



Reference Document
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Proposed Establishment of the CAREC Regional Food Safety Network

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TA 9274-REG: Strengthening International Standards in Agricultural Value Chains in the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Member Countries

Proposed Establishment of the CAREC Regional Food Safety Network

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I. THE PROPOSAL

A. Rationale

1. **Food safety situation in the world.** In 2017, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that unsafe food result in more than 200 diseases, which range from diarrhea to cancers.¹ Consumption of these unsafe food products have resulted in around 600 million cases of illness and approximately 420,000 cases of deaths every year, where the majority of these cases of morbidity and mortality occur in developing countries. WHO surveys indicates that developing countries have significantly higher rates of food borne illnesses than that found in developed countries.² Food exporters from such countries also face far higher technical barriers to trade.

2. **Food safety situation in the CAREC region.** Consumers in the CAREC region are facing higher food safety risks than in other developed countries because of the fragmented nature of existing systems used to control food safety and outdated technical regulations. The CAREC region is also home to about 25% of the global population, but accounts for less than 1% of global trade despite being significant food producers in many cases.

3. The food control systems in CAREC member countries demonstrate wide variations in structure and design, but most countries in the region have fractured food safety control systems that exhibit limited cooperation among local and international agencies, like the Codex Alimentarius Commission.³ There are, in fact, few formal mechanisms in place to encourage sharing of food safety control information and collaboration in most CAREC member countries. Most CAREC member countries have outdated systems and standards that are typically based on individual product standards and substantial end-product testing that are not consistent with that of World Trade Organization (WTO) Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) standards. For example, few CAREC member countries have regulatory measures in place for dealing with *Listeria monocytogenes*, which is internationally recognized as one of the most serious food safety hazards worldwide.

4. **International best practices in managing food safety.** Internationally adopted process for managing food safety requires: (i) hazard identification and characterization, which involves identification of sources of food contaminants and the qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the nature of adverse health effects; (ii) hazard analysis, which establishes the severity of impacts of various food hazards; (iii) risk characterization, which encompasses qualitative and/or quantitative estimation of the probabilities of occurrence of various hazards at different sources; and (iv) designing measures to minimize the occurrence of the hazard.

5. Since food can become contaminated at any point from production to final consumption, it is essential to manage food hazards throughout the food supply chain. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) guidance advocates food safety systems that are

¹ WHO reports that these food products contain harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites, prions, and/or chemicals (naturally occurring toxins, persistent organic pollutants, and heavy metals).

² World Health Organization. 2015. *Global Burden of Disease*. Geneva.

³ The Codex Alimentarius Commission is the joint FAO-WHO standard setting body that is recognized in the WTO SPS Agreement. Codex Standards, Codes of Practices and Guidelines are science-based and adopted by member countries world-wide.

science- and/or risk-based. These systems involve managing food risks from “farm to fork” through (i) production system processes that target potential hazards before they become risks using preventative control measures (based on Good Hygiene and Good Manufacturing Practices and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points), and (ii) specific measures targeting highest risk microbiological and chemical hazards—like *Listeria monocytogenes*.⁴ Regulatory requirements for such systems are based on the standards and guidance provided by the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Moreover, such systems should also be responsive to changes in food production and processing technologies, and food consumption patterns as these continue to evolve.

6. These food safety systems require substantial information and effective coordination at the organizational, national, and global levels, particularly in the design and implementation of technical regulations and risk-based inspection, testing requirements and enforcement. Therefore, it is essential that mechanisms for sharing of information and coordination of inspection and enforcement efforts in-country and across-borders be in place to ensure such systems operate effectively and at lowest cost.

B. Proposed Solutions

7. Food safety agency representatives from eleven (11) CAREC member countries⁵ met at the regional consultation workshop in Tashkent City, the Republic of Uzbekistan on 23–24 May 2019 to discuss options for improving coordination and information sharing within and between countries and agreed to recommend the establishment of a CAREC regional food safety network (“the Network”).

8. The Network would provide a vehicle for:
- (i) Assisting food safety regulatory and standard agencies in member countries pursuing the harmonization of national standards with Codex standards and development of regional standards and co-ordination of food controls, where appropriate;
 - (ii) Coordinating input into Codex committees and standard consultations based on risk analysis processes;
 - (iii) Sharing of information on:
 - (a) Authorized food safety and/or customs agencies contact points and contact details and INFOSAN contact points;
 - (b) Scientific data and risk analysis information;
 - (c) National legislation, regulations and control systems—including, traceability and introduction of management systems in food safety (GHP, GMP, and HACCP)—to aid in regional export and import management and assessment;
 - (d) Key technical specialists in areas like microbiology, chemical and physical analysis, toxicology, and food-processing technologies;
 - (e) Experiences from national operations; and
 - (f) Training.

⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization—World Health Organization. (undated). *Assuring Food Safety and Quality, Guidelines for Strengthening National Food Control Systems*. Rome. (FAO Food and Nutrition Paper No. 76 <http://www.fao.org/3/a-y8705e.pdf> [accessed 30 May 2019]).

⁵ These are: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, People’s Republic of China, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

- (iv) Sharing of expertise on risk analysis, traceability, introduction of food safety management systems (GHP, GMP and HACCP) among member countries.

9. The Network would have a website and electronic means of sharing information and discussing issues and would physically meet once a year. The proposed Terms of Reference for the Network agreed by CAREC food safety agency attendees at the 23–24 May 2019 workshop is in the Attachment.

C. Proposed Financing Plan

10. It is proposed that ADB will finance the development of the website and electronic sharing platform for members of the Network and the expenses related to the first meeting of the Network which is proposed for the first quarter of 2020, subject to the endorsement of the Network establishment.

11. Member countries will need to agree on how to finance the expenses of subsequent annual meetings and for maintaining the electronic discussion platforms and the website—including the costs of uploading information on the website. It is estimated that total costs are in the range of US\$70,000–US\$80,000 per annum.

D. Proposed Implementation Arrangements

12. The Network will be hosted by CAREC member countries on a voluntary basis. Countries which have strong interest will be first considered. The hosting of the Network could also be rotated among CAREC countries based on certain criteria agreed by all. The TA 9274-REG team will work with the identified hosting country to finalize the first hosting arrangements.

13. Should the Terms of Reference for the Network be officially endorsed, the TA 9274-REG project team will:

- (i) work with national food safety agencies in all member countries to upload some of the basic information identified (including contact points and legislation and key regulations);
- (ii) set up an electronic discussion platform for Network members to utilize and guide national agencies on how to use the platform;
- (iii) assist in the preparation for the first meeting of the Network in 2020 including the preparation of the agenda and working papers; and
- (iv) support for the first host country in the Network administration tasks.

E. Risks and Mitigation Measures

14. In light of the design of the Network—i.e., to facilitate and assist—and its relatively low costs, its administration and operationalization have relatively low risks. The two key risks and their mitigations are as follows:

Key Risks	Mitigation Measures
Lack of support for and engagement in the Network	Electronic platform and website will be designed for easy access and use.
Inappropriate sharing of information	Information and documents for sharing will only include those publicly available and/or cleared by relevant national authorities for public

	disclosure.
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II. DECISION-MAKING ITEMS

A. Proposal for the Network Establishment

15. Endorsement by the Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) is sought for **the draft Terms of Reference for the proposed CAREC Food Safety Network** as outlined in the Attachment.

B. Implementation Arrangements

16. The SOM is requested to decide the host/chair country of the Network in 2020 based on expression of interest.

17. Endorsement by the Senior Officials Meeting is sought for the TA 9274-REG team to:

- (i) work with national food safety agencies in all member countries to upload some of the basic information identified (including contact points and legislation and key regulations);
- (ii) set up an electronic discussion platform for Network members to utilize and guide national agencies on how to use the platform;
- (iii) assist in the preparation for the first meeting of the Network in 2020 including the preparation of the agenda and working papers in coordination with the host country; and
- (iv) support the first host country in the Network administration tasks.

C. Financing Plan

18. Endorsement by the SOM is sought for:

- (i) either the host country (to be determined annually) to finance the cost of administering the Network including its website and electronic discussion platform (estimated to be in the range of US\$70,000–US\$80,000 per annum), or each member country to contribute an equal share of the Network administration cost through its CAREC national office; and
- (ii) each member country to finance the cost of sending national representatives to attend the Network annual meetings, and associated training when required.

DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE CENTRAL ASIA REGIONAL ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION (CAREC) REGIONAL FOOD SAFETY NETWORK

1. In light of the desire across CAREC member countries to upgrade their food safety systems to improve public health and export prospects, and the need to align with World Trade Organization standards in order to do so, a regional CAREC food safety network is proposed.

I. Proposed Purposes

2. The Regional CAREC Food Safety Network would be tasked with:
- (i) Assisting food safety regulatory and standards agencies in member countries in pursuing the harmonization of national standards with Codex standards, and the development of regional standards and co-ordination of food controls, where appropriate;
 - (ii) Coordinating input into Codex committees and standards consultations based on risk analysis processes; and
 - (iii) Sharing of information on:
 - (a) Authorized food safety and/or customs agencies contact points and contact details, and INFOSAN contact points;
 - (b) Scientific data and risk analysis information;
 - (c) National legislation, regulations and control systems—including, traceability, and introduction of management systems in food safety (GHP, GMP, and HACCP)—to aid in regional export and import management and assessment;
 - (d) Key technical specialists in areas including microbiology, chemical and physical analysis, toxicology, and food-processing technologies;
 - (e) Experiences from national operations; and
 - (f) Training
 - (iv) Sharing of expertise on risk analysis, traceability, introduction of food safety management systems (GHP, GMP and HACCP) among member countries.

II. Proposed Outputs

3. Key outputs of the committee would therefore include:
- (i) Guidance on model examples of Codex-harmonized national and regional standards;
 - (ii) Advice on inputs to Codex committees;
 - (iii) A list of key agency contacts and their details by function and country, made available through the Network portal;
 - (iv) An online list of information summarizing the regulatory control regimes in place in each CAREC country; and
 - (v) An online database of regional technical experts in microbiology, chemical analysis and toxicology, INFOSAN and other experts.

III. Proposed Logistics

4. The Network would be a CAREC expert group under the CAREC Regional Trade Group and managed in step with the rotational host of the overall program, i.e., the chair of the Network would rotate annually by country.

5. The food safety agencies in each of the countries would determine their members for the Committee, and the Committee could have the ability to co-opt or use additional expertise when required for managing specific issues and/or set up expert subcommittees to advise on particular issues if necessary.

6. An electronic discussion platform and email group would be set up to allow members to communicate via these mechanisms. The Network would meet physically once a year (first meeting to be financed by ADB TA 9274-REG). Subsequent meetings will be funded by member countries subject to further approval by the Senior Officials Meeting.

7. The country chairing the Network could take responsibility for the provision of information to the CAREC web-portal.