REPORT OF THE

First meeting

OF THE

Technical Advisory Group on Food Safety:
Safer Food for Better Health

World Health Organization

Virtual meeting, 8–10 February 2021
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Acknowledgements

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This report was developed by Dr Amina Benyahia, Scientist, and Mr Cheng Liang, Technical Officer, Multisectoral Actions in Food Systems Unit (AFS), WHO Department of Nutrition and Food Safety (NFS). WHO is most grateful to Professor Alan Reilly who is commissioned by WHO to provide the extensive technical and indispensable advice throughout the process of drafting and finalization of this report. Input was provided by Dr Francesco Branca, Director NFS and Dr Luz Maria De-Regil, Unit Head, AFS.

Declarations of interest

All experts participating in WHO meetings must participate in their individual capacity and declare any interest relevant to the meeting prior to their participation. All members of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) submitted a declaration of interests along with their application to join the TAG and before each meeting. The declarations were reviewed by the responsible technical officer and the relevant departments before their appointment and/or receiving an invitation to attend a TAG meeting. In addition, TAG members made a verbal declaration of their interest during the meeting. No conflicts affecting the outcomes of the meeting were identified for any TAG members.
The first Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meeting on the update of the WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety was held on 8–10 February 2021, from 12:00–15:00 CET each day. The meeting was attended by WHO Multisectoral Actions in Food Systems (AFS) headquarters staff, WHO Regional Advisors for Food Safety, 24 TAG members, and staff from the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) as observers.

The overall objective of the first TAG meeting was to collect experts’ advice on the discussion paper on the update process of the WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety developed for this meeting.

The TAG meeting participants agreed on the role of food safety in the global development agenda, the drivers of change for the future of food safety, the aim and the vision, and the proposed five strategic priorities. The meeting highlighted the need to foster global and regional cooperation. While recognizing the strategy should be Member State oriented, it was agreed to enhance WHO’s leadership and give more visibility to WHO’s role in supporting Member States to strengthen food safety and lower the burden of foodborne disease.

The consultation recommended the WHO Secretariat:

1. Draft WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety in line with the comments and inputs provided during the consultation and the written comments received by 15 February.

2. Organize a follow-up meeting to address the unfinished agenda on the implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and the draft strategy.
1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In 2019 the WHO collaborated with international partners in organizing two major conferences on food safety that identified priorities and strategies across sectors and borders to reinforce efforts to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and support the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition. In addition, trade related issues and food safety challenges such as use of new technologies, multistakeholder coordination and harmonizing regulation in a time of change and innovation were addressed. These two conferences helped inform the 73rd World Health Assembly Resolution “Strengthening efforts on food safety” (WHA73.5) that was endorsed by Member States in August 2020.

Resolution WHA73.5 inter alia, called on the Director General of WHO to update the WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety in coordination with FAO, and in consultation with Member States and OIE, in order to address current and emerging challenges, incorporate new technologies, and include innovative strategies for strengthening food safety systems. Resolution WHA73.5 also called upon Member States to remain committed at the highest political level to:

- Recognize food safety as an essential element of public health;
- Develop food safety policies that take into consideration all stages of the supply chain, the best available scientific evidence and advice, as well as innovation;
- Provide adequate resources to improve food safety systems;
- Recognize consumer interests; and,
- Integrate food safety into national and regional policies on health, agriculture, trade, environment and development.

Based on the need to update the 2002 Global Strategy for Food Safety, the WHO established a new Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on Food Safety: safer food for better health. One of the key functions of the TAG is to advise the WHO on updating the Global Strategy for Food Safety and any other matters (implementation, monitoring and evaluation) relating to the Strategy. The first TAG meeting was convened virtually on 8–10 February 2021 (Annex 1: Meeting Agenda).

1.2 Meeting objectives

The objective of the TAG expert consultation was to collect experts’ advice on the updating of the WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety.

Specific objectives were to:

1. Build upon the understanding of 2002 WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety and the WHA73.5 resolution to identify drivers of change in food safety.

2. Agree on the overall vision, aim, and timeframe for the updated strategy.

3. Identify new strategic priorities, strategic objectives, and recommended actions for the updated strategy, and

4. Discuss the implementation framework and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for the updated strategy.
2. Proceedings

Session 1: Welcome session

Dr Francesco Branca, Director of the Department of Nutrition and Food Safety, WHO, welcomed participants and expressed his appreciation that they accepted the invitation to contribute to the update of WHO Global Strategy for Food. He noted that the TAG meeting was an important opportunity for experts to provide inputs and feedback on the draft consultation paper circulated in advance of the meeting and the outputs from this meeting would feed into the first draft of the new WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety.

Dr Naoko Yamamoto, WHO Assistant Director-General, Universal Health Coverage / Healthier Populations, delivered opening remarks and welcomed participants to this first meeting of the TAG. Dr Yamamoto provided an overview of global events in food safety leading up to the 73rd World Health Assembly (WHA), where Member States endorsed a new resolution on food safety requesting WHO to update its 2002 Global Strategy for Food Safety. This resolution highlighted the urgency for improved food safety systems that can proactively address new challenges and risks using innovative approaches. The multisectoral nature of food safety makes it unique and different from other public health issues. Dr Yamamoto said that adopting a One Health Approach to food safety is essential to promote the sustainability of – and access to – safe, sufficient, and nutritious food for all. It is also important to recognize the interconnectivity between food safety and human, animal, plant, and environmental health. To be successful, the development and also the implementation of the strategy will require cooperation with other international organizations with complementary mandates to WHO.

Dr Yamamoto informed the meeting participants that the WHO plans to update the estimates of the global burden of foodborne diseases published in 2015 and to establish an impact measurement framework to track the global progress in food safety from a public health perspective. While this work will be led by another advisory group, it is important to note that these two work streams should be mutual supportive.
Session 2:
WHO’s initiatives in strengthening food safety

Dr Luz Maria De-Regil, Head of Multisectoral Actions in Food Systems (AFS) Unit in WHO, introduced Session 2, which provided a background on the initiatives taken by WHO in responding to the WHA 73.5 and in preparing the draft consultation paper. Dr Amina Benyahia, Scientist, AFS in WHO, outlined the magnitude of the food safety challenges facing Member States in protecting public health, reducing the incidence of foodborne diseases and facilitating safe food trade. She highlighted the importance for Member States to invest in food safety systems and the magnitude of returns of such investment in terms of reduced health burden, greater productivity, and increased economic gains for national economies. The WHO intends the new Global Food Safety Strategy to be Member States oriented in providing guidance for prioritizing actions for strengthening food safety systems and to support programmes for their evaluation and continuous improvement. The strategy is expected to identify indicators and targets to identify indicators and targets so Members States can measure progress and improve accountability.

Dr Benyahia provided an overview of the process and timeline for developing the new strategy (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**
The overall process for the update of the WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety

**PHASE 1**
Approval and Establishment (2nd half 2020)
- Establishment of a new food safety advisory group and appointment of members
- Draft timeline and concept note
- Preparation for the 1st TAG meeting

**PHASE 2**
Analysis and Drafting (1st half 2021)
- TAG meetings
- Web-based consultations
- Member States consultations
- Mission briefing
- Draft strategy

**PHASE 3**
Refinement and Endorsement (2nd half 2021 to May 2022)
- 6 WHO Regional Committees
- Executive Board Meeting 2022
- 75th World Health Assembly
A food systems approach will be adopted in developing the Global Strategy for Food Safety (Figure 2). All activities in the food system, from inputs at the initial stages of primary production to transport, processing, storage, marketing, retail, catering, and final consumers will all impact food safety. Key drivers such as climate change, demographics, urbanisation, intensive agricultural systems, global trade, new technologies, culture and social traditions, innovation and development of information technology (IT) and digital information systems also impact on food safety.

Figure 2
Conceptual framework of food systems for diets and nutrition

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It will be imperative to integrate food safety in national and regional policies on health, agriculture, trade, environment and development in order to achieve the SDG by 2030. Food safety is a shared responsibility requiring actions by all stakeholders in the food chain.

Dr Benyahia also said that food safety must be integrated with programmes on animal health, human health, and the environment by using a One Health Approach.

In developing the TAG consultation paper, the WHO conducted a situation analysis. To identify core capacities in food safety, WHO considered the outcomes from the two international conferences on food safety which took place in 2019. In addition to country surveys conducted by Codex Regional Coordinating Committees, the results of country self-reporting under the International Health Regulations (IHR) using electronic State Party Self-Assessment Annual Reporting (e-SPAR) and Joint External Evaluation (JEE) reports were reviewed. Outcomes from consultations conducted in WHO Regional Offices were also taken into account.

Dr Paul Cook was proposed and appointed as the chairperson of the TAG meeting. The discussions among TAG members were based on the questions and contents in the consultation paper.

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Session 3:
General discussion on the strategy

This session involved a general discussion on the consultation paper on the proposed Global Food Safety Strategy 2022-2030, which was prepared for consultation/discussion with the TAG. In particular, discussions focused on (1) food safety as a public health and trade priority, (2) drivers of change of food safety, (3) aim and vision and (4) five proposed strategic priorities.

1. Food safety as a public health and trade priority

Participants unanimously agreed that food safety is a public health priority. While safe food trade is a priority, the emphasis in the Global Strategy should focus on public health. Food trade contributes to economic and social development, but foods found to be unsafe will be rejected in the marketplace. In order to successfully trade in global markets, countries must establish competent authorities with responsibility for food controls and the effective implementation of food safety regulations. To build consumer confidence in the domestic food supply and food safety, effective food controls are required to ensure that food placed on the market is safe and complies with national regulations.

Following an extensive discussion on how food safety relates to other dimensions, participants recommended that a diagram should be included in the strategy to illustrate the role of food safety with other key dimensions such as public health, trade, food security and nutrition.

2. Drivers of change of food safety

For the purpose of this strategy, the term “driver” can refer to either an internal or external factor that may influence or affect the safety of food. There was general agreement on the seven drivers discussed in the TAG consultation paper. While it is not always possible for competent authorities responsible for food safety to control all these external drivers, it is important that competent authorities understand how these drivers impact food safety. Participants recommended that the role of intensive agricultural systems and their impacts on the safety

Identified drivers in the consultation paper:

1. Stakeholder interests and demands for safe food
2. Global food safety threats
3. Global changes in the economics of the food supply
4. Environmental challenges
5. Social changes
6. Rise of new technologies
7. Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)
of food supply should be highlighted. Other topics suggested for inclusion were food waste, wastewater management, animal waste management, nanoplastics and microplastics, and environmental pollution. It was also recommended that information technology and digital transformation should be highlighted in the rise of new technologies.

3. Strategy aim and vision

The aim of the Global Strategy as presented in the consultation paper focused on guiding Member States to strengthen their food control systems. Some participants expressed the view that the aim should also include actions by WHO to support Member States in implementation of the strategy. Other participants thought that the prevention of foodborne diseases should also be included.

Participants expressed the view that there should be a greater focus on public health in the vision and a reduced emphasis on food trade. Somewhere in the strategy, the role of WHO’s leadership in fostering of global and regional collaboration needs to be captured. Participants agreed that the vision for the strategy needs to be high level, and that the overall vision of safe and health food for all is appropriate.

Based on the comments received, the WHO Secretariat revised the aim and vision. Proposed aims and visions were circulated to all TAG members for review. Further discussion and agreement were in Session 9 of the meeting.

4. Five strategic priorities

It is intended that the new global strategy will provide an overall vision and strategic priorities for concerted global action that will underline both the importance of food safety as a public health priority and the need to enhance its critical role as a public health component in food systems. In discussing the strategic priorities some participants suggested that the broad focus should be on national food safety systems rather than on national food control systems. Food systems encompass the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded. In the context of a food systems approach, the national food safety system would involve the combination of activities of all stakeholders in the food chain to safeguard the health and well-being of people, while fostering
economic development and improving livelihoods by promoting access to domestic, regional and international markets.

The different components of the national food safety system would include – but would not be limited to – the national food control system (official food controls conducted by government agencies); food safety management systems (risk-based systems based on Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point principles conducted by food business); foodborne disease surveillance systems (responsibility of the health sector); national food monitoring system for pesticide/residues/contaminants/pathogens in food and food producing animals (part of official controls conducted by government agencies); animal disease surveillance systems (part of official controls conducted by veterinary agencies).

For the purposes of this strategy and to ensure alignment with the standards, guidelines, and code of practice of the Codex Alimentarius, WHO, in consultation with FAO, has proposed the use of the term “national food control system”. This term will refer to a national food control system consisting of policies, procedures and plans, which includes a mandatory regulatory approach together with scientific information and preventative educational strategies that protect the whole food chain. This includes effective enforcement of food legislation, along with training and education, community outreach programmes, and promotion. TAG members noted the importance of aligning with the Codex Alimentarius on the usage of terminology. However, some TAG members expressed concerns about the term. They noted that the WHA73.5 uses the term “food safety systems”, and if the Global Strategy uses the term, “national food control systems”, those who are unfamiliar with Codex standards may think that the strategy only focuses on the control functions carried out by governments while excluding the activities of other relevant stakeholders in food safety.

Participants agreed on the following five strategic priorities:

- **Strategic priority 1**: Strengthening national food control systems.
- **Strategic priority 2**: Identifying and responding to food safety challenges resulting from global changes in food systems.
- **Strategic priority 3**: Increasing the use of food chain information, scientific evidence and risk assessment in making risk management decisions.
• **Strategic priority 4**: Strengthening stakeholder engagement and risk communication.

• **Strategic priority 5**: To promote food safety as an essential component of the economics of food production in both domestic and international trade.

Participants proposed an additional strategic priority to include technical cooperation to enhance the food safety situation in developing countries. Fostering regional and global cooperation and international connectivity should be a key theme for the strategy.
Session 4:
Session closing and arrangements for Day 2

To prepare for the breakout group discussion in Day 2, Dr Benyahia from the WHO Secretariat introduced the breakout group arrangement (See Annex 2). After a simulation, Dr Cook closed the meeting for Day 1.

Session 5:
Breakout group discussion for five strategic priorities

Participants were divided into five breakout groups, each of which discussed one of the five strategic priorities. Discussion groups were asked to consider if they agreed with the strategic priorities and respective strategic objectives as written, and to suggest modifications if they were not in agreement. Additionally, they were asked to suggest activities that would be necessary for Member States to carry out to achieve these strategic priorities.
Session 6: 
Plenary discussion and report by each working group (Group 1-3)

In this plenary session, breakout groups 1–3 reported back on their discussions.

**Strategic Priority 1: Strengthening national food control systems.**

Protecting consumers and meeting demands of international food trade requires that national food control systems take a whole-of-food-chain and risk-based approach to setting and implementing regulatory requirements. The group agreed with this strategic priority and noted that, while some members of the group preferred the term “national food safety system”, the term “national food control system” was aligned with the Codex terminology. The group recommended that the definition of these terms should be clarified in the final strategy. The group also recommended that the term “food safety policy” should be clearly defined. The importance of training and the development of a risk management framework for this strategic priority should not be overlooked. Participants agreed with the list of key components of a national food control system and felt that a list of competencies associated with these components should be developed for Member States.

Under this strategic priority, five key strategic objectives were discussed.

**Strategic Objective 1.1: Establish a modern harmonized framework of food legislation.**

The group was in broad agreement with this strategic objective and recommended the use of sound science and risk-based management to be included in the narrative. The Codex standards should be taken into account when establishing national policies and developing legislation and guidelines. The group also suggested inclusion of “risk-based” in the title of this strategic objective.

**Strategic Objective 1.2: Establish an institutional framework to coordinate the work of different competent authorities within a national food control system.**

The group agreed with this strategic objective and suggested that when Member States establish such an institutional framework, action plans should be developed to highlight clear roles and responsibilities of competent authorities and to establish the framework for coordination in national legislation. All
stakeholders should be included in these activities. Member States may wish to consider developing memoranda of understanding between different competent authorities to assure more effective cooperation and coordination of functions.

**Strategic Objective 1.3: Develop and implement fit-for-purpose standards and guidelines.**

The group agreed with this strategic objective and recommended that the concept of the farm-to-fork food chain continuum be included in the narrative associated with this strategic objective. It is also important that the standards and guidelines are aligned with Codex texts.

**Strategic Objective 1.4: Strengthen compliance, verification and enforcement.**

The group agreed with this strategic objective and recommended that the narrative associated with it includes the concept of risk-based inspections and stressed the importance of information sharing between competent authorities. Activities associated with this strategic objective should involve training and education for food workers, particularly in small- and medium-sized enterprises, registration/licensing of food business operators, development of best practice documents, and dedicated food control systems for food imports/exports and foods in the domestic market. All food control systems should be subject to regular review; this should be relevant for all strategic objectives under this strategic priority. Adequate resources for competent authorities to conduct these activities are essential for successful implementation.

**Strategic Objective 1.5: Strengthen food monitoring and surveillance programmes.**

The group agreed with this strategic objective and suggested that it be modified to include “risk-/evidence-based programmes”. In strengthening these programmes, Member States should ensure linkages with accredited food laboratory analytical capacities and with national food safety emergency response plans and communication networks, such as the IHR and the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN). Such programmes should also be linked to foodborne disease surveillance, animal disease surveillance, and food contaminants surveillance, adopting a One Health approach.

The group raised two items for further consideration:

- The first strategic priority can be framed as an overarching one that links with other strategic priorities, such as risk communication, trade, etc.
• This strategy should incorporate and strengthen the concept of technical cooperation as an important component in the food control systems, which is valid for both developing and developed countries.

GROUP 1  

Overall suggestions on wording:

SP1: Strengthening national food control systems.

• Objective 1.1: Establish a modern harmonized and risk-based framework of food legislation.

• Objective 1.2: Establish an institutional framework to coordinate the work of different competent authorities within a national food control system.

• Objective 1.3: Develop and implement fit-for-purpose standards and guidelines.

• Objective 1.4: Strengthen compliance, verification and enforcement.

• Objective 1.5: Strengthen food monitoring and surveillance by risk-based programmes.

Strategic Priority 2: Identifying and responding to food safety challenges resulting from global changes in food systems.

The complexity of global food systems and the speed at which they can change demand that governments and relevant competent authorities have a clear view of the connectivity between global and regional food systems within which food is produced, distributed and sold, and the food control system that governments and relevant competent authorities regulate. The group agreed with this strategic priority and recommended the inclusion of “global changes and transformation in food systems”. In addition, “food systems transformation” and its impact on food safety should be discussed in the introductory narrative of this strategic priority.
**Strategic Objective 2.1: Identify global changes in food systems and movement of food and evaluate potential food safety impacts.**

The group recommended the inclusion of “transformation” so the strategic objective now reads, “Identify global changes and transformation in food systems and movement of food and evaluate potential food safety impacts”. It will be important to include and evaluate the impact of new technologies and modern biotechnologies on the safety of foods. Some of the activities which should be carried out at Member State level to achieve this objective include participation in national, regional and international networks such as, INFOSAN, Codex, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Food Safety Network, and Food Safety Risk Analysis Network –South America (FSRisk), as well as engaging with all stakeholders to foresee new trends. In addition, strengthening surveillance of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and improving links with food research networks to generate data on emerging risks.

**Strategic Objective 2.2: Adapt food safety regulations and risk management options to emerging foodborne risks brought about by changes in global food systems and movement of food.**

The group agreed with this strategic objective and recommended the insertion of the word “transformation”, so the strategic objective now reads “Adapt food safety regulations and risk management options to emerging foodborne risks brought about by transformation and changes in global food systems and movement of food”.

Activities at Member State level that would contribute toward achieving this strategic objective include monitoring and surveillance of food contaminants and surveillance of foodborne disease. Other activities to generate data on emerging risks include horizon scanning, food authenticity and food fraud monitoring, improving food traceability through digital transformation, risk ranking, cross-agency and multidisciplinary communication, and harmonization of enforcement measures and regulatory responses.

In the plenary discussion, some TAG members suggested that one strategic objective can be added regarding the international solidarity and the preparedness for emerging risks. However, in order not to duplicate the content, the proposed strategic objective will be further assessed to see if it is already captured by the existing structure.
Strategic Priority 3: Increasing the use of food chain information, scientific evidence and risk assessment in making risk management decisions that strengthen national food safety systems.

Sourcing information on hazards from throughout the food chain is essential if there is to be integrated development and implementation of evidence- and risk-based standards/regulations and guidelines. Generating the evidence base as a first step in developing control measures is primarily dependent on scientific knowledge on the presence and level of hazards at different steps in the food chain. The discussion group was in broad agreement with this strategic priority.

Strategic Objective 3.1: Promote the use of scientific evidence and risk assessment when establishing and reviewing food control measures.

The group agreed with this strategic objective while recognizing the need for capacity-building for risk assessment, promotion of evidence-based health policy-making, and participation in national and regional networks for risk assessment.

Strategic Objective 3.2: Gather information on hazards from throughout the food chain and utilize these data when making informed risk management decisions.
The group was in broad agreement with this strategic objective. The group mentioned that the information gathering should not only be limited to hazards, but should be expanded to consumption data, foodborne diseases data, industry practices, etc. At Member State level, some of the challenges involved would relate to the collection and analysis of data from all sectors of society (food industry, consumers, public health, academia, etc.), the establishment of networks and platforms for data collection and sharing, and harmonization of data and its interpretation. Capacity-building is also a requirement in this strategic objective, and this would include building laboratory capacity, and capacity in surveillance of foodborne diseases and investigation of foodborne outbreaks.

**Strategic Objective 3.3: Source food safety information and risk analysis experiences from beyond national borders to strengthen risk management decisions and technical capacity.**

The group agreed with this strategic objective and pointed to some of the challenges around the interpretation and translation of the outcomes from risk assessments conducted by the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meetings on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA), the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) and Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues (JMPR) into national settings. There were also challenges in how to keep up-to-date risk assessments and in assessing risks associated with various new or novel hazards, such as the usage of nanotechnology, microplastics in the food chain or allergens in foods.

**Strategic Objective 3.4: Consistent and transparent risk management decisions when establishing food safety control measures.**

The group recommended a minor modification to this strategic objective, which now reads “Consistent and transparent risk management decisions when establishing food control measures”. Some of the challenges raised by the discussion group in implementing this strategic objective were the development of trust and confidence between respective competent authorities and the handling of confidential information when establishing control measures. Participation in the INFOSAN platform would be an important activity for building capacity at national level in risk management. An important issue raised by this discussion group was how countries with limited resources can develop capacity in the areas of risk assessment and risk management when establishing and implementing food control systems.
An important point raised during the plenary session was that discussions were focused on Member State initiatives and activities, and that the role of WHO capacity-building and international cooperation was absent. Some TAG members felt that the strategy should include a greater emphasis on international connectivity and global cooperation to supplement the focus on national food control systems. Capacity-building, particularly in developing countries, will be required to achieve the broad aims of this global strategy.

At the end of this discussion, Dr Cook, closed the meeting for Day 2.
Session 7:
Plenary discussion and report by each working group (Groups 4-5)

In this plenary session, discussion groups 4 and 5 reported back.

**Strategic Priority 4: Strengthening stakeholder engagement and risk communication.**

Strengthening stakeholder engagement and communication on food safety is an essential part of upgrading national food control systems. Stakeholder engagement and risk communication complements and supports regulatory activities, promotes consultation with the agri-food sector and empowers consumers. This can build expectation of higher levels of food hygiene and evolution towards cultivating a positive food safety culture. The discussion group agreed with this strategic priority.

**Strategic Objective 4.1: Establish platforms for consultation on the national food safety agenda.**

The discussion group agreed with this strategic objective and recommended that the narrative in the strategy highlight that stakeholders should include engagement with all government agencies with food safety responsibilities and, where appropriate, a One Health approach should be referenced. Activities at Member State level should utilize technology in both formal and informal consultative platforms for constructive dialogue, engagement and cooperation with different sectors of society.

**Strategic Objective 4.2: The use of non-regulatory schemes for enhancing food safety across the food chain.**

The discussion group agreed with this strategic objective and recommended that the strategy remain neutral in terms of the value of commercial standards. If the outcome is food safety rather than regulatory controls from government agencies, consider whether it is a problem that commercial standards are different or higher. Such schemes encourage the food industry to recognize their primary responsibility to produce safe food that is honestly labelled so consumers can make informed choices about the foods they eat. Competent authorities or governments must uphold their key responsibility and verify their key responsibility and verify that food business operators comply with food regulations.
Strategic Objective 4.3: Establish frameworks for sharing verification of compliance with food safety regulatory requirements.

The discussion group agreed with this strategic objective. Where sharing verification of compliance proves not to be effective, governments must have the resources and capacity to take back control and provide effective solutions. While executive functions may be delegated, it is key to ensure governments have appropriate oversight and capacity on shared verification of compliance with food safety regulatory requirements. It may be inappropriate to use this approach where there is a risk that systems might be abused.

Strategic Objective 4.4: Facilitate communication and engagement with the food industry and consumers.

The discussion group generally agreed with this strategic objective. However, the group doubted whether consumers should be framed in the same way as other stakeholders, such as food business operators, farmers, etc., within food systems, because consumers are not a regulated party. Stakeholder engagement on food safety is an important function of competent authorities and essential for building trust in the national regulatory programme. It complements and supports regulatory activities, empowers consumers, and builds expectation of a culture of safe food. A simple but potentially very effective tool for improving food safety outcomes is to provide consumers with targeted and accurate information and health messages on food safety, and specifically explaining how to minimize the risks associated with food that is handled, prepared and consumed in the household.

In the plenary discussion, the group advised that WHO may wish to consider placing this strategic priority as the first strategic priority of the Global Strategy and highlighting the food safety culture and the fundamental behaviour changes in food safety practices. Communication and engagement with all stakeholders are essential for the success of a national food control system. With the advent of social media platforms, it is important for competent authorities to be seen as a trusted source of accurate and reliable information on food safety in the food chain. It is also wise to engage with all stakeholders at the beginning of building and strengthening national food control systems as they will voice their needs, whether invited to or not, through social media platforms. Particularly, the group reflected that the strategy should not be limited to the regulatory and control functions as the only methods of building and strengthening national food control systems.
In the plenary discussion, the TAG members commented that the strategy introduction and this strategic priority should emphasize that food business operators have the primary responsibility to ensure safe food, and building on this, communication and engagement with all other stakeholders will be more effective. As well, TAG members thought the strategy should provide the flexibility for Member States to decide on the most suitable approach for strengthening national food control systems rather than limit the possibilities to a single solution. Regarding the third-party assurance, experts mentioned there is an ongoing discussion in the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS) regarding draft principles and guidelines for the assessment and use of voluntary Third-Party Assurance (vTPA) programmes. Further, experts said the strategy should be cautious in addressing third-party assurance and about using such information from private sectors.

GROUP 4  Overall suggestions on wording:

SP4: Strengthening stakeholder engagement and risk communication.

• Objective 4.1: Establish platforms for consultation on the national food safety agenda.

• Objective 4.2: The use of non-regulatory schemes for enhancing food safety across the food chain.

• Objective 4.3: Establish frameworks for sharing verification of compliance with food safety regulatory requirements.

• Objective 4.4: Facilitate communication and engagement with food business operators and consumers.
Strategic Priority 5: To promote food safety as an essential component of the economics of food production in both domestic and international trade.

The discussion group suggested that this strategic priority is reworded as “To promote food safety as an essential component in domestic and international food trade.” Some participants suggested that the economic aspect of food safety and trade should not be lost in the narrative. The serious economic consequences of an unsafe food supply are a major driver for governments to invest in strengthening national food control systems.

Strategic Objective 5.1: Strengthen interaction between national agencies involved in food production and those facilitating the export trade.

The group suggested that this strategic objective be reworded as “Ensure that national food control systems facilitate and promote food trade”. Activities at Member State level to achieve this strategic objective include advocacy with heads of regulatory authorities to promote interaction as beneficial to food safety and the promotion of collaboration at political level.

Objective 5.2: Ensure that export components of national food safety systems facilitate and promote international trade.

The group suggested a revision of this Strategic Priority as “Ensure that national food control systems facilitate and promote food trade”. Activities to facilitate this strategic objective at Member State level include the adoption of e-certification and the implementation of technical programmes for Codex standards.

Objective 5.3: Strengthen engagements with international agencies and networks that establish standards and guidelines for food in trade.

The group suggested a modification of this strategic objective to read “Strengthen engagements of national food control systems with international organizations and networks that establish standards and guidelines for food in trade”. The group also suggested that the terms “food control system” and “food safety system” should be further discussed and a consistent approach be adopted in line with WHA73.5. The food control functions implemented by national government agencies were perceived as being part of the wider food safety system. Participants agreed that there is a need for clarity between these terms.

Recommended activities at Member State level included capacity-building programmes for strengthening national Codex structures and enabling Codex Trust Fund support; the sensitization of policy-makers on the importance of food

**Objective 5.4: Strengthen food controls and capacity development in regulatory systems for the domestic market.**

The group agreed with this strategic objective. Suggested activities at Member State level included the harmonization of national food standards and training of food workers on the requirements of these standards/regulations; promoting the implementation of food safety assurance programmes for food business operators; the wide dissemination of the National Codex Committee Procedural Manual and the use of stakeholder groups involving government agencies, food industry and academia to harmonize domestic standards with those of the Codex Alimentarius; and building national food testing infrastructure.

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**GROUP 5 Overall suggestions on wording:**

SP5: To promote food safety as an essential component in domestic and international trade.

- Objective 5.1: Strengthen interaction between national agencies responsible for food safety and those facilitating the food trade.
- Objective 5.2: Ensure that national food control systems facilitate and promote international trade.
- Objective 5.3: Strengthen engagements of national food control systems with international agencies and networks that establish standards and guidelines for food in trade.
- Objective 5.4: Strengthen food controls and capacity development in regulatory systems for the domestic market.
Proposal on Strategic Priority 6

In this session, TAG members discussed the possibility of including a sixth strategic priority focusing on food safety infrastructure capacity-building in developing countries.

Developing countries suffer the greatest burden of foodborne disease and are generally resource poor and lack the necessary capacity for developing national food control systems. One of the TAG members presented a proposal for a sixth strategic priority focusing on "enhancing the food safety situation in developing countries". This priority will mainly encompass the activities that WHO should take for supporting Member States in food safety. Most participants supported this proposal while acknowledging that the organization of this new strategic priority can break the consistency of previous strategic priorities because previous strategic priorities all target Member States while the new one has a special focus on WHO. The WHO Secretariat explained to the meeting participants that as WHO's leadership in food safety and public health is crucial for the success of the strategy, the strategy will strike a balance between activities of WHO and actions by Member States. This new proposal will be reflected in the strategy.
Session 8: Food safety impact measurement framework

Ms Yuki Minato, the technical officer of the WHO Department of Nutrition and Food Safety, discussed the WHO’s initiatives on the food safety impact measurement framework and the global burden estimates of foodborne diseases. She highlighted the public health and economic burden caused by foodborne diseases in the 2015 WHO publication and the 2019 World Bank report. She discussed the WHO’s overall impact measurement framework against the Thirteenth General Programme of Work (GPW13) and highlighted that one of the challenges for food safety is that there is no food safety indicator within the current organizational impact measurement framework. Building on this need, WHO plans to work on a food safety impact measurement framework to document and track the progress by identifying 1) performance indicators that will track the progress of the implementation of the WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety; and 2) a health outcome indicator that will contribute to the WHO impact measurement framework under the SDG mechanism. In this case, a global forum will be established to identify such indicators, and experts from the current food safety TAG will be included as part of the discussion on the development of indicators. In addition, she mentioned that the update of the global burden estimates for foodborne diseases will be completed in 2025 by the Foodborne Disease Burden Epidemiology Reference Group (FERG).

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Session 9: 
Plenary discussion on key issues and closing

TAG members discussed the proposed structure of the WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety and made suggestions to improve it. The outline structure agreed upon by TAG members is as follows:

1. Introduction
   - Background
   - Food safety: A public health priority
   - Drivers of change

2. Aim of the strategy
Guide and support Member States in their efforts to prioritize, plan, implement, and regularly monitor and evaluate actions towards the reduction of the incidence of foodborne diseases by continuously strengthening food control systems and promoting global cooperation.

3. Vision of the strategy
Safe and healthy food for all. All countries are capable of promoting, supporting and protecting consumer’s health by applying food safety to reduce the burden of foodborne diseases.

4. Strategic Priorities
   **Strategic Priority 1**: Strengthening national food control systems.

   **Strategic Priority 2**: Identifying and responding to food safety challenges resulting from the transformation and global changes in food systems.

   **Strategic Priority 3**: Increasing the use of food chain information, scientific evidence and risk assessment in making risk management decisions.

   **Strategic Priority 4**: Strengthening stakeholder engagement and risk communication.
Strategic Priority 5: To promote food safety as an essential component in domestic and international trade.

Proposed Strategic Priority 6: Enhance food safety [situation] in developing countries.

It is intended to revisit this proposal after the WHO Secretariat conducts a mapping exercise to identify gaps and overlaps in the existing strategic priorities.

5. Strategy implementation
The WHO Secretariat proposed that for the implementation of the strategy, there will be recommended actions against each strategic priority for Member States, WHO, and international and national partners. No objections received from the TAG members.

6. Monitoring and evaluation
The WHO Secretariat proposed that monitoring and evaluation of the strategy should include the identification of:

- Key performance indicators
- Outcomes
- Outputs
- Impacts

No objections received from the TAG members. It was noted that the strategy implementation, monitoring and evaluation will be further discussed in the second TAG meeting.

Next steps
TAG members were asked to provide written comments regarding the consultation paper and meeting discussions by 15 February 2021. The WHO Secretariat will further compile the comments to draft the strategy and send a new version to TAG members in March. In the meantime, the Secretariat will draft the meeting report and share with meeting participants. The next TAG meeting was expected to be scheduled for early April.
Meeting closing remarks

Ms Catherine Bessy, Food Safety and Quality Officer, FAO, expressed the FAO’s gratitude to the WHO for the invitation to participate as an observer in the meeting and looked forward to being involved in the next steps in developing the strategy. She noted that there are complementarities in the roles of both WHO and FAO in assisting developing countries in strengthening their national food control systems. The joint programmes of both organizations, such as the Codex Alimentarius, the scientific advice expert committees (such as JECFA, JEMRA and JMPR), and common instruments such as the FAO/WHO Food Control Assessment Tool are resources to support food safety efforts in all Member States. Ms Bessy thanked all participants for their involvement and interesting discussions.

Dr Francesco Branca thanked all participants for their valuable contributions to the discussions over the course of the TAG meeting. He acknowledged the advice from the TAG members in shaping the strategy, which will assist Member States in strengthening their national food control systems. The WHO, in partnership with FAO, is committed to developing the new Global Strategy for Food Safety to chart the way forward and provide guidance to Member States. Dr Branca emphasized the importance of adopting a One Health Approach as a component of food control systems to address emerging risks at the human-animal-environment interface. He looked forward to working with TAG members in finalizing the strategy. Finally, Dr Branca thanked Dr Paul Cook for his professional chairing of the TAG meeting and thanked the WHO Secretariat for all efforts in moving the resolution WHA73.5 forward and organizing a very successful meeting.
# Annex 1

## Agenda for first TAG meeting

### Monday 8 February 2021, 12:00-15:00 CET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:00-12:45</td>
<td>Session 1: Welcome Session</td>
<td>Francesco Branca, WHO</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00-12:10</td>
<td>Opening Remarks</td>
<td>Naoko Yamamoto, WHO</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:10-12:45</td>
<td>Introduction to the meeting and participants</td>
<td>All participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:45-13:15</td>
<td>Session 2: WHO’s initiatives in strengthening food safety</td>
<td>Luz Maria De-Regil, WHO</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:45-13:10</td>
<td>- Presentation with Q&amp;A: Introduction to the resolution and the strategy</td>
<td>Amina Benyahia, WHO</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:10-13:15</td>
<td>Meeting Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:15-13:25</td>
<td>Session 3: General discussion on the strategy</td>
<td>Paul Cook, TAG</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:25-14:45</td>
<td>- Food safety as a public health and trade priority</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:25-13:45</td>
<td>- Drivers of changes in food safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:45-14:05</td>
<td>- Aim and the vision</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:05-14:25</td>
<td>- Proposed five strategic priorities</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:25-14:45</td>
<td>Session 4: Session closing and arrangements Day 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:45-15:00</td>
<td>- Arrangement for Breakout groups discussion</td>
<td>Amina Benyahia, WHO</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Adjourn</td>
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### Tuesday 9 February 2021, 12:00-15:00 CET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:00-12:10</td>
<td>Recap of Day 1 meeting</td>
<td>Paul Cook, TAG</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:10-13:10</td>
<td>Session 5: Breakout group discussion for five strategic priorities</td>
<td>WHO Food Safety Regional Advisors</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Group 1: Discussion on objectives 1.1 to 1.5</td>
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<td>- Group 2: Discussion on objectives 2.1 and 2.2</td>
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<td>- Group 3: Discussion on objectives 3.1 to 3.4</td>
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<td>- Group 4: Discussion on objectives 4.1 to 4.4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Group 5: Discussion on objectives 5.1 to 5.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:10-13:20</td>
<td>Meeting Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:20-15:00</td>
<td>Session 6: Plenary discussion and report by each working group</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:20-13:55</td>
<td>- Group 1 Presentation with Q&amp;A</td>
<td>Annie Locas</td>
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<td>13:55-14:30</td>
<td>- Group 2 Presentation with Q&amp;A</td>
<td>Anne Brisabois</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:30-15:00</td>
<td>- Group 3 Presentation with Q&amp;A</td>
<td>Hajime Toyofuku</td>
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<tr>
<td>15:00</td>
<td>Session closing and adjourn</td>
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<td>Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00-12:10</td>
<td>Recap of Day 2 meeting</td>
<td>Paul Cook, TAG</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:10-13:20</td>
<td>Session 7: Plenary discussion and report by each working group</td>
<td>Paul Cook, TAG</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:10-12:45</td>
<td>- Group 4 Presentation with Q&amp;A</td>
<td>Sally Johnston</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:45-13:20</td>
<td>- Group 5 Presentation with Q&amp;A</td>
<td>Jørgen Schlundt</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:20-13:30</td>
<td>Meeting Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:30-14:00</td>
<td>Session 8: Food safety impact measurement framework</td>
<td>Paul Cook, TAG</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:30-14:00</td>
<td>- Presentation with Q&amp;A: WHO's food safety impact measurement framework</td>
<td>Yuki Minato, WHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:00-15:00</td>
<td>Session 9: Plenary discussion on key issues and closing</td>
<td>Paul Cook, TAG</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:00-14:50</td>
<td>- Key issues and next steps for the updated strategy</td>
<td>Paul Cook, TAG</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:50-15:00</td>
<td>- Closing remarks</td>
<td>Catherine Bessy, FAO</td>
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<td>Francesco Branca, WHO</td>
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## Annex 2

### Breakout groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakout groups</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SP1: Strengthening Food Control Systems</td>
<td>Dr Annie Locas</td>
<td>Region of the Americas</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr Dasep Wahidin</td>
<td>South-East Asia Region</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr Jambay Dorji</td>
<td>South-East Asia Region</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr Fadi Naser Al-Natour</td>
<td>Eastern Mediterranean Region</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Professor Mungiu Sohn</td>
<td>Western Pacific Region</td>
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<td><strong>Group 2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>SP2: Identifying and responding to food safety challenges resulting from global changes in food systems</td>
<td>Dr Antoinette Brigitte Ngandjio</td>
<td>African Region</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dr Rubeena Shaheen</td>
<td>South-East Asia Region</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dr Sébastien Goux</td>
<td>European Region</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dr Anne Brisabois</td>
<td>European Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr Dina Lithy</td>
<td>Eastern Mediterranean Region</td>
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<td><strong>Group 3</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>SP3: Increasing the use of food chain information, scientific evidence and risk assessment in making risk management decisions that strengthen food safety systems</td>
<td>Dr Amare Ayalew</td>
<td>African Region</td>
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<td>Dr Paul Cook</td>
<td>European Region</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr Nesrine Gharbi Gafsi</td>
<td>Eastern Mediterranean Region</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dr Yongning Wu</td>
<td>Western Pacific Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professor Hajime Toyofuku</td>
<td>Western Pacific Region</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Group 4</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>SP4: Strengthening stakeholder engagement and risk communication</td>
<td>Dr William R. Jones</td>
<td>Region of the Americas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Professor Elke Stedefeldt</td>
<td>Region of the Americas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dr Sebastian Hielm</td>
<td>European Region</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr Farahnaz Ghollasi</td>
<td>Eastern Mediterranean Region</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ms Sally Johnston</td>
<td>Western Pacific Region</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Group 5</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>SP5: Food safety as a driver of the economics of domestic food production and international trade</td>
<td>Ms Eva Edwards</td>
<td>African Region</td>
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<td>Dr Mirian Bueno Almendarez</td>
<td>Region of the Americas</td>
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<td>Dr Sunil Bakshi</td>
<td>South-East Asia Region</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr Jørgen Schlundt</td>
<td>European Region</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Annex 3
Meeting participants

TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP (TAG) MEMBERS

**Dr Mirian Bueno Almendarez**
Deputy Director for Food Safety
Subdirecccion General de Inocuidad Agroalimentaria
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**Dr Fadi Naser Al-Natour**
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**Dr Sunil Bakshi**
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**Dr Anne Brisabois**
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French Agency for Food, Environmental, Occupational Health & Safety
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**Dr Paul Cook**
Science Lead
Microbiological Risk Assessment Science, Evidence and Research Division
Food Standards Agency
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

**Mr Jambay Dorji**
Senior Regulatory and Quarantine Officer
Bhutan Agriculture and Food Regulatory Authority
Ministry of Agriculture and Forests
Bhutan

**Ms Eva Edwards**
Deputy Director
Food Safety and Applied Nutrition Directorate
National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control
Nigeria

**Dr Nesrine Gharbi Gafsi**
Assistant Director
Health Control for Food, Feed, and Water
National Agency for Sanitary and Environmental Control of Products
Tunisia
Dr Farahnaz Ghollasi  
General Director  
Participation in International Standards Development Department  
Institute of Standards and Industrial Research  
Iran (Islamic Republic of)  

Dr Sébastien Goux  
Deputy Head, Unit of Multilateral international relations  
The Health and Food Safety Directorate-General  
European Commission  
Belgium  

Dr Sebastian Hielm  
Director of Food Safety  
Food Safety Unit  
Food Department  
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry  
Finland  

Ms Sally Johnston  
Director Paetae Kairangi  
Ministry for Primary Industries  
New Zealand  

Dr William R. Jones  
Principal Deputy Director for Food Safety Science & Policy  
U.S. Food and Drug Administration  
United States of America  

Dr Dina Lithy  
Director of food mycotoxins lab  
Central public health laboratory  
Ministry of Health  
Egypt  

Dr Annie Locas  
National Manager  
Food Safety Science Services - Microbiology, Science Branch  
Canadian Food Inspection Agency  
Canada  

Dr Antoinette Brigitte Ngandjio  
Regional Microbiologist - West Africa  
Mott MacDonald - Ghana  
Fleming Fund Programme  

Dr Jørgen Schlundt  
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Healthier Populations

Dr Francesco Branca  
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Dr Amina Benyahia  
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Unit Head  
Multisectoral Action in Food Systems

Mr Cheng Liang  
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Ms Hyun Jin Kim
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Multisectoral Action in Food Systems

Ms Yuki Minato
Project Officer
Multisectoral Action in Food Systems

Mr Nesre Redi
Technical Officer
Multisectoral Action in Food Systems

Professor Alan Reilly
Consultant
Multisectoral Action in Food Systems

Mr Carmen Savelli
Technical Officer
Monitoring Nutritional Status & Food Safety Events

Ms Liliya Smialkova
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