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**FARM -TO-FORK FOOD SAFETY APPROACH: THE ROLE OF MINISTRY
OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY IN PRODUCTION OF FRESH
AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS FOR CONSUMPTION**

(Prepared by Sudan)

A. Introduction:

Agriculture is the basic dominant activity in the Sudan economy. Taking into consideration the vast suitable agricultural areas, abundance of irrigation water from the different sources, cheap available labor and diversity in ecological factors affecting agricultural production, Sudan has the potential to be a major source for food for itself, the region, and for other parts of the world. It is now self-sufficient in most of the agricultural products and exports some products.

Ministries in Sudan such as the Ministry of Planning and Finance, Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Irrigation, Ministry of Animal Wealth and Fisheries play very important roles in the food production process. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry plays the leading and most important role by virtue of the country's characteristics and its specialization. The major food agricultural crops produced in Sudan are represented by vegetables, fruits, cereals, oil crops and other categories.

Sudan politically and administratively adopts the federal system; there are ministries and agencies at the federal level ,others at the states level and a third category at the localities level.This applies to roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in food safety aspects including production, harvesting, post harvesting and marketing of agricultural products.

B. Role and responsibilities of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry:

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry being at the federal level is mainly responsible for the strategies, policies, planning, federal legislations, training and the overall monitoring and evaluation at the national level. In all these activities, though the food security is a major objective, but safety of food as well as facilitation of food trade are important objectives. The state Ministries of Agriculture and the localities play these roles within their boundaries but according to the federal directives. The direct administrative and field work is more concentrated at the state and localities level. In Sudan the food industry is not yet well developed and thus most of the agricultural products are consumed or exported fresh or raw or semi-raw. This magnifies the role of the Ministry of Agriculture in aspects of food safety.

The farm -to- fork approach reflects that it is the responsibility of all agencies to adopt the scientific, administrative and legal systems and means that will assure the production of safe food for the consumers. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Sudan adopts this approach at the farm level through the application of the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) system. The following

department's activities lead to the adoption of the GAP system and ensure the safety of the agricultural products:

1. Seeds propagation:

The Department of Seed Propagation is responsible for the planning, follow-up and certification for seeds produced for crops production by either public or private sector. This power originates from the seed propagation law (1994). There is a national council for seeds propagation in which the concerned ministries and agencies are represented.

2. Insecticides and pesticides:

The Department of Plant Protection is responsible for the registration, import permits, inspection, supervision of storage and internal marketing of the insecticides and pesticides that are used by farmers and other producing agencies. The Insecticides Law (1913); up-dated (2004) is the legal ground for these rights. A national council for insecticides is in existence according to this law. It consists of the concerned ministries and agencies such as Ministry of Health, Customs, Animal Wealth, Science and Technology, Sudanese Standards and Metrology Organization (SSMO), in addition to the concerned departments from within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The Department of Plant Protection is the administrative tool for applying this law, and the Director of the Department is the registrar.

3. Fertilizers:

Use of fertilizers, being an important input for crop production, is organized by the Department of Fertilizers on the basis of the Fertilizers Law (2004). There is a national council for fertilizers. It regulates the imports, registration, storage and the use of different kinds of fertilizers.

4. Agricultural extension:

The technology transfer and agricultural extension department play the major role among farmers and other producers to promote agricultural production aspects of quality and safe products for producers. The different GAP factors are well transferred and demonstrated to the producers, especially those in connection with the safe use of insecticides and fertilizers. More stress is given to the use prior to and during the harvest period especially for crops that are consumed fresh and raw like some vegetables and fruits. Farmers are encouraged to stick to the safety periods determined for each insecticides. Also the personal application methods such as proper clothing, wind direction and concentration of liquids are taught to them. Different extension means are followed including the farmers schools, which was introduced recently. Other safety aspects of food safety during collection of products in the fields, short-period storage, in-field packaging and transport means and methods are also dealt with.

5. Exports and Imports:

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forests plays an important role in collaboration with other Ministries and agencies in the main sea and air ports to assure the entrance or departure of safe agricultural products. This is achieved through the plant quarantine offices, by adopting the national and international laws and agreements. There are specialized laboratories for these tasks but most of them need modernization. One of the important factors to be detected is the Maximum Residue Level (MRLs) which must be in conformity with the adopted national and international standards.

6. Quality control:

The overall sum of the above mentioned activities as well as the activities of other ministries and agencies develop into application of total quality management. Recently, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests established the Unit of Standardization and Quality Control to be the coordinating body within the Ministry and with other ministries and agencies as well as international organizations such as Codex. The Ministry of Agriculture is the focal point for FAO, and the quality control unit is the focal point for Codex and INFOSAN.

C. Future aspects:

1. There is an increasing tendency to adopt the organic production to avoid the excessive and unsafe use of chemicals. The major obstacle is the need for certification and accreditation.
2. Laws need to be up-dated to strengthen the collaboration between the different ministries and agencies.
3. The laboratories facilities in the different ministries and agencies need to be modernized in the equipment and systems areas. Establishing reference laboratories is an urgent need.
4. The consumers, producers and dealers associations need to be strengthened and embodied in the systems to ensure the right adoption of the food safety approaches.