

8.3. NEHAP 2017-2022: Food Safety and Health Sector

Background

Ensuring food safety and public health is one of the purposes in the development of the Philippine National Environmental Health Action Plan. The Food Safety and Health Sector is the primary responsible in the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of plan for food safety ⁽¹⁾.

From the 2015 Report of the Epidemiology Bureau of the DOH ⁽²⁾, it was reported that out of the 20 disease outbreaks that occurred from 2005- 2015, majority (40%) occurred between 2014 and 2015- mostly during the month of May. The most common places of events were identified to be in the home followed by schools and the most common causes of disease outbreaks are bacteria, followed by toxins and chemicals. Between 2005 to 2015, a total 1,021 cases were identified, with 44 cases of death and 406 cases hospitalized. In 2015, newspaper reports showed that there were 11 major food poisoning incidents in the Philippines. between April to August 2015. Most of the affected population were school children that bought food from their school canteen and other vendors. It was reported that the common sources of poisoning were the following: catered foods, home made candies, home made cakes, milk tea, and even commercially prepared foods ⁽³⁾.

During hydrometeorological disasters (floods, typhoons), Cluster A of the NDRRMC: Food and Non-food Items, is guided by the Cluster Operations Protocol⁽²⁾ for disaster response. Specifically the protocol calls for monitoring, in coordination with the Nutrition Cluster as part of HEALTH Cluster B, the nutritional status (including nutritional content, social, and cultural acceptability) of the affected population; the identification of gaps in the provision of food assistance; and the formulation of strategic interventions to address the gap and to ensure availability of food stockpiles at all levels. The DSWD is the cluster A lead agency with the DOH taking care of food safety and IEC.

Several government agencies and non-government organizations are already in action in ensuring food safety. In the Republic Act 10611 or the Food Safety Act of 2013, the agriculture and health departments are mandated to strengthen the food safety regulatory system in the country to protect consumer health and facilitate market access of local foods and food products, and for other purposes. The implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of the Food Safety Act was published in 2014⁽¹⁾.

Currently, FDA and DA are adopting established CODEX Standards as Philippine National Standards. As of 2015, the government has developed 321 Codex Standards (CODEX STAN), 86 Guidelines (CODEX GL), and 75 Recommended Codes of Practice (CAC/RCP) for both fresh and processed food commodities ⁽⁵⁾.

In order to more effectively address issues regarding food safety, an inter-agency for food safety and health sector currently lead by the Department of Health (DOH, based on NEHAP 2010-2013) is tasked to have close communication with other agencies and offices

such as DA (BFAR, BPI, BAI, NMIS, PCA, SRA, NDA, BAFS, NFA, FDC, BAR, and FPA), DTI-BPS, DOH agencies (EOHO, HEMS, BOQ, NCHP, NEC, NNC, and RITM), DILG-BLGS, DOST (PCHRD and FNRI), DepEd, BOC, Leagues of LGUs, and the academe⁽¹⁾.

In 2014, the Food Safety Regulation Coordinating Board (FSRCB), an inter-agency stipulated in RA 10611 of the Food Safety Act of 2013, was established. In 2015, there are other events/activities that address food safety such as the National Forum on Food Sanitation and Safety⁽¹⁾. The objective of the forum was to come up with a collaborative plan of action to protect consumers' health aimed to halt or reduce food-related illnesses or events in the Philippines.

The major concerns raised during the Forum were on:

- Policies covering food sanitation safety particularly its implementation at the local levels. Local ordinances are not developed by some LGUs and if ever they are, these are weakly enforced even at the national level. Issues on enforcement, jurisdiction, surveillance, inspections and compliance by food establishments have been raised due to defects in existing guidelines.
- Advocacy and awareness efforts were noted to be insufficient both at the national and local levels. IEC materials pertaining to food safety regulation and practices that promote the causation of food-borne diseases and poisoning, and the basic principles of food sanitation and safety are found wanting.
- Limited capacity and capability (manpower, funds, training) of the food inspectorate to perform the necessary food surveillance system both at the national and local levels. This is compounded by the insufficiency of analytical laboratories capable to determine food quality particularly in the regions outside of NCR.

Priority Issues and Challenges

Food safety remains a public health concern in the Philippines. Regulation of the industry is a primary area of interest, given the multitude of government agencies mandated by law to enforce, and monitor compliance to, prevailing statutes and rules pertaining to food safety and health. There is also an apparent gap in terms of integrating, packaging, and adapting these regulations at the local government unit level, where convergence primarily occurs. An organizational capacity to enforce policies on food safety is also a contributory factor, reflecting lack of human resource, technical, and operational abilities that hinder optimal protection of the public's health.

The issue is further compounded by the breadth of sectoral concerns than span the entire food chain, i.e. from food production, transport, processing, storage and consumption. The state also needs to recognize the predominance of cottage industries and the informal sector, mainly unregulated, which contribute to available food products in the marketplace. The free flow of goods and commodities in the era of a globalized economy, and in the face of the forthcoming regional integration by way of the ASEAN Economic Community, also mean that stakeholders in the food safety sector need to train their sights on the bigger regional and even global movement of food products, and their eventual entry in the domestic market.

An emerging concern is the impact of climate change and the resulting humanitarian emergencies on food safety. The agriculture sector primarily bears the brunt of climactic events, resulting to a drop in food production, which eventually impacts food security. Humanitarian emergencies, whether as a result of natural or man-made disasters, also impact on food safety and security, not only by reducing access to safe food products among the displaced or affected populations, but also by disrupting existing safety nets designed to regulate the food industry.

State intervention is recognized as but one means of ensuring food safety from farm to fork. Consumers also need to be capacitated to make informed decisions with respect to the food products they purchase, prepare, and eventually ingest. There is, however, a recognized gap in this respect, as there is a perceived inadequacy in advocacy on food safety among consumers.

Finally, self-regulation by food industry actors as part of their commitment to ethical business and good manufacturing practices is critical to ensuring that food really contributes to improvement, and not the detriment, of the health of populations.

Goal, Objectives and Strategies

Goal: To reduce morbidity, mortality and out-breaks of food-borne diseases^{ll}, recognizes the dual result that may emanate from ingestion of food-products.

This goal is envisioned to contribute to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 3, -Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all age. Attainment of the goal between 2017 and 2022 is premised on the creation of a harmonized policy framework that identifies and streamlines roles and contributions of different government instrumentalities with respect to ensuring food safety at the national and sub-national levels. The passage of Republic Act No. 10611, or the Food Safety Act of 2013, and its implementing rules and regulations is a promising entry point for this undertaking. As the overarching framework on which subsequent activities will be lodged, completion of this strategy is deemed a high-priority action point, to be completed after before the end of 2016.

Human, material, technical and financial resource considerations relevant to food safety need to be strengthened as well, to support enforcement of regulations. In this regard, duplication of interventions and resource allocation need to be carefully considered and monitored to ensure efficiency across different agencies, and across time.

The role of the local government unit as the primary regulatory institution at the community-level needs to be strengthened and supported by national government agencies. As the primary institution with oversight and control over business establishments within their jurisdiction, local government units will be assisted by the Department of Health and Department of Agriculture in the development of ordinances and resolutions that will strengthen the city or municipality's capacity to enforce national statues or even international conventions.

Knowledge and practices of consumers on food safety will complement state regulations. End-users are envisioned to be informed decision-makers, and this will be accomplished

through information dissemination at the school and community levels. Thus, the development of appropriate educational materials, and their consequent dissemination through different media, needs to be prioritized. The education sector, as a partner in imbuing the citizenry with essential life skills during the early years of development, is likewise expected to be able to integrate food safety concerns in their curriculum. While activities are to be conducted year-round, advocacy efforts can be doubled during the Consumer Welfare Month, celebrated every October by virtue of Proclamation No. 1098 promulgated in 1997.

Implementation and Monitoring

The Department of Health, mainly through the Food and Drug Administration, and the Department of Agriculture will take the lead in the implementation and monitoring of sectoral strategies and activities. Support from local government units, however, will be a critical factor to the successful attainment of sector objectives. Likewise, cooperation from the education sector – Department of Education, Technical and Skills Development Authority, and Commission on Higher Education – will also be necessary to ensure that food safety is incorporated into all levels of the Philippine Education System.

With the exception of the harmonization of and integration of different agency functions to be consistent with sectoral goals, which is ideally to be completed during the first year of the project cycle, all other interventions are intended by stakeholders to be continuing activities. Workshop participants envision concerned agencies to be proactive in their approach to general food safety concerns, as well as specific issues that may emerge between 2017 and 2022.

Way Forward

The Food Safety Coordination Board, created by virtue of the Food Safety Act of 2013, appears to be a promising venue to address food safety concerns. A careful study should be made for the possible merger of the Board and the sectoral group convened under the Interagency Committee on Environmental Health, as their goals and functions appear to be parallel. In the short term, however, stakeholders in general, and the Department of Health and Department of Agriculture in particular, should ensure that this plan is considered and incorporated in the Board's future actions. Finally, this sectoral plan should be integrated into the Philippine Development Plan, the country's strategic plan, which is being revised for 2016.

Table 8.3.1.National Environmental Health Action Plan 2017-2022: Food Safety and Health Sector

GOAL: To reduce morbidity, mortality and out-breaks of food-borne diseases

| Strategies | Activities | Lead Agency | Partner Agency | Time Frame | Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI) | Means of Verification (MOV) |
|---|--|-------------|---|--------------------------|---|---|
| <p align="center">Priority Issue 1: Food safety policies, guidelines, and standards: a. Absence of a harmonized system on monitoring and surveillance, inspection, and response.</p> | | | | | | |
| <p align="center">Objective: Strengthen the implementation of the integrated regulatory framework developed under the Food Safety Act.</p> | | | | | | |
| Institutionalization of agency responsibilities for effective and efficient implementation of the framework | Conduct of consultative meetings with regards the framework to come up with a formal agreement among the stakeholders to include the following, among others: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget allocation from Congress • Institutional capacity building: human resources and facilities • Technical guidelines development based on local and international research studies | DOH | 1. DA (NMIS, BFAR, PCA, NFA, FPA, BPI, NDA, SRA, BAI) 2. DA-BAFS 3. DTI 4. DILG 5. DOST 6. LGUs 7. Food industry partners 8. Consumer Groups | 2016 (3 rd Q) | Policy document/ MOA/ TOR | Review of minutes of the consultative meeting |
| <p align="center">Priority Issue 1: Food safety policies, guidelines, and standards: b. Inadequate institutional capacity (e.g. Human resources and facilities) for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of food safety policies guidelines and standards.</p> | | | | | | |
| <p align="center">Objective: To develop a harmonized system on Food Safety in the Philippines across the food chain.</p> | | | | | | |

| Strategies | Activities | Lead Agency | Partner Agency | Time Frame | Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVI) | Means of Verification (MOV) |
|--|--|---|---|---|--|---|
| | Issue policy guidelines to LGUs on enforcement of food safety regulation, inspection, surveillance and compliance by business establishments, wet markets, school canteen, catering services, and water refilling stations | DOH, DA | 1. DOST 2. DTI 3. DILG 4. LGUs 5. FIP 6. Consumer groups | Continuing activity in response to the needs | 1. Policies and guidelines formulated 2. Joint AO, localization of national policy (including budgetary allocation) | Review of policy and guidelines by Lead agencies |
| Priority Issue 2: Inadequate information/advocacy on food safety among consumers. | | | | | | |
| Objective: To improve the level of KAP on Food Safety across the food production chain, i.e Farm to Fork. | | | | | | |
| Development of an integrated framework on information generation, and dissemination | Prepare appropriate advocacy materials and training manuals | DOH | 1. DA (NMIS, BFAR, PCA, NFA, FPA, BPI, NDA, SRA, BAI) 2. DA-BAFS 3. DTI 4. DILG 5. DOST 6. LGUs 7. Food industry partners 8. Consumer Groups | 2017-2022 | Six new or revised advocacy materials every year | Inventory of available materials and distribution list of IEC materials |
| | Disseminate information through tri-media | DOH | | 2017-2022 Continuing activity in response to the needs | Interviews conducted, seminars, infomercials, Radio interviews, publications, and communication plan | Media mileage and site visits (for social media) |
| | Integrate food safety measures in K-12 school curriculum and other food related courses | 1. DepEd (suggested) 2. TESDA 3. CHED | | (will depend on the lead agency) | Integration of a topic on food safety on existing curriculum | Chapter in Textbook/s on food safety |
| | Conduct local forum/seminars on food safety | DOH | | 2017-2022 Continuing activity at least during consumer welfare month (October) | Number of seminars/ advocacy activities conducted for: a. industry b. consumers | Proceedings and documentations report |

Food Safety Sector Member Agencies as per DPO 2005-2196A February 2014

1. Department of Health – FDA/NCHFD
2. Department of Agriculture –BFAR/NMIS/BPI/BFAPS
3. Department of Science and Technology- FNRI
4. Department of Trade and Industry- BOI
5. Department of Interior and Local Government - BLGCD
6. National Economic Development Authority
7. Public Information Agency

Food Safety and Health Sector Member Agencies which were represented in the development of the Sector NEHAP 2016-2021:

1. Department of Agriculture - National Meat Inspection Service
2. Department of Health- Disease Prevention and Control Bureau
3. Department of Health- Epidemiology Bureau
4. Department of Health - Food and Drug Administration
5. Department of Health – Health Emergency Management Staff
6. Department of Science and Technology - Food and Nutrition Research Institute
7. National Economic and Development Authority

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