



# FACILITATING COMPLIANCE TO FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY FOR CROSS-BORDER TRADE

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## Executive Summary

With globalization and increasing demand by consumers for variety in foods, there is increasing trans-boundary movement and trade of food across countries, both imports and exports. Global food trade in 2014 was approximately 1,486 Billion US dollars<sup>1</sup>. With this continuously increasing global food supply chain and trans-boundary movement of foods, the potential for spread of contaminants is high which has resulted in safety and quality acquiring global focus. The importance of food safety cannot be understated as unsafe food leads to food-borne illnesses, malnutrition, food wastage and losses, reduced domestic and international market access (due to rejections, destructions of consignments, withdrawals), and an overall impact on consumer confidence, economic development, and national reputation, amongst others. In addition to food safety, there are also issues related to quality aspects of food, such as size and labelling requirements, requirements for various certifications (organic, free trade, etc.). These issues can be related to food fraud, which is the deliberate and intentional substitution, addition, tampering, or misrepresentation of food, food ingredients, or food packaging; or false or misleading statements made about a product, for economic gain. Issues impacting cross-border trade in food products also relate to procedural aspects, such as customs procedures, which have an impact on quality and safety, coordination procedures and traceability procedures.

This publication describes briefly the type of food safety and quality issues impacting cross-border trade. It highlights important food safety and quality control strategies, which will strengthen food safety and quality within countries, which will facilitate cross-border trade. Robust food quality and safety systems can lead to greater confidence in the importing country of the export country capabilities and thereby require less stringent import controls. Finally, the publication brings out guidance to governments for implementing effective food control systems that will facilitate exports as these will meet importing country requirements; and will also expedite import clearance and release of goods at border. An overview of each of these areas is highlighted below in brief.

### Key food safety and quality issues impacting cross-border trade

This section covers an analysis of reasons for import rejections by major developed importing countries namely the European Union (EU), United States of America (US) and Japan. Information from the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) and information shared by countries in the region at various seminars and workshops was analysed. The findings show that food safety issues generally relate to pathogens (*Salmonella* spp., *Escherichia coli*, *Vibrio* spp., *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Bacillus cereus*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, etc), residues of veterinary drugs, pesticide residues, toxins, dioxin, residues of cleaning chemicals, use of unauthorised food additives, simple adulterants, heavy metals, etc. In addition food safety issues can also be an outcome of filthy or unsanitary conditions, allergens and unregistered processes or manufacturers.

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<sup>1</sup> WTO (2015) International Trade Statistics [https://www.wto.org/english/res\\_e/statis\\_e/its2015\\_e/its2015\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/its2015_e/its2015_e.pdf)

Based on the reasons, the major issues have been identified and discussed. The most important challenge identified is standards and compliance. Standards may be regulatory or voluntary. Under voluntary, these may be governmental or private. An important aspect in relation to standards is the multiplicity of standards and overlap of standards due to multiple agencies developing standards. This can lead to a situation where more than one standard exist for the same product. Other challenges on standards relate to development by countries on compositional and quality related standards with lesser focus on food safety requirements, absence of data while developing standards due to which these are not risk-based, low participation in international Codex standards development due to which the developing country situation is often not reflected in international standards, no transparent and comprehensive procedure followed by countries for regulatory standards development and system for notification of regulatory standards to WTO is still not well developed.

Infrastructure capacity in terms of lack of cold chains, inadequate testing infrastructure, inadequate IT systems and data, poor primary processing facilities (hygiene) are also major challenges in countries. Another set of challenges relates country infrastructure for certifications and accreditations, lack of credibility of certifications as international principles and requirements not always followed, export certifications often based on end-product testing rather than verifying conformity of food control system. Challenges also relate to the areas of food fraud and labelling requirements.

### **Food safety and quality control strategies for trade facilitation**

This section deals with some important strategies in selected focus areas to strengthen food safety, quality and food controls in order to meet importing country requirements and consequently facilitate trade. Country examples have been used to illustrate some of these cases.

Some key strategies include the use of preventive approaches in which food safety hazards arising at different stages of food chain are prevented from entering the food chain or are reduced or eliminated at each stage. Harmonization with international standards and rationalizing these within the country is an important strategy towards having a single global national standard. It is also important for countries to rationalize these standards within the country, in order to avoid duplication that can lead to confusion amongst stakeholders. Other key considerations for countries include the need to have transparency and communication through providing comprehensive guidance on their food safety and quality requirements; strengthening food control systems to cover domestic exports and imports; strengthening value chains by identifying the hazard in specific food chains and addressing them to mitigate risks; strengthening coordination and focusing on research activities at various levels and data collection in a systematic way for food safety and food control activities.

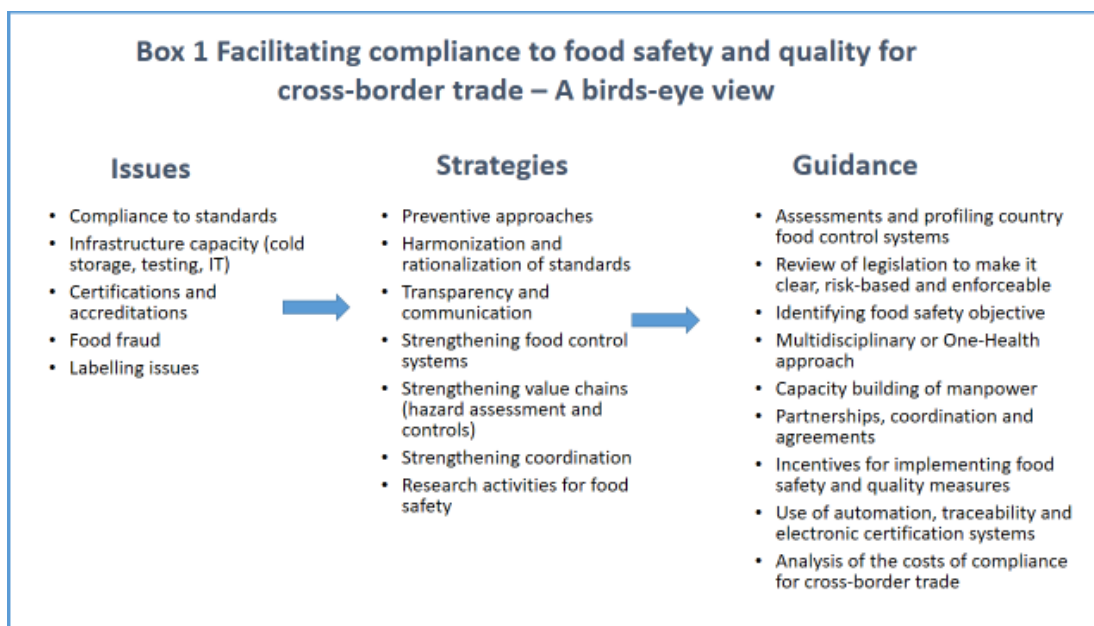
## Guidance to policy makers for implementing effective food control systems for cross-border trade

This section highlights how policy makers should proceed to implement effective food control systems that will help expedite clearance and release of goods at borders and thereby strengthen cross-border trade. These include a step-wise process for assessments and profiling of country's food control systems; reviewing the legislation to make it clear, risk-based and enforceable; identifying the food safety and quality objectives and planning to achieve them over an identified period; implementing a multidisciplinary or One-Health approach to strengthen coordination between multiple agencies in a country; capacity building of manpower to empower them in terms of knowledge and skills in various fields; strengthening partnerships, coordination activities and agreements both at global and national levels including with the research, academia and private sector amongst others. This section also brings out the importance of incentives (both financial and others such as preferences in government procurements) to the smaller and less developed food businesses in the initial stages till they have stabilized their activities.

A section has also been devoted to the use of automation, traceability and electronic certification systems for effective compliance to food safety and quality standards. Examples of electronic traceability systems (the case of GrapeNet) implemented in India for export of grapes and China's E-port – a single window paperless trading system have also been described. An analysis of the costs of compliance for cross-border trade requirements has also been made.

Although countries have a major role in strengthening their own food and agricultural control systems for facilitating trade, certain activities could better be handled at regional level. In such cases, development partners could provide support through facilitation and technical support. This publication has identified some of these areas.

An overview of the topics covered in this publication is diagrammatically illustrated in **Box 1**.



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