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COUNTRY REPORT PROPOSED BY THE PHILIPPINES

by

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SUMMARY:

Regulatory Issues

The implementation of food safety measures in the Philippines directed on four strategies, namely; 1) licensing and inspection of food establishments; 2) product registration; 3) monitoring of trade outlets, and 4) monitoring of product advertisements. GMP is the basic requirement by the Bureau of Food and Drugs (BFAD) before a License to Operate (LTO) is given to establishments which manufacture processed foods. BFAD inspection activities also indicate that HACCP application is extensively applied only by the processed seafood sector, which are exporting where HACCP is a mandatory requirement.

Aware of the many issues on food safety raised by the industry and the consumers, BFAD organized a Joint BFAD Industry Committee on Food to review existing policies, propose and develop strategies and provide inputs to address relevant issues affecting consumers, food processors including those of international concerns. BFAD believes that through the joint efforts the objective will be realized and implementation and enforcement of policies agreed upon by the committee can then be easily achieved.

Risk Management

Alarmed of the emergence of food borne disease incidence, the national government in 1998, created through an Executive Order the National Food Security Council Under this, a National Food Safety Committee was organized to formulate National Food Safety Policy Program. Together with partner agencies a consultative meeting was convened to discuss and formulate of a framework for a National Food Safety initiative.

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Several issues were raised in the consultative meetings and the committee came up with the following recommendations.

1. Formulation and issuance of a national policy on Food Safety.
2. Review critical areas of the food chain which are unprotected by laws or regulations and standards.
3. Development of a comprehensive Food Disease Surveillance System
4. Develop detection methodologies and assessment in the emergence of GMOs.

Action plans were formulated to come up with strategies to be implemented in 3 phases with Phase I (2002-2004), Phase II (2005-2007) and Phase III (2005-2007). The reason for the three year coverage of implementation with the change in leadership at the lowest implementation level, which is at the Local Government Units.

Communication and Participation

Food safety is a shared responsibility of the government food industry and the consumers. A multisectoral and non government organization was initiated, it is aimed to empower the consumers by providing them with scientifically sound, correct current and convincing data about food safety using the Information Technology. The Food Safe Network Philippines (FoodSafeNet Phil.) is a multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral movement of autonomous bodies acting together toward a common goal-**FOOD SAFETY**.

I. INTRODUCTION

Food safety has been gaining increased attention lately due to the following:

- increasing number of food-borne illnesses worldwide
- factors such as globalization, production efficiency techniques and the high level of uncertainty surrounding existing and emerging food-borne risks
- public interest in microbial food safety and dietary concerns

It is important to note that the food safety affects one country's security, economy and political stability. Food quality on the other hand is also an important issue. Quality makes a product what it is. Ignoring quality leads to erosion of profits, escalation of prices and loss of business.

Thus, it is important that a comprehensive control procedure in the food chain to ensure the production of safe and high quality food are maintained.

II. THE PHILIPPINE FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRY

The food processing industry is an important sector of the Philippine economy. It is composed of establishments engaged in the processing/manufacturing and distribution of food and food products.

The major processed food sectors include the following:

- Fruits and vegetables
- Fish and marine products
- Meat and poultry products
- Flour and bakery products
- Beverage and confectionery
- Dairy foods
- Food condiments and seasonings
- Food supplements
- Bottled water
- Snack foods
- Fats and oils

III. FOOD REGULATION

The Bureau of Food And Drugs (BFAD) was created by Republic Act 3720 mandated to enforce and administer the law, “ it is the policy of the state to ensure safe and good quality food, drug and cosmetics and regulate the production, sale and traffic of the same to protect the health of the consumer”.

Republic Act 7394 (Consumer Act of the Philippines) reiterated BFAD's mandate “to protect consumers from adulterated or unsafe product with false, deceptive and misleading information”. The enforcement activities have been focused on four (4) strategies, namely; 1) licensing and inspection of food establishments; 2) product registration; 3) monitoring of trade outlets, and 4) monitoring of product advertisements and process.

BFAD is carrying out its regulatory functions and has been in coordination with the food processors. Among the activities that BFAD undertake to assist the food processors are as follows:

- establish partnership with other government agencies to help food processor meet international market requirements and develop/update standard in line with Codex
- provide information relevant to regulatory requirements both local and international

Lately, (1999), DOH management realized that regulation of food area needs attention due to many issues raised by consumers and food manufacturers. As a result of this efforts to strengthen the Food Control System (FCS) of BFAD were initiated in the year 2000.

One of the activities under BFAD's FCS strengthening is the Joint BFAD-Industry Committee on Food. This was organized by BFAD in October, 2000 to address mutual concerns of BFAD and the food industry in the enforcement of regulations relative to food safety and quality. The joint committee also considers projects that will promote the enhancement of the consumer protection and fair trade practice. Through this partnership the following specific objectives were set:

1. Review existing and/or proposed policies and procedures relative to food safety and quality assurance by the food processing industry;
2. Develop strategies for ensuring industry's adherence to the pertinent rules and regulations;
3. Provide inputs to address relevant issues affecting consumers and producers of processed foods including those concerning international trade; and
4. Implement and enforce policies and procedures agreed upon by the Joint Committee

The structure of this partnership is composed of a Core Group and a Technical Working Group (TWG) to handle specific tasks. The Core group is made up of seven representatives from BFAD and ten representatives from the food industry represented by the Philippine Chamber of Food Manufacturers Inc. Initial TWG's were identified such as:

- TWG on Codification of Food Laws and Regulations
- TWG on Systems and Procedures on Licensing and Registration
- TWG on Food Standards
- TWG on Food Labelling

Other TWGs may be created as deemed necessary to support the work and programs of the Joint Committee.

IV. CONTROL MEASURES TO ADDRESS SAFETY AND QUALITY IN THE PROCESSED FOOD INDUSTRY

1. Hygienic Safety Manufacturing Practices (GMP)

GMP covers the fundamental principles, procedures and means needed to design a suitable environment for the production of acceptable quality. GMP codes and the hygienic requirements they contain are the relevant conditions for the hygienic manufacture of foods.

GMP is a basic requirement by BFAD before a License to Operate (LTO) is given to establishments which manufacture processed foods. Food processors are required to comply with A.O. 208 otherwise known as current Good Manufacturing Practices (cGMP) and company's established standard operating procedures.

- Building and grounds
- Equipment and other facilities
- Sanitary facilities and control
- Sanitary operations
- Processes and control
- Personnel

Presently, there are some food processors that are faced with difficulties for GMP compliance particularly small and medium enterprises' (SME) plants for reasons that complying with GMP required capital to correct structural deficiencies, technical assistance to support in-house knowledge and a commitment to change attitudes and values at the level of both management and worker.

2. Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP)

HACCP is a system of food safety control based on a systematic approach to the identification and assessment of hazard associated with food operations and the definition of means for their control (Bryan, 1988). HACCP is also becoming increasingly important for all food businesses as an effective means of ensuring food safety. HACCP identifies before they occur, and establish mechanisms for their control at the stages in production critical to ensuring the safety of food. The control is proactive. The chief advantage of HACCP is that it is proactive; it aims to prevent problems from occurring. HACCP is a trial rather than relying mainly on end product testing.

In the Philippines, some companies of processed foods are adopting principles of HACCP as a minimum system of quality control of raw materials and manufacturing technologies. BFAD inspection activities as a member of the Joint Management Committee (JMC) also indicate that HACCP application is extensively applied only by the processed seafood sector particularly those, which are exporting where HACCP is a mandatory requirement. However, the level of application needs improvement particularly the medium scale plants, which cannot continuously implement HACCP effectively for reasons, lack of adequate knowledge on HACCP and company commitment and resources. For small-scale plants, HACCP is not yet being applied due to lack of technical personnel with knowledge on HACCP.

As mentioned earlier, the exporter of processed seafood products particularly to the US extensively applies HACCP. It is part of the US regulation requiring every exporter of fish and fishery products to apply HACCP in the production of such products Part 123 of Title 21 of Title 21 of the US Code of Federal Regulations.

The JMC composed of BFAD, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and Food Development Center (FDC) is implementing a voluntary accreditation of HACCP to help seafood establishments comply with such requirements. The three (3) government agencies harmonized their inspection and decision-making procedures for food plant accreditation by conducting joint inspection and audit of seafood processing plants. The plant inspection checklist used covers 8 areas of Standards Sanitary Operating Procedures (SSOP) and HACCP Plan submitted by the company.

3. Safety and Quality Standards

Food Processors also adopt standards of quality for processed foods. BFAD has standards for some of the processed products. In the absence of a particular standard, food processors use the Codex and US CFR for reference. With the entry of the Philippines into the General Agreement of Tariff and Trade, setting of standards is geared towards making Philippine product standards equivalent to those of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) since Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement considers Codex standards as one of the international reference for food safety standards.

V. CHALLENGES TO FOOD PROCESSORS AND MEASURES ADOPTED

Food processors are faced with challenges involving safety and quality of the products they produced. Food processors in the Philippines should earn their market share with a proven record for quality and safety. This is heightened especially today, now that a wide variety of foods flooded the market brought about by globalization. For local processed food to be globally competitive with other exporting countries, food processors must take preventive and proactive role to ensure safety and quality of their products. These can be achieved by the following :

- responsive to address safety and quality control by integrating hygienic practice and start embracing HACCP principles as a primary means to achieve food safety
- invest in plant sanitation and maintenance

The following are actions necessary to prepare food processors in meeting current requirements of the export market particularly HACCP

- management commitment to provide technical assistance to strengthen the skill of personnel through training
- continue innovating and adopting appropriate technology quickly to meet market demands

Food processors initiate activities that help them handle and resolve issues on food safety and control. Industry forms association within themselves and participate in seminars and workshops to have a better understanding of the local and international market requirements.

VI. CONCLUSION

Continuing cooperation and effective partnership between government, the food industry and the consumers is primordial to ensure production of safe and quality food. This is not only to protect the health of consumers but also to help country move towards economic recovery by providing rational and systems standards for processed foods that can compete globally.

ANNEX. THE PHILIPPINES: A COUNTRY DESCRIPTION

The Philippines is an independent nation consisting of a group of islands which stretches more than a thousand kilometers north to south between Taiwan and Borneo. It strategically lies within the arc of the nations of Myanmar, Thailand, Kampuchea, South Vietnam, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. In its extreme southeast are Papua New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand.

The Philippines is a tropical country with 7,100 islands. These islands have a total land area of 300,000 square kilometers. The two largest islands are Luzon in the north and Mindanao in the south. Between these islands lies a group of small to medium sized islands called the Visayas. It has 16 regions, 78 provinces, 82 cities, 1,525 municipalities and 41,939 barangays.

Pilipino is the national language, although English is widely spoken in business and government and it is the medium of instruction in schools. There are more than 87 dialects all over the country.

The climate is hot and humid with an average temperature of 32° C. The hottest months are from March to June when temperatures may reach 38° C. The weather from November to February is pleasantly cool and dry with temperatures around 23° C. Rains and typhoons prevail from July to October. The Philippines is prone to natural disasters brought about by volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods and typhoons. The tropical temperature favors the existence of disease vectors and parasites.

The estimated population in 1999 is 74,723,373 and projected to increase to 82,636,689 in 2004. Demographic trends indicate a decrease in ratio of rural to urban population as the country moves toward industrialization.

As a republican state, it has three co-equal branches of government- the executive, legislative and judiciary. Line functions of the executive departments have been decentralized by virtue of the local government code which increased the authority of local government units.