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**DEFINING THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND TASKS OF DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS
WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR FOOD CONTROL**
(Prepared by Canada)

1. Introduction

Canada is of the view of that collaboration of all stakeholders in the food continuum (feed manufacturers, primary producers, food manufacturers/operators, government authorities, consumers) is essential to ensure a comprehensive and integrated approach to the availability of a safe and nutritious food supply. Government has the primary responsibility for identifying and assessing health risks associated with the food supply, and developing national strategies to manage the risks. Industry has the primary responsibility for the safety of its products and for providing appropriate information to permit consumers to make informed choices. Consumers have the right to be informed about the potential health risks and benefits associated with food and have the responsibility to use this information.

One of the fundamental principles of Canada's food safety system is that the health of the population must remain paramount. However, Canada's demography creates a unique challenge to achieving the objective of protecting and optimizing the health of Canadians through a safe and nutritious food supply. As the second largest country in the world, geographically, Canada is divided into ten provinces and three territories, with a population of only 32 million, 80% of whom live in urban areas. The majority of the urban centres are located in a corridor along the Canada-United States border, which leaves the largest part of Canada sparsely populated. In this setting, the success of Canada's food safety system depends on close working partnerships amongst federal, provincial, territorial and municipal authorities, industry and consumers. Governments collaborate in areas of shared jurisdiction, such as food inspection, to provide effective and efficient program delivery. Industry associations, academia and consumer, environmental and health groups contribute to the work of governments to provide a consistent, comprehensive and scientifically sound mechanism to identify, assess and manage potential risks to health while providing Canadians with a high quality, nutritious, abundant and affordable food supply.

Key to ensuring effectiveness of the various regulatory agencies within a multi-jurisdictional and multi-stakeholder system is a focus on understanding and clarifying roles and developing effective mechanisms to support the identified roles.

2. Integration of national and sub-national jurisdictions within the food safety system

Canada recognizes the need to strengthen and integrate federal, provincial and territorial programs for the safety and nutritional quality of food. Enhancing inter-agency cooperation and coordination is essential to effectively manage food risks and benefits, preclude gaps, and to establish collaborative decision-making

processes in areas of shared jurisdiction.

Major governmental initiatives, which have contributed to an enhanced national strategy for food control, include the *Blueprint for the Canadian Food Inspection System* (1994); the creation of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (1997); and the *Agriculture Policy Framework* (APF) (2002). In addition to these major initiatives, federal, provincial and territorial governments continue to develop national approaches, such as: the Canada Foodborne Illness Outbreak Response Protocol (June 2004); and the Canadian Code of Practice - General Principles of Food Hygiene (May 2004).

2.1 *Blueprint for the Canadian Food Inspection System*

In 1994, federal and provincial governments endorsed the development of a National Food Inspection Policy, based on *The Blueprint Document for the Canadian Food Inspection System (CFIS)* aimed at providing an Integrated Food Inspection System which is Responsive to both Consumers and Industry. The CFIS goals are:

- < High quality, safe food supply
- < Harmonized standards
- < Cost-effective inspection system
- < Enhanced access to markets by Canadian food producers
- < Risk-based inspection system
- < Protection from economic fraud

Through its national working groups and committees, the CFIS Implementation Group continues its work on the development of a common legislative base and harmonized national standards and codes of practices, such as the national codes for dairy, meat and poultry, food retail and food services, and bottled water. In May 2004, the Canadian Code of Practice - General Principles of Food Hygiene was adopted, which provides a firm foundation for good manufacturing and hygienic practices to be applied by the food industry in Canada. The Canadian Code is based on the Recommended International Code of Practice - General Principles of Food Hygiene adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission. (Information on these codes is available from www.cfis.agr.ca)

2.2 *Creation of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency*

The Government of Canada, in an effort to enhance effectiveness and efficiency, consolidated federally mandated food and fish inspection and animal and plant health activities into a single federal agency, reporting to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. On April 1, 1997, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) was established and brought together all federal food inspection activities. The CFIA was given a mandate to enter into bilateral agreements on food inspection with the provinces and territories thus providing a mechanism to move forward on integrating food inspection in Canada.

More information on the creation of the CFIA can be found in the Country Paper prepared by Canada under Agenda item 4 - Institutional Reforms of the Canadian Food Safety System.

2.3 *The Agriculture Policy Framework*

The Agriculture Policy Framework (APF), signed by federal, provincial and territorial Agriculture Ministers in 2002, is a broad ranging and innovative national public policy initiative that has five elements:

financial risk management; enhancement of food safety; environmental stewardship; renewal; and broadening the use of science.

Under the Chapter on Food Safety and Quality, significant steps are being taken to align government programs with the emerging demands of the marketplace, and to incorporate industry's voluntary efforts in critical areas such as on-farm food safety, traceability and quality assurance systems to better meet their responsibilities related to the safety of their products in the food continuum, and address evolving consumer requirements. For example, many agricultural sectors are developing Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) or HACCP-based systems adapted to their commodities. Under the APF, federal, provincial and territorial governments have agreed to a matching funds program to support industry development of HACCP and HACCP-based systems.

Some of the key federal initiatives under the APF include:

- < On-farm food safety research and standards setting
- < National integrated enteric pathogen surveillance
- < Human impact of on-farm antimicrobial use
- < Water quality surveillance program
- < National government recognition of industry developed on-farm food safety programs
- < Medicated feed regulations

More information on HACCP implementation can be found in the Country Paper prepared by Canada under Agenda item 4.4 - How Official Services Foster and Enforce the Implementation of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) Methodology by Industry and Trade.

2.4 *Foodborne Illness Investigation*

In July 2004, an updated Canada Foodborne Illness Outbreak Response Protocol (FIORP) was adopted to respond to multi-jurisdictional food borne illness outbreak situations. The revised FIORP, developed through federal, provincial and territorial government collaboration, is a key procedural document in national emergency preparedness and formalizes best practices among the key partners in responding to potential multi-jurisdictional food borne illness outbreaks.

3. Facilitating the role of the non-governmental stakeholders in the food safety system

Food safety is the responsibility of all stakeholders along the food continuum and partnerships have been established with the public, private and academic sectors to foster collaboration on key system issues.

3.1 *Involving Academia*

While governments retain the ultimate decision-making authority and accountability, Expert Advisory Committees are established to assist in program or policy decisions. These Committees provide independent sources of information, bring leading-edge knowledge, provide a mechanism to communicate policies externally, and increase the transparency of the decision-making process. For example, the Ministers of Health, Agriculture and Agri-Food, and Environment established an independent panel to provide objective expert advice on the science capacity needed to continue to ensure the safety of new food products being developed through biotechnology into the 21st century. The Royal Society Expert Scientific Panel on the Future of Food

Biotechnology released its report in February 2001. More recently, discussions have been initiated to establish a Pan-Canadian Framework on Health Information to facilitate a coordinated approach with academia in research on disease surveillance, including food borne diseases.

3.2 Partnerships

3.2.1 Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education

Communication between industry, health, environmental and consumer organizations, and federal and provincial government agencies concerned with food safety, resulted in the formation of the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education with the mandate to "Contribute to the reduction of microbial food borne illness in Canada by increasing awareness of safe food handling practices through the coordination and delivery of food safety education programs focused on the consumer. This non-profit organization is a national association of more than 50 public and private organizations committed to educating Canadians about the ease and importance of food safety in the home.

3.2.2 Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition

Industry has primary responsibility for the safety and quality of its food products, and to provide a reasonable level of descriptive product information to permit consumers to make informed decisions. It is thus important that an ongoing dialogue be maintained between industry and the regulatory agencies along the food continuum. The Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition was founded in 2000 through the joint action of industry associations along the food continuum. Its mandate is to provide a coordinated input on industry-wide food safety issues with the public and with governments and serve as a mechanism for dialogue and consultation. The Coalition is composed of national and provincial associations representing all sectors from input suppliers through primary production, processing, manufacturing, transportation, distribution to final marketing at retail or in foodservice. The Coalition works to foster collaboration with governments and consumer groups on a national, co-coordinated approach to food safety, one that emphasizes consultation, harmonization and transparency.

4. Canada continues to work to improve its food safety system

In an increasingly competitive globalized economy, all levels of government and the private sector are faced with the challenge of responding to consumers' expectations for a Canadian food system that ensures a safe, nutritious, high quality, abundant, affordable and varied food supply. Concurrently, governments and industry strive to foster a competitive, profitable and sustainable food sector at every segment of the food continuum.

Examples of current challenges that require a more integrated and coordinated approach include:

- < Rapidly evolving science: new technologies (e.g., nanotechnology, nutraceuticals, genetic engineering); better detection methods for contaminants; new scientific understanding of linkages between food and health; coordinated and efficient identification of emerging hazards and the challenges they pose to the food safety control system.
- < Increased globalization: changes in consumer tastes and eating habits; standards developed in a more global environment with the resulting demands on industry and more complex requirements for food safety governance; increased range of food borne hazards (e.g., BSE); rising dependency on export markets; changing structure of industry (Multi-National Corporations vs. Small and Medium Enterprises); increased role and responsibility of industry; increased risk to the integrity of Canada's

food supply.

- < Increased consumer awareness: rise in social advocacy; demands for dissemination of information that relates to nutrition, health and safety, production and processing practices; expectations for due diligence; recognition that food plays a significant role in the health of the population; greater awareness of linkages between animal health and human health; stakeholders demanding a more active role in the governance of food safety (e.g., formulation of standards, regulations, surveillance, control measures).

In face of such challenges, governments and industry recognize the interconnectedness between securing consumer confidence and pursuing greater economic prosperity of the agri-food industry. As the understanding of the opportunities of such an interconnectedness emerges, so does the recognition for the need to address food issues in Canada from a holistic perspective, one encompassing the food sector in its entirety, from input-production to end-consumer. To facilitate and support this new holistic approach, it is imperative to clarify the roles of all those involved in the food continuum (e.g., constitutional mandates and authorities of the governments involved).

Future enhancement of the system will need to balance both the public health and economic considerations and to look for synergies that will bring added value to consumers and industry.

Some key aims for additional enhancements to the system are to:

- < Foster the uniform adoption and application of science-based food safety programs, standards and regulations;
- < Provide a policy and regulatory environment and infrastructure that supports industry's effort to maintain and develop market access, secure/promote brand recognition, stimulate investment for innovation and value-added opportunities;
- < Provide the tools to develop and implement harmonized compliance, enforcement, and inspection programs and activities, as well as traceability and emergency systems; and
- < Foster a healthy lifestyle and contribute to good nutrition through enhanced prevention and promotion methods.

5. Conclusion

While Canada's food safety system is working well, continued improvement in efficiencies and success will require collaboration of everyone involved in the food continuum. Balancing the importance of safe and nutritious food while fostering a competitive, profitable and sustainable food sector at every segment of the food continuum will be challenging and will require clarity of roles and strengthened linkages among governments, consumers and industry. Future system enhancements aim to improve Canada's ability to meet the challenges ahead and to maintain its position as an innovator, processor and marketer of safe, high-quality food products.