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**IMPORTANCE OF STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION IN CANADA'S  
FOOD SAFETY SYSTEM**  
(Prepared by Canada)

**1. Introduction**

It is internationally recognized that protection from hazards occurring along the entire food chain is only possible if all sectors in the chain operate in an integrated way. Effective relationships and mutual support among government agencies and institutions involved in food control and other stakeholders, particularly the food industry and consumer groups, are extremely important<sup>1</sup>.

Collaboration and cooperation are essential to inform stakeholders, to give them a voice on issues of concern and to include them in the decision-making process. Stakeholder consultation and communication, from policy development to implementation of risk mitigation measures, contribute to effective and efficient program delivery for safe and nutritious food and lead to consumer confidence in the domestic food safety system.

As discussed in the Theme A Conference Room Document on *The Food Safety Regulatory System in Canada*, collaboration of all sectors and jurisdictions to protect consumers is a fundamental principle of Canada's food safety system<sup>2</sup>. Government decisions are made through well-established cooperative mechanisms that facilitate an integrated approach to decision-making, which is necessary to effectively manage food risks and benefits, preclude gaps, and identify priorities for the advancement of a safe and nutritious food supply for Canadians.

**2. Stakeholder Groups: Mechanisms for Interaction**

From the Government of Canada's perspective, meaningful stakeholder involvement is essential to enable it to fulfil its legislative mandate, develop public policy, design and deliver programs and services and build public trust. Consultation and collaboration benefit government by supporting the establishment of priorities, broadening the decision-making sphere and promoting consensus on policy and program objectives. By engaging stakeholders in its work, the Government of Canada's objective is to maximize the potential for concurrence and successful implementation of its initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> FAO Food and Nutrition Paper 76, *Assuring food safety and quality: Guidelines for strengthening national food control systems*

<sup>2</sup> Canada's food safety system adheres to three fundamental principles: the health of the population must remain paramount; policy decisions must be grounded on scientific evidence; and all sectors and jurisdictions must collaborate to protect consumers.

In Canada, the responsibility for food safety is multifaceted and shared among government, industry, academia and consumers. The success of the Canadian food safety system depends on close working relationships among these stakeholders. There are specific mechanisms in place to consult with government and non-government stakeholders. When addressing food safety issues, the Government of Canada gives careful consideration to which stakeholders should be involved, as well as the benefits of involving some or all of them jointly so that they can hear each other's views. Considerations include the nature of the issue, who is affected by it, the urgency with which it needs to be addressed, and the type of input that is needed from stakeholders. Consultation can, therefore, include some or all of the following mechanisms, either independently or in combination.

## **2.1 Federal Mechanisms**

Federal departments with food safety responsibilities work closely together, as needed, on cross-cutting files to ensure coordination on priorities and deliverables. This is especially important when federal departments collaborate with their provincial and territorial counterparts and non-government stakeholders on specific initiatives.

For instance, formal mechanisms are in place between Health Canada (HC) and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), which are the federal regulatory bodies with responsibility for food. HC sets standards and policies governing the safety and nutritional quality of all food sold in Canada. The CFIA is responsible for enforcing those policies and standards set by HC, as well as all federally mandated food inspection, compliance and quarantine services. Collaboration at the senior level occurs through the *HC/CFIA Joint Food Safety and Nutrition Committee*, which provides overall guidance and leadership on policies and strategic directions to the federal food safety and nutrition regulatory system. At the technical level, coordination is achieved through several mechanisms, one of which is the *CFIA/HC Science Committee*. This committee conducts environmental scans of food safety hazards and issues, assesses the risk related to each one based on the likelihood of its occurrence and the severity of the consequences, and assesses risk management tools and identifies risk management options through priority projects.

Consultation among federal departments is critical to develop Canada's position into international food safety activities, taking into consideration each department's mandate and responsibilities. For example, Canada has established an Interdepartmental Committee on the Codex Alimentarius Commission (IDC/Codex), comprised of representatives from HC, the CFIA, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), International Trade Canada and Industry Canada. The IDC/Codex reviews, revises and authorizes Canadian positions developed for the Codex Alimentarius Commission, its Committees and Task Forces, endorses the composition of Canadian delegations to all Codex sessions, and provides policy advice with respect to acceptance of Codex standards, recommendations and guidelines.

## **2.2 Federal/Provincial/Territorial Mechanisms**

Collaboration among the different levels of government is facilitated by the Federal/Provincial/Territorial (FPT) food safety committees. Key objectives of these committees include joint food safety priority setting, leadership on food safety policies and standards, facilitating national harmonization of inspection processes, resolving inter-provincial technical trade barriers and ensuring adequate implementation of food safety initiatives.

One example is the *Canadian Food Inspection System Implementation Group* (CFISIG), within which

FPT governments strive to harmonize sector-specific model regulations and codes of practice. The model regulations are outcome-based and voluntary, allowing each jurisdiction to incorporate them into their legislative and inspection programs. The model regulations are interpreted by companion codes that detail acceptable industry practices.

Another example is the *Agriculture Policy Framework - Food Safety and Quality Chapter FPT Working Group*. The Agricultural Policy Framework<sup>3</sup> was developed by FPT Ministers of Agriculture to address the challenges and opportunities for continued prosperity in the agri-food sector. All provinces and territories have now signed on to the Framework, and have signed Implementation Agreements with the Government of Canada. The Food Safety and Quality FPT Working Group is a forum for FPT government departments with food safety responsibilities to work collaboratively with farmers and the agriculture and agri-food industry to help them develop and implement government-recognized safety and quality control systems, such as traceability and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP), from the field through to the retail and food-service level.

### **2.3 Government-Industry Mechanisms**

Government and industry recognize that they must work together to establish food safety priorities and find opportunities to address the various challenges facing the agri-food sector. An example of government-industry collaboration is the Value Chain Roundtables initiative, established by AAFC. Roundtable meetings represent a fundamental shift in the industry-government relationship. These strategy sessions are led by industry and are made up of representatives from all the industry groups in a commodity supply chain, from producers to retailers. The members meet regularly to discuss issues that are important for them to resolve as a group, such as traceability.

### **2.4 Government-Academia/Industry Mechanism**

Governments often need the expertise of other stakeholders to study food safety issues and develop recommendations. Expert advisory committees and task forces are examples of this type of public involvement, in which a group of representatives from a particular community or with differing interests are selected by government bodies to advise, comment, review or make recommendations for action on any given issue. These groups usually develop terms of reference that outline their mandates and responsibilities. Membership is identified through broad consultation with stakeholder groups, including health professional and scientific societies, academia, industry associations, consumer associations, and government agencies. Members are appointed on the basis of their individual expertise, and do not represent their firms, organizations or associations directly. Rather, they are expected to serve in the best interests of all Canadians.

### **2.5 Government-Consumers Mechanisms**

While publication in the *Canada Gazette* remains the official Government of Canada mechanism for notification of proposed regulatory changes and for seeking input into these changes, other means are often selected to inform and provide consumers with a voice on issues of interest to them as well as an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and help form policies and legislation that reflect the concerns of Canadians. A range of activities and mechanisms between the public<sup>4</sup> and the government are in place to

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<sup>3</sup> The APF is composed of five chapters: Business risk management; Food safety and food quality; Science and innovation; Environment; and Renewal

<sup>4</sup> **Public** is defined broadly to cover all the individuals or groups who may be interested in or affected by government activities. The public includes consumers, patients, professionals, academia, industry and the groups that represent them.

facilitate consumer involvement, including public meetings, advisory committees and partnerships.

One such mechanism is the "Consulting with Canadians" website, established by the Government of Canada to provide a single-window access to a list of consultations from selected government departments and agencies. The website features a consultation calendar for current and upcoming consultations over several months, a section on previous consultations with links to their results, and a link to the *Canada Gazette*.

Another mechanism is the Public Advisory Committee (PAC), established by the Health Products and Food Branch of HC to increase public involvement in policy development. PAC is comprised of ordinary citizens including men and women of various ages, educational backgrounds, occupations, cultures and linguistic backgrounds. PAC provides advice from the consumers' perspective on issues and initiatives as requested by the Branch. For example, PAC has advised the Branch on policy aspects of issues such as biotechnology, animal livestock cloning for food use, and plant molecular farming.

### **3. Stakeholder Collaboration: Examples of Successful Outcomes**

#### **3.1 Harmonization of Food Safety Standards and Regulations with Codex**

Canadian positions to Codex Committees and Task Forces are developed through broad consultation with FPT governments, industry, academia and consumers. Engagement of stakeholders in the development of Codex standards, guidelines and recommendations leads to greater acceptance of these texts as the basis for national regulations and codes of practice. The development of the Codex General Standard for Bottled/ Packaged Drinking Waters (Other Than Natural Mineral Waters) is an example of successful collaboration and consultation in Canada, which facilitated the development of a Canadian code of hygienic practice and the on-going initiatives to revise the Canadian regulations on pre-packaged water and ice.

In the development of the Codex standard, in-depth consultations were conducted with the bottled water industry in Canada to understand its needs and obtain its views. The resultant Codex standard was very favourably received by the industry.

Within Canada, the CFISIG formed a government-industry working group tasked with the development of the Code of Hygienic Practice for Commercial Pre-packaged and Non-Pre-packaged Water. This Code of Hygienic Practice is based on the Codex principles and water-related standards.

Stakeholder consultation on the CFISIG Code of Practice was done jointly with the Government of Canada's consultation on the proposed revisions to the regulations on pre-packaged water and ice, since they targeted the same audience. The result of this engagement is that the bottled water industry in Canada is well aware and supportive of international and Canadian standards, as it was involved from the onset in their development and was consulted in a coordinated manner throughout the process.

#### **3.2 Strengthening Food Inspection Systems**

Canada supports and has built its HACCP food safety control programs on that promoted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission<sup>5</sup>. Change is being driven by industry adoption of HACCP-based practices and by regulators adopting these same principles at the federal, provincial/ territorial and municipal levels as a core element in inspection program design and intervention strategies. Canada has made significant progress in the

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<sup>5</sup> Recommended International Code of Practice General Principles of Food Hygiene CAC/RCP 1-1969, Rev. 4 (2003); Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) System and Guidelines for its Application - Annex to CAC/RCP 1-1969, Rev. 4 (2003)

implementation of HACCP programs. One example is the Food Safety Enhancement Program (FSEP); the HACCP initiative directed at all federally registered establishments of the meat, dairy, honey, maple syrup, processed fruit and vegetable, shell egg, processed egg, and poultry hatchery sectors. Another example is the Quality Management Program, which is a requirement for federally registered fish processing plants in Canada.

Implementation of FSEP was facilitated by joint government/industry expert advisory groups developing tools, such as hazard database and generic HACCP models, and promoting implementation through information sessions and training initiatives. These tools have contributed significantly to the common understanding of HACCP while facilitating implementation. The high degree of participation by the meat industry has resulted in a decision by the CFIA to move toward a mandatory requirement for FSEP in these establishments. The development, expansion, and acceptance of HACCP-based food safety control programs are best achieved through partnerships amongst all levels of governments and industry stakeholders.

### **3.3 Risk-Based Food Safety Policies**

#### ***Multi-Stakeholder Task Force on Trans Fats***

The Trans Fat Task Force was formed in November 2004 to make recommendations for reducing processed trans fat in Canadian foods to the lowest level possible. It is comprised of government, industry (production, processing, manufacturing, and restaurant and food service), academia, and health and consumer interest organizations.

The Task Force issued an interim report in August 2005, which provides government, the public and the food processing and food service industries guidance on actions to reduce Canadians' intake of trans fats. The final report is anticipated by late Fall 2005, and will contain recommendations for an appropriate regulatory framework and for the introduction of healthy alternatives to limit the trans fat content of processed foods sold in Canada to the lowest levels possible.

#### ***Informed Consumer Choice - Consumption of Unpasteurized Fruit Juice/Cider Products***

In July 2000, HC put in place the policy *Managing Health Risk Associated with the Consumption of Unpasteurized Fruit Juice/Cider Products* to increase public protection against the potential microbial risks associated with the consumption of unpasteurized juice/cider. The policy comprised a voluntary Code of Practice for producers and processors, voluntary labelling of juice/cider as "unpasteurized", and an education campaign to inform consumers about potential risks and the actions that can be taken to reduce these risks.

The effectiveness of the policy was evaluated over a two-year period by conducting telephone interviews with consumers. The evaluation found that 83% of them were unable to make an informed choice, partly because some unpasteurized products were not labelled as such, and because some consumers had not heard the education messages. As a result of this consultation, HC has proposed modifications to the original policy, including a mandatory label statement indicating the product is unpasteurized, possibly in combination with a warning statement, as well as increased consumer education.

The importance of verifying the effectiveness of food safety polices involving consumer education is well demonstrated with the juice/cider policy. Without addressing the lack of awareness of consumers, the 2000 juice/cider policy would have remained only partly effective.

### **3.4 Use of the Food-Chain Approach: Developing On-Farm Food Safety Systems**

As part of the Agriculture Policy Framework, Canadian (FPT) governments are working with farmers and the agriculture and agri-food industry to help them develop and implement safety and quality-control systems throughout the agri-food continuum. The process capitalizes on the knowledge, experience and innovative thinking of farmers, producers and processors. Through the Canadian Food Safety and Quality Program, funding has been provided to national associations (e.g., the Dairy Farmers of Canada, the Chicken Farmers of Canada, and the Canadian Pork Council) for the development of on-farm food safety systems specific to their commodity.

## **4. Conclusion**

Canada has mechanisms in place for collaboration among all food safety stakeholders, and a number of initiatives are underway to deliver concrete programs and tools for the benefit of government and industry, and ultimately to increase public health protection from food-related hazards. While the above-noted initiatives show the dedication of all stakeholders to improve the food safety system in Canada, the approach is constantly evolving to improve coordination and collaboration.

The development of a Canadian strategy for a safe and nutritious food supply is an example of a proposed new national initiative that requires broad consultation with various stakeholder groups (e.g., governments, industry, academia and consumers). The strategy aims to strengthen the Canadian food safety system through improved coordination of efforts by different levels of government, agreed priorities and approaches, and linkage of activities to public health outcomes. As well, it is intended to support industry efforts to produce safe and nutritious food, and enable consumers to make healthy choices and plan and prepare safe and nutritious meals for their families. The implementation of the strategy would serve to demonstrate that Canada has a food supply that helps protect and promote good health, and would further promote confidence in a modernized Canadian food system at home and abroad.