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**THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE ON FOOD SAFETY REGULATIONS**

*by*

*R.K. Omotayo*

*Director, Federal Ministry of Health*

*and*

*Mrs S.A. Denloye*

*Chief Regulatory Officer, National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control,  
(NAFDAC)*

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Like many other developing countries, Nigeria faces the challenge of providing adequate food supply for its teeming population. Towards this end, policies and programmes aimed at boosting agricultural and food production are being actively promoted. However, the issue of food safety poses a more daunting challenge. Like several other countries, Nigeria has to contend with the problem of food-borne diseases with their attendant social, economic and health costs.

Realising the central focus that the issue of food safety is attracting globally, Nigeria needs to take appropriate and pragmatic steps to ensure food safety and quality for domestic consumption and export. This is because food has been identified globally as not only a biological need but also as an economic and political weapon. It is constantly a potential source of socio-political problems in communities and nations. An effective national food safety policy should therefore provide the assurance that food supplied to the consumers is adequate, nutritious, of good quality and wholesome.

## 2.0 REGULATORY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. NIGERIAN POLICY ON FOOD HYGIENE AND SAFETY

In recognition of the importance of food safety as an important factor for achieving high level of health for all Nigerians, the Government of Nigeria launched the National Policy on Food Hygiene and Safety in 2000 as an integral part of the Nigerian National Health Policy. The overall goal of this policy is the attainment of high level of food hygiene and safety practices which will promote health, control food-borne diseases, minimize and finally eliminate the risk of diseases related to poor food hygiene and safety. The policy seeks to stimulate and promote legislations concerning food in areas of production, storage, handling, processing, preservation, trade, transportation and marketing. It also seeks to improve the quality of healthcare through ensuring that all food consumed in Nigeria, whether imported or exported are wholesome, nutritious, free from contaminants and accessible to the consumers at affordable price. Implementation of the policy is aimed at addressing the unsatisfactory level of food hygiene and safety practices which to a large extent is responsible for the prevalence of food-borne diseases in Nigeria.

### 2.2. NATIONAL LEGISLATIONS.

The main national legislations relating to food safety include the following:

- (a) The Public Health Laws (1917) now known as Public Health Ordinance Cap 164 of 1958;
- (b) The Food and Drugs Decree, No. 35 of 1974;
- (c) The Standards Organisation of Nigeria Decree, No. 56 of 1971;
- (d) The Animal Disease Control Decree, No. 10 of 1988;
- (e) The Marketing of Breast Milk substitute Decree, No. 41 of 1990.
- (f) The National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC) Decree No. 15 of 1993.

The need to revise, update and harmonise existing legislations on food safety has been recognised, as some of them are outdated and do not accord with current trends and advances in food safety.

### 3.0 INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT

#### 3.1. RESPONSIBILITIES FOR REGULATING AND MONITORING FOOD SAFETY STANDARDS AND PRACTICES DEVOLVE ON THE FOLLOWING GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS AND AGENCIES:

- (i) Federal Ministry of Health
- (ii) National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC)
- (iii) Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON)
- (iv) National Codex Committee
- (v) Federal Ministry of Agriculture
- (vi) States and Local Governments.

#### 3.2. THE FEDERAL MINISTRY OF HEALTH:

Federal Ministry of Health has the responsibility for formulating national policies, guidelines and regulations on food hygiene and safety as well as the monitoring of their implementation. It is also responsible for establishing guidelines for the requirements for the nutritive value of food, and monitoring of food environments and handlers, control of food borne disease, the quality of public water supply as well as national and international matters relating to food.

#### 3.3. NATIONAL AGENCY FOR FOOD ADMINISTRATION AND CONTROL (NAFDAC)

NAFDAC is the parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Health, charged with the responsibility for the regulation and control of imported and locally processed foods and bottled water, at the Federal and State levels of the government.

#### 3.4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Local Government Authority, working in collaboration with the National Primary Health Care Development Agency is responsible for regulating and monitoring and regulating street food vending, catering establishments and the traditional markets.

#### 3.5. STANDARDS ORGANISATION OF NIGERIA (SON)

The Standards Organisation of Nigeria is responsible for the formulation of standards on the composition of imported and locally manufactured foods. Over 100 standards on food and food products as well as a good number of codes of hygienic practices for food and food products have been established. These standards and codes are reviewed periodically to reflect current trends in technological and industrial development.

#### 3.6. FEDERAL MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

The Federal Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for promoting good agricultural practices and new agricultural technologies.

#### 3.7. ACTIVITIES

**3.7.1** In line with the government policy on Food Hygiene and Safety, responsible agencies are mandated to: -

- Protect the public against injury to health through the consumption of unwholesome food;
- Restrain the sale of foods which are unhygienically prepared, adulterated, contaminated, spoilt, improperly labeled;
- Ensure proper inspection and registration of all food premises;
- Conduct public health surveillance of food premises, food handlers and equipment used for food processing;
- Educate the populace on sound hygiene and safety practices;
- Ensure inter-ministerial and multi-sectional collaborative activities;

- Collaborate with non-governmental organizations and ensure community participation.

Towards the achievement of the objectives of the policy, the collective activities of the responsible agencies are performed through regulations, regular inspection and surveillance activities, registration of premises and products, laboratory certification and enforcement activities. Furthermore, company certification and award procedures for manufacturers who meet the requirements of the relevant standards are in place.

### **3.7.2. Inspection of Manufacturing Outfits:**

Realising that testing of end products alone does not assure quality and safety, high premium is placed on ascertaining compliance with Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) and application of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) system by manufacturers. Aspects ascertained under GMP include:

- Location of outfit
- Equipment and Personnel
- Master and Batch Formulae SOPs
- Production flow
- Documentation
- Handling of Complaints and Rejected/Returned Goods
- Internal Audit

### **Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP):**

The training of small-scale food processors and local government officials on HACCP application in some parts of the country is being addressed. Public enlightenment on good hygienic practices in small-scale packaged water, drinks and ices processing / manufacturing industries is on going with emphasis on HACCP system.

### **3.7.3. Regulations and Registration**

All existing food laws, standards and codes are enforced by the individual responsible agencies. However, efforts at coordinating and integrating them are ongoing. Efforts are also being made at coordinating all existing food control infrastructures and resources with a view to redefining their roles and eliminating overlap and conflict areas.

Only processed food registered in Nigeria can be marketed in the country, whether imported or locally manufactured. Registration involves reviewing all the information provided on the product by the manufacturer and marketer to enable the NAFDAC decide whether granting of marketing authorization should be allowed or not.

In addition to the routine review of national standards and their harmonization with international standards, SON also coordinates the activities of the National Codex Committee.

### **3.7.4. Laboratory Services**

NAFDAC laboratories investigate and pronounce on the quality of imported, exported and locally manufactured food products and water based on national and international standards (CODEX) and regulations. The laboratory testing aspects include: microbiological, pesticide residue, trace metals, mycotoxin analyses and radiation monitoring.

**Microbiology:** A standard laboratory built in line with European Union specifications and international norms is in place. The laboratory is involved in the quality certification of seafood such as shrimps, crabs and fish for export and import. This involves the detection of food borne pathogens viz: Salmonella, Vibro cholerae, Vibro parahaemolyticus, Listeria monocytogenes and Staph. aureus.

**Pesticide Residue:** A well-equipped pesticide residue-testing laboratory with trained manpower is operational courtesy of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Efforts at ensuring that the laboratory meets the ISO 17025 quality standards are being vigorously pursued.

**Mycotoxin:** A mycotoxin analytical laboratory, established with the assistance of IAEA is in place.

**Radiation Monitoring:** The laboratory is capable of monitoring radioisotopes of Cesium in food products.

### 3.7.5 Company Certification

The Standards Organisation of Nigeria conducts certification inspections towards rating companies' products for the National Industrial Standards (NIS) award. The award is a strategy to motivate companies to aspire towards total quality assurance in their operations.

## **4.0. AREAS OF FUTURE COLLABORATION**

The Government of Nigeria recognises that some of the major contributors to the success of any food safety programme are education and alleviation of poverty, and therefore has taken bold steps in these directions. The government has introduced the Universal Basic Education programme, which assures a free and compulsory education up to secondary school level. The Government has also introduced various programmes for training of school leavers, to prepare them for employment and to start small-scale industries.

As the government continues to strive to improve on the basic infrastructure in terms of electricity, potable water, telecommunication, adequate accommodation and environmental sanitation, it recognises also the need for an improvement in the implementation of the national food hygiene and safety policy in the following areas:

- Review, harmonisation and effective enforcement of the existing laws relating to food safety.
- Strengthening infrastructural and managerial capacity in risk analysis.
- Forging closer inter-ministerial collaboration, cooperation and coordination
- Involvement of all stakeholders in policy formulation as a key to the success of the food safety programme.
- Strengthening the capacity of states and local governments in promoting safe and hygienic practices by street food vendors and catering establishments.

Nigeria looks forward to future collaborations with participating countries and regulatory institutions in the area of capacity building in terms of manpower, infrastructure and logistics, for effective risk analysis of food safety and food security, information management and biotechnology.