THE WORLD BANK
IBRD • IDA | WORLD BANK GROUP

Vietnam Food Safety Risks Management:

Key Findings

- Food safety is a major concern for the public, with high levels of anxiety each time there is a high-profile food safety incident.

- Vietnam's reputation amongst its trading partners as a major exporter of food products is vulnerable to trade statistics showing levels of contamination.

- Food-borne illness is notoriously difficult to assess in any country but the level of contamination found in Vietnamese food for domestic consumption justifies public and trade concerns.

- Without action by government, these problems are likely to worsen:
    - Food safety scares are highly topical and each case is likely to be exploited by the media;
    - International trade will become increasingly competitive with the new trade agreements;
    - Increasing urbanisation puts pressure on traditional ways of providing food.

- The report found that the primary cause of food-borne illness comes from bacterial contamination, rather than from chemicals, which could be prevented by better levels of food hygiene throughout the value chain.

- High use of agricultural inputs such as antibiotics, pesticides and chemical fertilisers, poorly regulated or illegal imports, lack of traceability and cross-contamination are also important factors in assuring safe food but the biggest challenge lies in changing the practices of vast numbers of small producers.

- Vietnam has a modern food safety regulatory framework with foundations in place for further improving food safety performance and outcomes. However, much more could be done to make it result-focused and risk-based.

- There is no single answer to food safety issues but international experience provides many tested ideas which, in the right combination, should gradually improve levels of food safety.

Challenges and Opportunities

Background: A report on food safety was produced by the World Bank and partners at the request of the Government of Vietnam. This policy brief summarises the key findings and recommendations.

ILRI
INTERNATIONAL
LIVESTOCK RESEARCH
INSTITUTE

FAO

Canada

ADB

cirad
AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
FOR DEVELOPMENT

Australian Government

Principles for a high performing food safety systems

Safe food is delivered by the private sector, not by government: this is best attained through co-operative strategies for compliance, a focus on processes and prevention of incidents rather than end-product testing, and self-regulation by industry enforced by government.

• Enforcement requires: genuine collaboration across ministries; a network of well-trained food inspectors; risk-profiling of businesses leading to risk-based enforcement planning science- and risk- based food safety surveillance plans; laboratory networks (public and private) participating in proficiency testing and providing timely and quality-assured tests.

• Building a trusted and authoritative food safety system requires transparent and comprehensive hazard surveillance, planned communication for outbreaks and crises, and good relations with the public and institutions involved in food safety.

Key policy recommendations

The overall recommendation of the report is to develop a risk-based system using the principles of risk assessment, risk management and risk communication as set out by FAO/WHO. The recommendations are aligned with the National Strategy for Food Safety and would help realise its specific objectives. The following recommendations are key:

Risk assessment is the scientific evaluation of known or potential adverse health effects resulting from human exposure to foodborne hazards

• Strengthen the national food safety monitoring and surveillance system
• Improve data management to fill the need for better evidence on risks, impacts, and costs of foodborne disease and the efficacy and cost benefit of interventions.
• Develop databases of food businesses according to their risk profiles in order to understand and target effective interventions and enforcement.

Risk management is the process of selecting appropriate prevention and control options for improving food safety. It is based on risk assessment.

• Establish a performance management system within ministries and associated monitoring addressing the context of different food sectors and create a culture of evidence-based decision-making.
• Develop a "farm to fork" approach to food safety that covers inputs, production, processing and retail and builds capacities in all food safety actors.
• Work with consumers to drive better practices by producers.

Risk communication is the interactive exchange of information and opinions among risk assessors, risk managers, consumers, industry, the academic community and others

• Develop a Food Safety Communication strategy which, over time, builds consumer confidence in government advice on food safety issues.
• Develop open collaboration between ministries and other actors in order to present a coherent and consistent message.

Optimising risk assessment, management and communication can be facilitated by building capacity and improving co-ordination between actors.

• Create a Risk Assessment Centre to build capacity in risk-based approaches including risk assessment, risk profiling and risk categorization.
• Institutional re-arrangement: pilot a single agency for food safety management at provincial level.
• Improve networking, consensus building and consistency: coordinating and sharing of data from laboratory and surveillance networks to serve evidence-based decision-making.
• Develop inter-connected food safety strategy and SPS action plan.
• Focus on preventive approach for ensuring food safety rather than on end product testing.