

CAREC SOM 2021
Summary Annual Progress Report for Agriculture Cluster

- The TA 9274-REG: Strengthening International Food Safety Standards in Agricultural Value Chains in the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Member Countries was approved on 13 December 2016 for \$500,000 (TASF-6) with original closing date of 31 August 2019. The latest TA closing date is 30 November 2021. In September 2017, the TA was increased to \$2.0 million (\$1.3 million from ADB's Technical Assistance Fund (TASF-6) and \$200,000 from TASF-others (Attachment 1). The impact of the TA is aligned with improved public health and facilitation of trade in agro-food products in the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) member countries (CMCs). The outcome will be stronger institutional systems for the operationalization of international food safety standards. The following four outputs are expected: (i) regulations for meeting international food safety standards developed; (ii) laboratory rationalization and infrastructure requirements for applying international food safety standards identified; (iii) capacity of value chain actors to implement food safety to international standards strengthened; and (iv) CAREC food safety network developed.
- Work has continued under the TA but has been severely impacted by the pandemic. Some key work has continued virtually for Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and recently Azerbaijan. Assistance has included:
 - Advice on the harmonization of legislation and regulations with international norms (including the development of new Food Safety Law, national action plans, hygiene, microbiological and chemical hazard regulations, inspection checklists and risk categorization) in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and recently Azerbaijan under Cluster 4, Output 1;
 - Training in Good Hygiene and Manufacturing Practices (GHP and GMP) and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point system (HACCP) inspection in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan under Cluster 4 Output 2; and
 - Training in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on how to engage with Codex via national networks under Cluster 4 Output 3.
- Work related to the proposed CAREC Regional Food Safety Network has had to be placed on hold as there is reluctance by countries to share anything meaningful as intended by the network design. Some of the information suggested to be shared is meant to be available under WTO rules - but few countries in the region yet fully comply with WTO requirements. Therefore, the setup and operationalization of the network at this stage is premature.

Key Developments and Results

Table 1: Work Undertaken since SOM 2020

Country	Work undertaken since last SOM under Agriculture Sector (Cluster 4)
Azerbaijan	One training session to 25 representatives from Azerbaijan Food Safety Agency, Azerbaijan Food Safety Institute and industry in the latest Codex Hygiene guidance for food safety hygiene regulations under Output 1.
Kazakhstan	Two training sessions for manager and key inspectors at the National Centre of Excellence under the Ministry of Health to support the rolling out of its HACCP training program for food inspectors under Output 2 Two training sessions with key staff from Atameken (Kazakhstan's Chamber of Commerce)- in its review of Food Safety regulation in Kazakhstan under Output 1.
Kyrgyz Republic	Four rounds of assistance to the key manager and team at the Department of Sanitary Epidemiological Services on risk categorization, revised inspection checklists, and regulations for a market surveillance program under Output 1.
Tajikistan	Five rounds of advice on to key Food Security Committee managers on a National Food Safety Action Plan and revised Food Safety Law, pesticide and veterinary drug regulations, engagement with Codex Alimentarius, specific laboratory testing, under Output 1 and training to 25 representatives from the Committee, Ministry of Agriculture in GHP, GMP and HACCP inspection under Output 2.
Turkmenistan	Two rounds of training for 27 representatives from the Ministries of Health and Agriculture in GHP, GMP and HACCP under Output 2, and technical advice to laboratory staff at the Centre of Public Health and Nutrition (laboratories) in specific food safety laboratory tests under Output 1.
Uzbekistan	Three rounds of assistance to deputy head of the Department of Sanitary and Epidemiological Wellbeing with the development and lodging of a new Food Safety Law into the Uzbek Parliament, a presentation to the Uzbek Senate Committee investigating food safety, and one round of training for the new National Codex Commission under Output 3.

Challenges and Key issues

- By far the biggest challenge with the project recently has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Key clients for the TA are the Ministries of Health in the member countries and such Ministries have been severely impacted by the pandemic. This has understandably resulted in a significant slowdown in much of the TA work program while the Ministries have had to focus on the pandemic.
- The second challenge has been engaging with agencies online. It has been more challenging to get time with key managers to organize training and it has proven more challenging to offer significant and more interactive training online. This has also impacted on the amount and length of training that has been able to be provided.
- The third challenge has been an ongoing one which is regarding the number of countries involved in the TA. Due to the many countries in the region, it has not proven possible to provide training and assistance to all of them.
- A fourth challenge is the non-alignment of former Soviet type approaches for managing food safety and the approaches recommended by Codex Alimentarius and elsewhere in the world. Creation of cross-country regulations under the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) has led to an improvement in food safety approaches - but they are still not consistent with Codex Alimentarius which creates challenges for CAREC members keen to increase trade with EAEU members and others at the same time.

Work Proposed

Table 2: Work proposed until September 2021 (online)

Country	Proposed work
Azerbaijan	Follow up with Azerbaijan Food Safety Agency on the training provided in relation to the latest Codex Hygiene guidance for food safety hygiene regulations.
Kazakhstan	<p>Further assistance to the National Centre of Excellence under the Ministry of Health in its rolling out a HACCP training program for food inspectors.</p> <p>Assistance to Atameken - in its review of Food Safety regulation in Kazakhstan with training in risk categorization, Codex hygiene guidelines based on GHP and GMP, microbiological and parameter testing and HACCP.</p>
Kyrgyz Republic	Further assistance to the Department of Sanitary Epidemiological Services with risk categorization, revised inspection checklists, a revised market surveillance program, new Food Safety Law, new national food safety strategy.
Mongolia	Training in HACCP for the General Agency for Inspection Services and the General Agency for Veterinary Services and to the National Food Safety Reference Laboratory in Codex risk assessment and specific food safety laboratory tests (once current lockdown conditions are eased).
Turkmenistan	Training to the Ministries of Health and Agriculture in Codex hygiene guidance, and to the Centre of Public Health and Nutrition (laboratories) in specific food safety laboratory tests.
Uzbekistan	Further training to the Department of Sanitary and Epidemiological Wellbeing and the new National Codex Commission on the new Food Safety Law, a national food safety strategy, Codex hygiene guidelines based on GHP and GMP, microbiological and parameter testing and HACCP.