

Discussion Paper on the Development of the Arab Food Standards Program

21 November 2023 – Arab Codex Coordination Committee

Background

The Arab Industrial Development, Standardization and Mining Organization (AIDSMO) has the responsibility to support the unification of standards applied in members countries, namely countries of the League of Arab States, members of AIDSMO.

Although several food standards were developed as part of AIDSMO's activities, these standards tend to be commodity standards and are mostly based on the proposal of one or a group of countries, with the adoption of their standards as the basis of the proposed Arab standard. Arab food standards have had a low track record of adoption as regional standards by AIDSMO member states.

With the increased pressure on food regulatory bodies to develop food regulatory decisions, that are based on a robust risk analysis approach and the opportunities created by the Arab Codex Initiative to leverage resources in Arab countries related to food regulatory development, data and information sharing for the past 2 years, there is an impetus to consider an enhanced approach for the development and formulation of food safety, nutrition and quality standards that are based on a stronger scientific and technical rationale and more importantly on data collected from and representative of the region.

Moreover, the collaboration with the Global Food Regulatory Science Society (GFORSS) and its growing network of experts from the Arab region under the Arab Food Risk Analysis Network (AFRANet), along with the investments made to initiate the development of an Arab Food Contaminants Database, through co-funding from the World Health Organization, offer added impetus to consider the development, under the leadership of AIDSMO of the Arab Food Standards Program, as a pilot initiative aimed to formulate science-based food standards that are applicable to the Arab region, based on scientific assessments aligned with best food risk assessment practices and involving an increasing expertise from the Arab region.

The Proposed Arab Food Standards Program: What will Change

For areas of food standardization considered as a priority to food competent authorities from the region and to stakeholders, the Program will pilot the formulation of proposed food standards aimed to create a stronger convergence of food regulatory provisions between countries of the Arab region, and anchored in Codex standards that will be used as the basis of adaptation or possible adoption of the proposed provisions in the Arab region.

Emphasis will be made on areas considered to pose impediments to intra-regional trade in the region, in most instances considered to be unjustified by scientific or evidence-based arguments.

In piloting the program on some areas of horizontal standard development such as contaminants in food or food additives, this initiative will also aim to develop incrementally the foundations need for food safety risk assessment, necessary to all stakeholders in the region, food competent authorities and industry actors alike.

These foundational data sets will be aimed to become accessible to all, hence contributing to the ability of food industry actors to develop submissions to Arab food regulators for applications requiring pre-market approvals in many jurisdictions such as food additives or Health Claims.

Pilot projects will be developed under this Program with an initial priority given to:

- ❖ Contaminants in Food,
- ❖ Food Additives,
- ❖ Food Allergen Management,
- ❖ Reference Methods of Analysis and Sampling

Figure 1 offers an illustration of how a pilot project on contaminants in food would be initiated and subsequently managed.

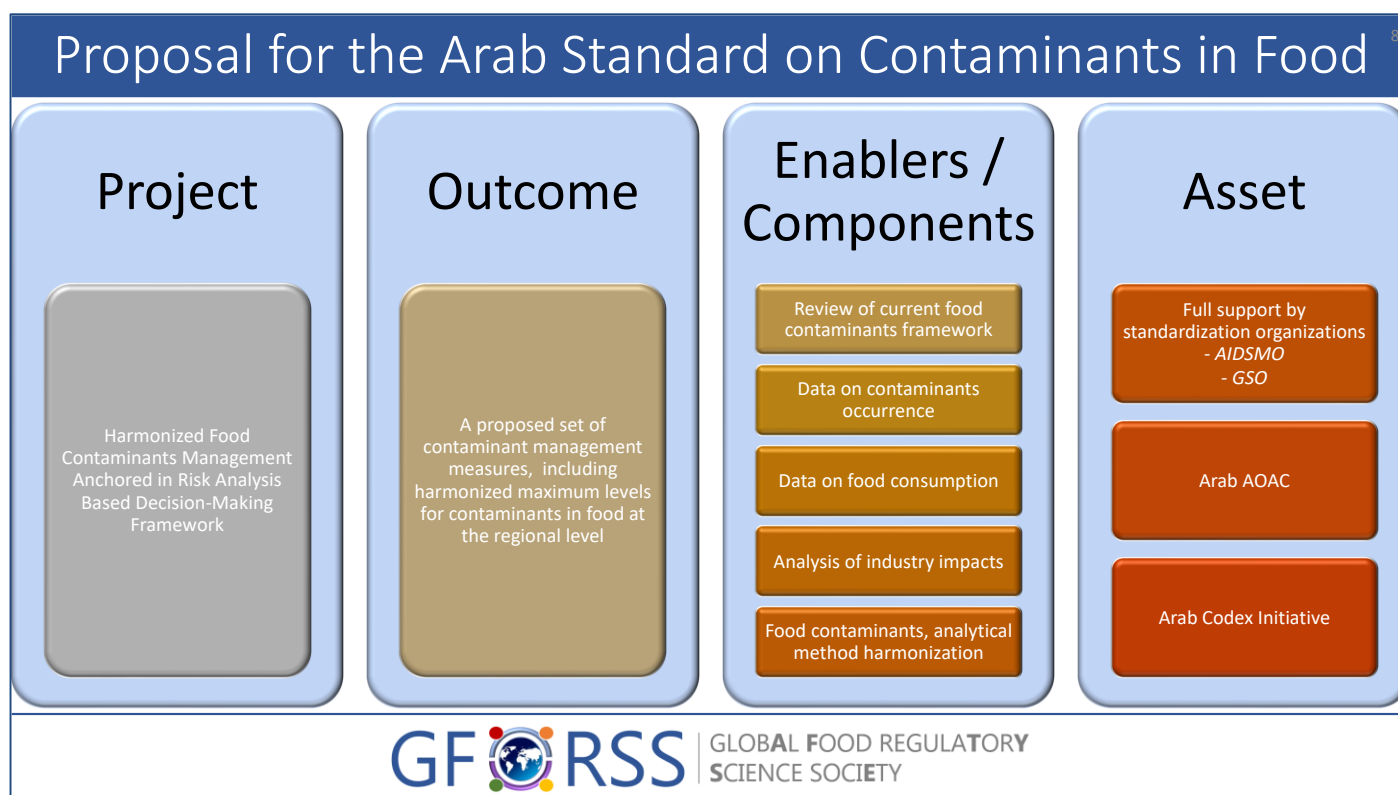


Figure 1: Proposed Management Framework for Contaminants in Food to be Developed as a Pilot as part of the Arab Food Standards Program

Considerations for the Program Organization and Management

AIDSMO as the custodian of standards in the Arab region, overseen by the Arab High Standardization Committee, will develop and manage the governance of the Program, in accordance with the organization's guidelines and procedures.

AIDMSO, through its collaboration with GFORSS, covered by a Memorandum of Understanding between both organizations will be developing the funding requirements and sustainability of resources necessary to the implementation of this Program.

AIDMSO and GFORSS will be working with existing and developing competencies in food risk analysis available from food competent authorities in the Arab region, and beyond to support the development of pilot projects part of this Arab Food Standard Program (Figure 2)

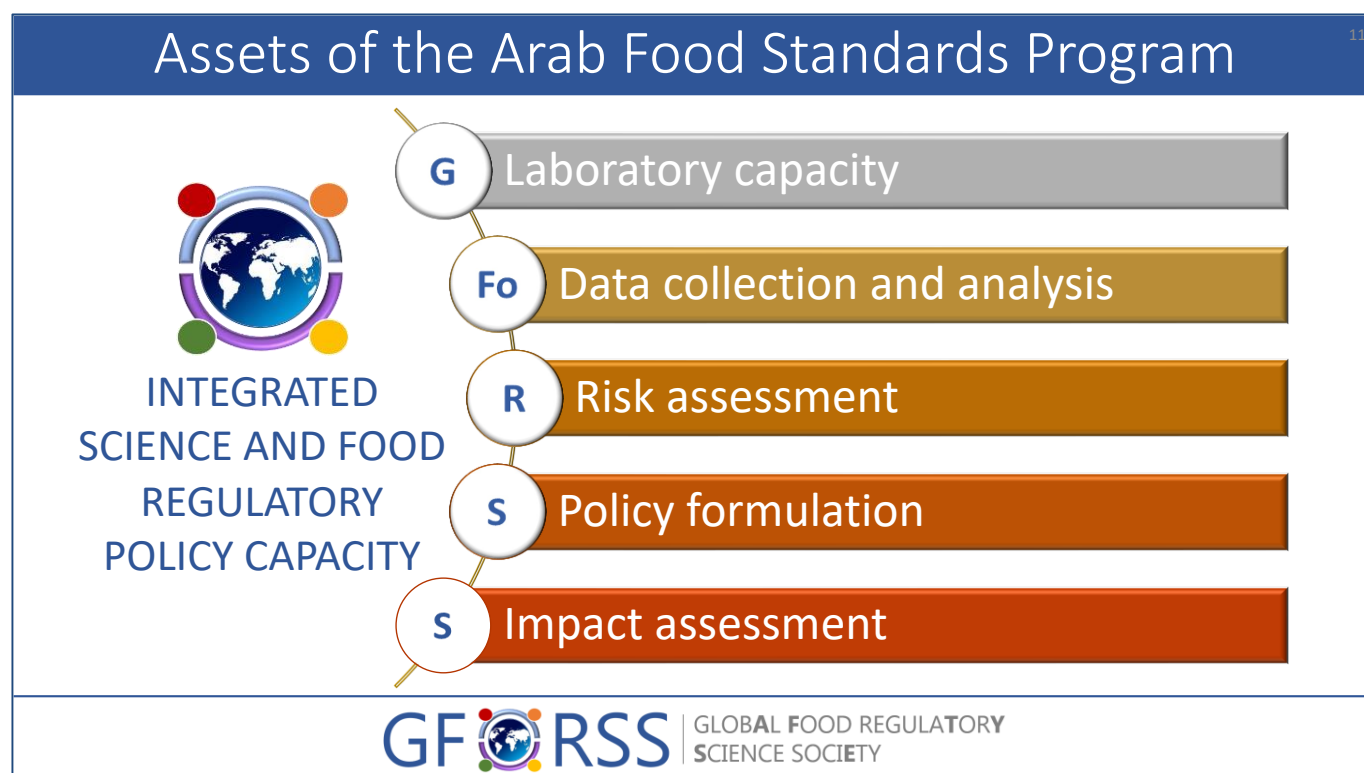


Figure 2: Assets envisaged through the Development of the Arab Food Standards Program

While deemed to be focused on pilot initiatives, AIDMSO will strive to sustain the Arab Food Standards Program such that it offers a trustworthy and robust reference to Arab food competent authorities and contributes therefore to added efforts of food regulatory convergence in the Arab region.

What is Sought from the Arab Codex Coordination Committee

Codex contact points part of the Arab Codex Coordination Committee are asked to endorse:

- ❖ The development by AIDSMO of the Arab Food Standards Program
- ❖ That AIDMSO takes all the necessary measures to develop the governance and conditions of operations of this Program in accordance with the organization management framework.