



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

Ensuring the safety of imported foods

Strengthening the risk-based imported food control system

According to the World Trade Organization statistics for 2014, food products comprise the third most valuable commodity group traded globally, and imports constitute a significant proportion of food supplies.

With the annual trade in food growing exponentially, imported food controls need to be strengthened to protect consumer health and ensure fair trade.

In 2017, the Governments of Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka worked under the FAO project entitled **“Strengthening national capacity for risk-based food import control within a One Health framework”** to improve national imported food control systems and ensure they are aligned with the relevant international guidelines developed by Codex Alimentarius.

The project significantly contributed to one of the FAO’s Strategic Objectives, *“Enabling inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems”* (SO4), as all of the relevant national authorities have initiated the employment of systematic and inclusive approaches in effective imported food control.



PROJECT OUTPUTS

- **An FAO milestone publication** entitled *“Ensuring the safety of imported food: Current approaches for imported food control in Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka”*. The document compiled national situation reports of the countries, including the current status, strengths and areas requiring improvement of their respective food import control systems.
- **Stakeholder consultations** were held in all four countries to collectively validate the information in the situation reports and confirm the recommendations and follow-up actions.
- **Training of trainers workshops** were held on the application of risk analysis for imported food in Nepal, and risk categorization in the Philippines, both of which helped deepen the understanding of relevant officers in the two countries of the importance of a risk analysis framework in imported food control.



Stakeholder consultations in the Philippines



Country overviews

Myanmar

- The Import and Export Law primarily regulates imports of food and related products into Myanmar. Secondary laws address plant and animal sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements. The Food Law (under review) addresses food regulatory and technical standards, including food safety.
- Risk categorization in major ports under the Myanmar Automated Cargo Clearance System framework, a two-tier customs system, classifies food imports based on their risk and compliance history by an international harmonized code (HS Code), and are inspected accordingly.

Nepal

- Imported food controls are regulated by the Food Act of 1967, and a new food safety and quality policy, with the revision of the legislations to address the current risks, is underway.
- Data collection systems on imported foods and importer profiles are at preliminary stage and need to be improved in order to be sufficient for risk management actions.

Philippines

- The imported food control system is governed by the Food Safety Act of 2013, and its Implementing Rules and Regulations, as embodied in joint Department of Agriculture and Department of Health Administrative Order No. 1, s. 2015.
- Pest risk analysis, risk categorization of plants, and the accreditation of foreign meat establishments are useful pre-border control tools currently in use.

Sri Lanka

- Imports are regulated through the Imports and Exports (Control) Act of 1969, and amended by Act No. 28 of 1987. The Food Control Administration Unit administers the national food control system, under the Food Act No.26 of 1980.
- Customs operate a risk and performance-based inspection programme that categorize importers based on their compliance history; controls are applied at different stringency levels for each category.



Conclusion and highlights

Several good practices have already been implemented by the countries despite the differences in their capacities and food import priorities. Such practices include: subjecting imported foods equally to the same legal requirements as domestic foods; keeping records of importer profiles and imported foods; testing and sampling methodology based on the risk level of the food; and having risk-based management actions in place at border control checkpoints.

All four countries identified the following as best practices:

- **Effective use of a food safety risk categorization** to prioritize commodity-hazard combinations in order to create a concise and easy reference for border control officials so that high-risk and high-interest food items receive more attention than other food items;
- **Implementation of standard operating procedures for risk-based inspections** of imported food in order to maintain consistency and transparency, eliminate procedural mistakes, and save time and finances; and
- **Systematic communication and collaboration with relevant partner agencies and stakeholders** on information pertaining to importer profiles, risk categorization results, and required documents for risk-based management for imported food safety.

FAO References



FAO Risk Based Imported Food Control Manual 2016

Available for download at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-15381e.pdf>



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Available for download at: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca0286en/ca0286en.pdf>

For more information

<http://www.fao.org/asiapacific/perspectives/one-health/food-safety/>



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