codex standard setting;
ii) To enhance understanding on International food safety standards and their implementation;
iii) To share information on national scenarios in relation to implementing International food safety standards; and
iv) To discuss and identify capacity building needs and priorities on subjects for workshops, training courses, case studies and guidance documents under the project.

Opening Session

The welcome address was given by Mr. Tetsuya Murakami, First Secretary, Embassy of Japan in Thailand, and Mr. Sakchai Sriboonsue, Secretary General of the National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards (ACFS), Bangkok. The inaugural address was delivered by Mr. Hiroyuki Konuma, Assistant Director-General and FAO Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok.

Mr. Atsuhiro Meno, the Project coordinator, explained the project objectives, benefits, outputs and outcomes, various activities relating to the questionnaire and discussion with national focal points. He explained briefly objectives of the inception workshop.
Implication of SPS/TBT Agreement and current activities of International agreement and standard setting

Overview of the SPS/TBT Agreement and recent developments
Ms. Marieme Fall, Counselor, Agriculture and Commodities Division, WTO, Geneva explained the WTO structure, the use of non-tariff measures, the objectives, coverage and current issues of SPS and TBT agreements. The various provisions of the SPS agreement, the role of Codex in the WTO as a food safety standard setting organization were also presented. She explained specific trade concerns relating to animal health and food safety. She highlighted specific trade concerns with practical examples pertaining to ASEAN countries, the food safety notifications, the private standards besides briefly touching the various provisions of TBT agreements. She also showed Standards Trade and Development Facility website along with its contents.

The SPS Agreement and International Standards
Ms. Shashi Sareen, Senior Food Safety and Nutrition Officer, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, brought out the link between the SPS Agreement and Codex standards. She described the current activities of International Standard setting, Codex standard setting procedures and the status of various FAO projects in the Asian region. She referred to the various Codex documents, and the principles that set out policies and guidelines for their interpretation. She dealt at length with the current focus in Codex Alimentarius Commission including its draft strategic plan for 2014-2019, the proposed golden jubilee of Codex during 2013. Besides, she highlighted the various training programmes carried out, guidance documents and tools developed, information exchange mechanisms, various regional and national projects and forthcoming training programmes and workshops and seminars.

ASEAN’s approach for 1) applying scientific principle and risk analysis for food safety standards setting 2) contribution to Codex standard setting process 3) implementing Codex standards
Mr. Pisan Pongsapitch, Director, Office of Standard Development, National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards, Bangkok in his capacity as the Chair of the ASEAN Task Force on Codex (ATFC), presented the role of ATFC as a forum to discuss Codex issues of interest to ASEAN. He referred to the ASEAN efforts on harmonization on food safety standards through the working groups of the ASEAN Ministerial meeting on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF), and so on. In addition, he also enunciated the principles of harmonization of ASEAN MRLs. His talk covered the ASEAN Standards and Conformance Framework and its technical infrastructure, activities of the prepared food products working group, food testing reference laboratories and the task force on Codex.

Japanese approach for applying scientific principles and risk analysis relating to food safety and the contribution to the Codex standard setting process
Mr. Tetsuo Urushiyama, Scientific Adviser for Food Safety and Consumer Policy Division, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Tokyo, described the process of enactment of Food Law in 2003, the implementation of the risk assessment process and the establishment of Food safety commission to conduct risk management by Government. He covered the objectives and content of Standard
Operating Procedures for conducting Food Safety management, provided examples of priority list of chemical and microbiological hazards, traced development of guidelines to risk managers and introduced the concept and policy for promoting regulatory science. He explained the Japan’s contributions to standard setting process citing the Case study of Maximum Level and Code of Practice on 3-Monochloropropane-1,2-Diol(3-MCPD) in soy sauce. He also cited the strategy of MAFF to facilitate discussions through providing scientific data and information for filling the gaps in accordance with the Codex principles, cooperating with industries, and submitting written comments to Codex.

An introduction of current important topics

Food recall and traceability
Ms. Usa Bamrunghuet, Senior Standards Officer, Office of Standard, THAILAND made her presentation on the subject “Establishment of Codex Standards relevant to Food Recall and Traceability”. She dealt at length on the various standards related to food recall, traceability and product tracing, food safety emergency plan, the various principles, need for further guidance on traceability/product tracing. The benefits of traceability and product tracing were elucidated by her.

Dr. Ponprome Chairidchai, Director of Information and Technology Center, Bangkok gave his talk on “Implementation of Traceability in Thailand”. He described the facilities developed in Thailand by illustrating the Agriculture Commodity Food Standards traceability project, highlighting the regulations including Agriculture Standards Act. Other aspects presented by him included the record system, use of data input software, bar code, RFID and so on. As part of the regional collaboration, the ADB Initiative on ASEAN Traceability system with its various steps such as promotion for wider adoption, standardization of traceability data, standardization of information transfer, standard coding system and the regulatory system was explained.

Microbiological risk assessment and risk management
Dr. Stephen W Page, Advanced Veterinary Therapeutics, Sydney highlighted the importance of food safety quoting newspaper reports, scientific papers and reports, and the changing global scenario. After introducing the tool of risk analysis, he elaborated the principles and guidelines for the conduct of microbiological risk assessment with specific examples and referred to the various Codex documents in detail. Risk assessment was explained using the example of Listeria monocytogenes in Deli meat posing the greatest risk of Listeriosis. For managing risks, Dr Page provided the details of many valuable resources including the CAC guidelines for the control of Campylobacter and Salmonella in chicken meat and Codex texts, other publications and links. He concluded his talk by referring to future challenges of microbial food safety by citing the drivers, sources, pathways and outcome.
Antimicrobial resistance
Dr. Sun Lay Kruy, Deputy Director of Pasteur Institute, Phnom Penh described how antimicrobial resistance is a public health concern by providing examples of how humans can be infected after food ingestion or handling with zoonotic bacteria such as *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter* and *E.coli*. Proper prevention and control measures should be applied and there should not be unnecessary antimicrobial use.

Presenting the highlights of implementation of AMR research in Cambodia, she explained that *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* isolates from poultry samples and only *Salmonella* isolates from human samples were isolated and the results would be useful in articulating policies on food safety and the implementation of public health. She demonstrated the importance of research on antimicrobial resistance and recommended the setting up of an integrated surveillance system in developing countries.

**Codex activities in the area of food standard setting in ASEAN countries**

The session was initiated with a presentation by Dr. Ramesh Bhat, International Consultant, on Status of implementing International standards at national level in ASEAN countries - analysis result of questionnaire.

This was followed by country presentations from 9 ASEAN countries viz., Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam on the current activities for implementing Codex standards in a structured format, providing information of their respective countries on

i) Structure of the Food control system
ii) Level of Codex implementation
iii) Process of standard setting activities
iv) System for data collection and analysis
v) Prioritized needs of capacity building for effective implementation of Codex Standards.

**Prioritized subjects and areas for future activities in the Project**

In this session, Dr. Ramesh Bhat, presented an analysis of replies of the questionnaire on specific national interest area for future work, as well as prioritized subjects for Regional workshops, Regional training courses, Case studies, Guidance documents, and other activities.

Ms. Shashi Sareen supported the group discussion exercise. Three groups were formed as below. These groups were asked to discuss amongst their groups and come up with subjects in the areas assigned to them.

Group A; Prioritized subject for Regional Workshops,
Group B; Prioritized subject for Regional training courses,
Group C; Prioritized subject for Case studies, Guidance documents, and other activities.
The groups identified the subjects as follows:

**Group A**

**Prioritized subjects for Regional Workshops**

1. Setting up National Food Control System
2. Food Safety Standard based on the risk and the cost-benefit analysis for food contaminant
3. Data sampling technique
4. Risk Assessment for imported Food
5. Harmonization of Codex Standard and voluntary private standard and its effect to trade
6. Food quality and safety through best practices in food inspection and surveillance
7. Standard guidance on product traceability
8. Codex standard utilization at national level

As there will only be 4 or possibly 5 more workshops during the course of the project, it was agreed that the above subjects would be duly considered while organizing the workshops.

**Group B**

**Prioritized subjects for training programmes**

1. Risk Assessment (Chemical, Microbiological and nutritional)
2. Risk Analysis, Cost benefit Analysis, Risk Management (priority on Cost Benefit Analysis)
3. Data Sampling, Data Generation
4. Standard, standardization
5. Technical Subjects (General)

It was suggested that the training courses would cover more technical aspects of food safety risk analysis, data sampling and standardization according to Reference Health Standards. There was emphasis placed on cost-benefit analysis of implementing Codex standards, as this was identified as an area of insufficient knowledge in most ASEAN countries.

**Group C**

**Prioritized subjects for Case studies**

1. Risk assessment of Cadmium in Rice
2. Data collection
3. Traceability system for fish and fishery products
4. Data sampling technology

**Prioritized subjects for guidance documents**

1. Traceability system
2. Microbiological and chemical risk assessment modelling
3. Data sampling technology

It was also emphasized by the group that the case study on data collection on standards setting for edible insects, which is an important priority as identified in the recent technical
consultation meeting.

At the plenary discussions chaired by Ms Shashi Sareen, it was observed that there was significant overlap in the topics suggested for various programmes. It was agreed that based on the above suggestions as well as the newer developments, the work on case studies and guidance documents will be initiated early. Organizing the first training back-to-back with CCFICS will also be explored.

**Field visit**

Participants were provided with an opportunity to visit the National CODEX contact point in Thailand at the National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards (ACFS). Presentations were made on the following aspects by the staff of the NBACFS.

1. Implementation of Codex Standards
   - i) Codex Contact Point of Thailand
   - ii) The Establishment of Thai MRLs and Food Consumption Data
2. The Role of ACFS as the Accreditation Body (AB)
3. The Role of ACFS as the SPS Contact Point

The agenda, list of the participants, presentation paper are now available on the website below.

**Website of the Project.**

A website of the project [http://foodsafetyasiapacific.net](http://foodsafetyasiapacific.net) has been recently developed and gives details on some information of this project. It also gives the detailed publications of completed project, “Enhancing Food Safety by Strengthening Food Inspection Systems in ASEAN countries - GCP/RAS/222/JPN”.

**Food Safety Standards in ASEAN Countries**

Based on information collected from countries through national focal points and participants at the inception workshop a document on **Status of National Codex Activities in ASEAN Countries** has been compiled and published. This will shortly be available on the project website [http://foodsafetyasiapacific.net](http://foodsafetyasiapacific.net).
Coming events

Side event of 18th CCASIA

A side event on “Strengthening Standard Setting and Implementation of International Food Safety” is being organized on November 7 (Wednesday) 2012, from 13:30 to 14:30 during the 18th FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Asia CCASIA in Tokyo, which will highlight the activities of the project. This side event is open to all participants in CCASIA and is aiming to
1) Disseminate and share information on the current situation of countries in the Region in relation to Codex standards setting and implementation
2) Present and share the information on various projects/activities related to Codex standards setting and implementation
3) Discuss and identify prioritised subject for future activities for capacity building in this region in relation to Codex standards

Other Side event and Workshop of 18th CCASIA

Training Workshop on understanding regional standards
November 4 (Sunday), 9:30-17:30

FAO Food Safety/Quality programme in the age of private food standards
November 8 (Thursday), 9:30-12:00

Readers are welcome to provide their feedback on the newsletter.
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