

ASEAN

Food Safety Policy

The ASEAN Secretariat
Jakarta



one vision
one identity
one community

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ASEAN: A Community of Opportunities

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Foreword



ASEAN Food Safety Policy represents a significant accomplishment toward a resilient, inclusive, people-oriented and people-centred ASEAN as envisaged in the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025.

It is an overarching policy which provides a common basis for current and future efforts of ASEAN Ministerial Bodies responsible for health, agriculture and trade in improving the protection of health, ensuring consumer rights and improving the quality of food products produced and traded within ASEAN.

It will also ensure that measures implemented by ASEAN Member States cover the entire food chain from primary production, processing, storage and distribution of food products, that

the measures adopted are science based and provide guidance for ensuring fair practices in food trade while facilitating the free movement of safe food products within the region.

I am confident that this policy will serve to integrate and underpin the ongoing complementary initiatives that ASEAN is undertaking in improving food safety such as the recent establishment of the ASEAN Risk Assessment Centre for Food Safety (ARAC), the ASEAN Regional Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (ARASFF) and the harmonisation of technical requirements being undertaken by the working groups for agriculture and prepared food products.

I congratulate the ministerial bodies for their contributions to the formulation of this ASEAN Food Safety Policy and wish all regional bodies and ASEAN Member States successful implementation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Minh', written in a cursive style.

LE LUONG MINH
Secretary-General of ASEAN

Introduction

The ASEAN Leaders made a decision “to create a single market and production base which is stable, prosperous, highly competitive and economically integrated with effective facilitation for trade and investment in which there is free flow of goods, services and investment; facilitated movement of business persons, professionals, talents and labour; and freer flow of capital.” with the intention “to enhance the well-being and livelihood of the peoples of ASEAN by providing them with equitable access to opportunities for human development, social welfare and justice” as defined in Article 1 of the ASEAN Charter.

The **ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint** sets the objective of establishing a Single Market and Production Base in which there is free flow of goods, services, investment, capital and skilled labour. The Blueprint identifies a series of priority actions that are required in the area of “Food, Agriculture and Forestry”, including food safety and trade, to reach the objective of establishing an ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. The ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement concluded on February 26, 2009, which has the objective of establishing a single market and production base for the deeper economic integration of the region towards the realisation of the AEC by 2015, includes specific provisions for the trade in food products.

The **ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint** includes as one of its Strategic Objectives to ensure adequate access to food at all times for all ASEAN peoples and ensure food safety in ASEAN Member States. This Strategic Objective aims at strengthening the various national and regional institutions involved in food safety and improving health outcomes.

Since the beginning of ASEAN cooperation and subsequent efforts in moving towards regional integration, a number of important initiatives focusing on food safety have been implemented through the establishment of various ASEAN bodies under the respective purviews of the ASEAN Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF), ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) and ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting (AHMM).

Food safety is a shared responsibility requiring a multi-disciplinary approach. It requires the active participation and collaboration of a number of actors along the food chain, from the primary producer to the consumer.

As ASEAN establishes an integrated market for food, the ASEAN food safety policy will provide the basis for coordination and establish a common purpose across the relevant ASEAN Ministers Meetings and ASEAN bodies established by the Ministers. The agreed principles of the ASEAN Food Safety Policy serve as guidance and facilitate the development of a sustainable and robust food safety regulatory framework for the region.

The ASEAN Food Safety Policy will be reviewed periodically and updated as required to reflect new developments in ASEAN that have an impact on food safety.

Objectives of the ASEAN Food Safety Policy

To provide direction to relevant ASEAN Sectoral Bodies and ASEAN Member States with the goal of protecting the health of ASEAN consumers, ensuring fair practices in food trade and facilitating the free movement of safe food products within the region, which includes:

- i. Establishing and implementing food safety measures;
- ii. Fostering the process of harmonisation of food safety measures and control procedures of ASEAN Member States; and
- iii. Supporting the efforts of ASEAN Member States in strengthening national food control systems.

Scope

The ASEAN food safety policy addresses all sectors concerned with food safety assurance and control, including agriculture, health, industry and trade.

The ASEAN Food Safety Policy comprises 10 core principles. These principles provide a guide and direction for the development and implementation of the initiatives of ASEAN bodies responsible for all aspects of food safety and food safety regulatory systems in ASEAN Member States:

Principles of the ASEAN Food Safety Policy

Principle 1: Integrated ‘Food Chain’ Approach

In order to ensure the safety of food in ASEAN, it is necessary to consider all aspects of the food production chain as a continuum from and including primary production and the production of animal feed up to and including sale or supply of food to the consumer.

ASEAN Member States should put in place food safety assurance and control systems and implement at every step of the food chain from primary production to consumption, and across all food sectors, through the application of good practices where it applies to food safety. ASEAN Member States will

cooperate to develop harmonised requirements for food safety assurance and control systems throughout the food chain.

Principle 2: Systematic Risk Analysis Framework

Measures adopted in controlling food safety by ASEAN Member States governing food safety should be based on risk analysis.

The consistent use of risk analysis principles and scientific advice should be applied at the regional and national level, and used in the development of food safety control system.

Capacity building on food safety risk analysis should be carried out at the regional and national level.

ASEAN Member States will cooperate to develop food safety risk management recommendations that are based on scientific risk assessment. Other “legitimate” factors relevant for the health protection of consumers and for the promotion of fair practices in food trade may be taken into account.

Risk management should take into account the economic consequences and the feasibility of risk management options. It should also recognise the need for alternative options in the establishment of standards, guidelines and other recommendation.

Risk management should ensure transparency and consistency in the decision-making process in all cases.

The risk management process should be transparent and consistent. Examination of the full range of risk management options should, as far as possible, take into account an assessment of their potential advantages and disadvantages. When making a choice among different risk management options, which are equally effective in protecting the health of consumer, the potential impact of such an option on trade should be sought and taken into consideration and options that are no more trade- restrictive than necessary should be selected.

Food safety risks should be communicated to ASEAN Member States to implement control measures within each territory.

ASEAN food safety risk management decisions should be consistent with ASEAN Member States obligations under the World Trade Organisation's Agreements on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT).

ASEAN Member States should implement national food safety rapid alert and response systems to prevent unsafe or adulterated food products from reaching the consumer. Participation in the ASEAN Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (ARASFF) can ensure timely exchange of information on food safety between ASEAN Member States and facilitate the conduct of corrective and preventive actions.

ASEAN Member States should participate in the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN), and ensure that food safety events that constitute as Public Health Emergencies of International Concern (PHEIC) are reported through the appropriate channels as required by the International Health Regulations (2005).

In case of scientific uncertainty and potential health risk for the consumer, provisional measures may be taken to protect the consumer. These measures shall be reviewed when new scientific information becomes available and within a reasonable timeframe.

Principle 3: Science-based, Independent Risk Assessment Process

Food safety risk assessments should be carried out in an independent, objective and transparent manner, using relevant and available scientific information and data.

ASEAN Member States should monitor potential food safety risks, inter alia, the prevalence of chemical and microbiological contaminants in food supply to generate information on the nature of these contaminants, their levels

and trends to enable taking corrective and preventive measures to protect consumer's health.

ASEAN Member States should fully participate in the ASEAN Risk Assessment Centre for Food Safety (ARAC), the regional coordinating centre for food safety risk assessment that provides independent scientific opinion on food safety issues of common interest. ASEAN Member States should share relevant data as needed for conducting food safety risk assessment.

Where available, food safety risk assessments carried out by relevant international bodies, such as the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA), the Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues (JMPR), the Joint FAO/WHO Experts on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA) and international consultations, should be used. Where needed, risk assessments carried out by other regions or countries should also be referenced.

Principle 4: Primary Responsibility of Food Business Operators

Food business operators, at every stage of the food chain, have the primary role and responsibility for ensuring the safety of their food products. The supporting role of national governments, consumers, academics and scientific institutions should be factored in implementation of food safety measures.

Food business operators shall establish and implement appropriate food safety assurance systems.

When requested by ASEAN Member States' food control authorities, they shall demonstrate the effectiveness of their food safety assurance system and provide related information and data.

Special consideration should be given to small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) by the regulatory authorities to enable them to upgrade their food safety assurance systems that take into account their conditions. ASEAN Member States shall ensure that continuous and appropriate support and assistance is

provided so that SMEs can meet national food safety requirements.

Principle 5: Consistency with ATIGA and WTO's SPS and TBT Agreements

Food import/export requirements of ASEAN Member States shall be consistent with ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA), as well as with the World Trade Organisation's Agreements on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures and on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT).

ASEAN Bodies undertaking the harmonisation or mutual recognition of requirements for food control shall ensure that these are based on the relevant provisions of ATIGA, SPS and the TBT Agreements. The ASEAN bodies should additionally ensure that the mutual recognition arrangements are consistent with the provisions of all existing ASEAN trade agreements with external parties.

Principle 6: Equivalence and Mutual Recognition

ASEAN Member States recognise that national food control systems or their components, although designed and structured differently, are capable of meeting the same objective.

ASEAN Member States should participate in and implement initiatives to develop and maintain food safety standards and technical regulations which have been harmonised with international standards and requirements and establish mutual recognition arrangements (MRAs) and equivalence arrangements with other ASEAN Member States to facilitate economic integration.

Principle 7: Harmonisation with International Standards

ASEAN Sectoral Bodies engaged in the harmonisation of standards and requirements for food safety and food control should ensure that these are based on international standards.

When establishing harmonised food safety measures or standards for food safety and food control at the regional level, the adoption of internationally accepted standards, guidelines and recommendations and, in particular, those issued by the Codex Alimentarius Commission should be the first option.

ASEAN Member States should actively participate in setting up international food standards, guidelines and recommendations to ensure that the concerns of the region are duly considered.

Principle 8: Reliable Traceability System

A reliable traceability system covering relevant stages of production, processing and distribution of food and feed products should be put in place by ASEAN Member States to enable targeted and swift withdrawals of unsafe food products whenever needed.

The traceability system should be able to identify at any relevant stage of the food chain (from production to distribution) from where the food came (one step back) and to where the food went (one step forward).

Priority should be given to the traceability of high-risk food products. ASEAN Member States should cooperate and share information on unsafe food products or ingredients when sourced from other ASEAN Member States or when the supply chain food products extend to other ASEAN Member States.

ASEAN Member States should establish national food recall procedures to prevent unsafe food products from reaching the consumer. These procedures should be part of the national food safety systems and enable sharing of information through ASEAN Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (ARASFF), especially when the products are traded between ASEAN Member States.

Principle 9: Strengthening and Harmonisation of Regional and National Food Control Systems

All ASEAN Member States will support the development of ASEAN initiatives for enhancing food safety and make every effort to ensure that all national food control systems are at a level of performance, efficiency and effectiveness that is in line with ASEAN Principles and Guidelines for National Food Control Systems as well as other relevant international or ASEAN common food safety requirements.

ASEAN Member States will actively support and participate in ASEAN Sectoral Bodies that undertake the development of harmonised standards and requirements for enhancing food safety and for facilitating free movement of safe food products within ASEAN. A coordinated approach needs to be adopted to avoid overlaps in scope and duplication by the Sectoral Bodies.

ASEAN Member States will ensure that national food safety legislation is comprehensive, up-to-date, covers all stages of the food chain and is consistent with international and ASEAN Agreements. ASEAN Member States will ensure that the national food control system is comprehensive and implemented in a coordinated manner to address all aspects of the food chain and clearly identify responsibilities for implementation. ASEAN Member States will ensure that adequate resources are allocated and that all the components of the system function effectively.

ASEAN Member States will harmonise border food inspection and certification procedures through the adoption of relevant ASEAN principles and guidelines. ASEAN Member States should make every effort to ensure that the performance of their food laboratories is at the level required for food control and implement internationally accepted analytical quality assurance systems. ASEAN Member States shall ensure that their official food laboratories participate in regional and international analytical and proficiency testing networks. ASEAN Member States should take the required actions to strengthen and maintain the capacity of these laboratories.

Particular attention should be given to assist ASEAN Member States with less developed food safety control system in their effort to bring their food safety control systems to the desired level. In this regard, ASEAN Member states with more advanced food safety control systems should provide technical assistance on a bilateral or multilateral level.

Principle 10: Transparency

The development and implementation of ASEAN food safety measures will be undertaken in a transparent manner.

ASEAN Member States will share information on their institutional arrangements and food safety measures with all other ASEAN Member States. ASEAN Member States should make every effort to ensure effective communication with all stakeholders, including consumers, food business operators and other stakeholders at national and regional levels.

Food business operators, consumers and other stakeholders should be informed of the rationale for introducing new food safety measures and be invited to contribute to the decision-making process.

ASEAN Member States should undertake consumer education to enhance awareness on food safety.

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