



International Commission on Microbiological Safety for Foods (ICSMF) Food Safety Risk Management Symposium

Background

Food production and export is considered to be one of the primary steps on the path of economic development. In response to the need to liberalise international trade so as to facilitate development, the World Trade Organisation was created as part of the finalisation of the Uruguay Round of GATT¹ in 1995. It was agreed in the resolution of that round of GATT that the only justification for restricting food imports would be to protect human, animal or plant life or health against a demonstrable threat. It was also agreed that any regulations imposed to protect those populations must be applied equally to imported or domestically-produced foods.

In this regard, a number of principles have been embodied in the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement and the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreements. Under these agreements, formal risk analysis has been recognized as the means of objectively assessing whether the individual standards set by trading nations are valid, and whether diverse food safety control systems implemented in trading nations, provide the same level of protection of public (or animal or crop) health.

Central to the implementation of these policies is the idea of '*risk*', and the use of formalised risk assessment approaches to assess equivalence of food safety and food safety systems in trading nations. The idea of control of hazards, through the widespread adoption of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points management systems, is well understood. While hazards are things that could *potentially* cause harm, '*risk*' encompasses both the **likelihood** that the hazard might occur and the **severity** of the harm if it did. Also implicit in these approaches is the idea that there is always some risk. Thus, approaches described as "zero tolerance" are misnomers and may impose costs to regulators, the industry and (ultimately) consumers that are out of proportion to the benefits gained. A starting point for these new approaches is the establishment of Food Safety Objectives (FSOs) that reflect a societally-endorsed 'Appropriate Level of Protection (ALOP)' of consumers.

Foodborne pathogens continue to cause human illness and deaths, and loss of productivity, in all nations, despite great advances that have been made in the realm of food safety. Changes, e.g., in farming practices, globalisation of the food industry, increased concentration of food production, greater demand for convenient but minimally processed foods and advances in medicine that prolong life in people with serious underlying illnesses, have meant that food-borne infections are still relatively common and the risk of outbreak is still real, even in nations with mature food processing and regulatory infrastructure. The risk assessment approach can also be used to minimise the impact of food-borne pathogens by identifying the most effective point(s) in the food chain at which to control them. The risk assessment approach is also essentially quantitative, meaning that FSO's are 'converted' into numerical limits for pathogens or indicator organisms. In turn, these microbiological criteria must be assessed by appropriate sampling plans.

The International Commission on Microbiological Specifications for Foods (ICMSF) and the South African Association for Food Science and Technology (SAAFoST) are partnering to bring to South

¹ General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

Africa, endorsed training materials and courses to explain these risk-based rules and to provide **practical training** in their implementation with the aim of:

1. Facilitating trade in the different regions in Africa as well as internationally;
2. Improving food safety at a national level, i.e., domestic markets;
3. Enabling innovation in food processing.

Overview of the Congress Symposium

The Congress symposium is intended to provide participants with an understanding of the international rules for establishing microbiological criteria for foods in international trade, modern food safety risk management concepts, and practical tools to aid in their implementation.

Date : **To be confirmed**
Time : **11h00 – 15h00**
Registration Fee : **Included in the Congress Registration Fee**

The Congress Symposium, which will take place during the Congress on one of the three days (7-9 October 2013), will comprise lectures and practical examples covering:

- overview of current trends in microbial food-borne illness in developed nations and responses of government, industry and international bodies (e.g., Codex) to them,
- explanation of the ideas of food safety risk *cf.* food safety hazards,
- introduction to food safety risk analysis including the role of the World Trade Organisation and the significance of the SPS and TBT agreement,
- Codex Alimentarius Commission principles for food safety risk management, food safety and risk assessment, with appropriate examples,
- explanation of the concept of Food Safety Objectives and introduction to their practical application, including use of the ICMSF food safety objectives tool to translate a Food Safety Objective into Microbiological Criteria at the point of manufacture,
- useful microbiological testing (appropriate) of foods per commodity (this would include presentations from the new ICMSF book 8 – Use of Data for Assessing Process Control and Product Acceptance).

The ICMSF also brings you a Post Congress One-Day Workshop on Microbiological Sampling on 10 October 2013 at the same venue. [Click here](#) for more information.

For further information, contact:

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