

Introducing the Concept of the Arab Food Regulators Network (Arab FoRNet)

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The Issue

- ☐ Current and future challenges of Food Security and Food Safety requires multi-faceted interventions
- ☐ The performance of food control systems is a key determinant of these interventions



- Deploy all the relevant food regulatory functions require heavy investments and the mobilization of human and financial resources
- □Collaboration between Regulators is Imperative to Address increasing Challenges
- □While Codex (Codex Alimentarius Commission) offers a forum for engagement between food regulators, the International Food Standard Setting Agenda makes the agenda limited to thesea activities



Existing Forums of Food Regulatory Cooperation

☐ The International Heads of Food Agency Forum (IHFAF)

- An informal gathering of senior representatives of like-minded international food regulators and food risk assessment agencies at the heads of agency level.
- Forum convened with the aim to facilitate engagement and dialogue targeting to advance a common collaborative agenda of work sharing opportunities.
- Limited to Invited Members, with specified inclusion criteria for new membership.
- Initiated by the Saudi Food and Drug Authority, Food Safety Agency of Ireland and Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

☐ The Global Food Regulators Summit (GFRS)

- Initiative of the Food Safety Standards Agency of India (FSSAI) as part of G20' leadership at the G20 in 2023
- Maintained as an annual gathering events of food regulators to promote information exchange, updates and collaboration
- 2024 edition gathered over 70 countries with food regulators, academia, industry and other stakeholders represented





Other Existing Forums of Food Regulatory Cooperation

Regional and Sub-Regional Perspective

- ☐ The African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum (AFRAF)
 - Created in 2023 at the instigation of the National Food Safety Authority of Egypt and the African Union Commission



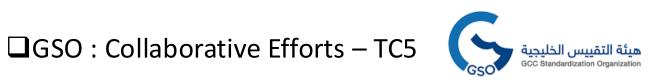
- Meant to operate as a governance mechanism of the soon to be operationalized African Food Safety Agency.
- Support to efforts of food regulatory cooperation and integration as part of the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)
- ☐ The Caribbean Food Safety Taskforce (CFSTF)
 - Created in 2019 and endorsed by the Ministerial Council of Trade and Development (COTED)
 of countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).
 - Aims to act as an advisory committee to food safety collaborations implemented by the Caribbean Agency (CAHFSA).





Existing Forums of Food Regulatory Cooperation

Arab Perspective



□ AIDSMO Leadership: Arab Food Standards Efforts



- ☐ Arab Taskforce on Food Safety (ATF) now folded into a standing committee reporting to the Economic and Social Council of the League of Arab States
- ☐ Arab SPS Coordination Structure, part of Economic and Social Council of the League of Arab States

Need for a Practical and Effective Forum of Food Regulatory Cooperation between Food Regulators / Competent Authorities

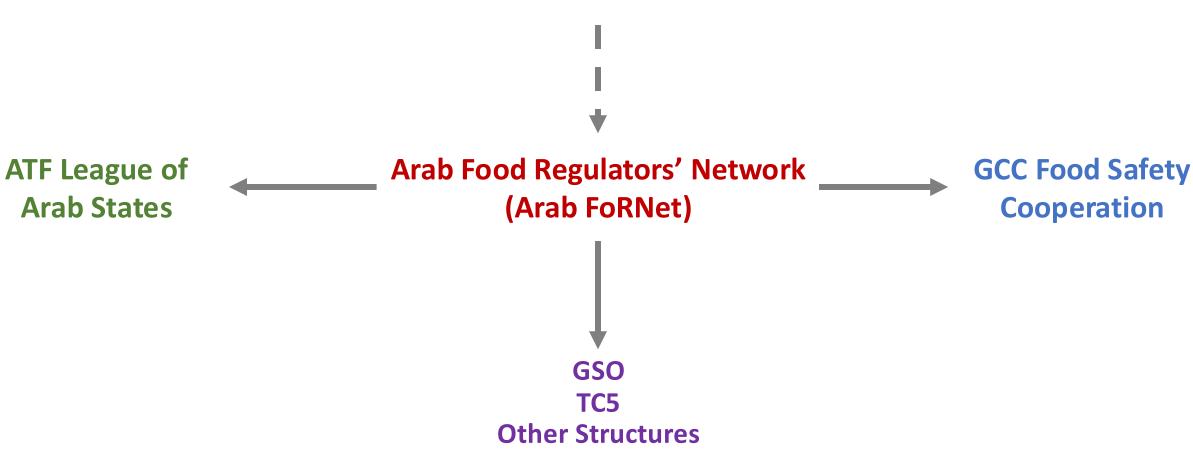


- ☐ A Network of Food Competent Authorities in the Arab Region, including food risk assessment agencies,
- ☐ An Informal Structure (nonetheless organized) focussed to Leverage Existing Collaborations and to Promote New Collaborative Opportunities between Food Regulators in the region
- ☐ Focus on aspects related to:
 - Enabling regular Engagement, with updates on priorities, future directions and emerging issues
 - Coordination of efforts to address emerging issues as needed
 - Work-sharing efforts / Joint initiatives to minimize costs and leverage resources
 - Focus on common efforts of competency development and capacity building
 - Liaise and Strengthen Existing Formal mechanisms of Collaboration at the Regional and Sub-Regional Level











Modus Operandi

- □ Network of Food Regulatory Science to be initiated by Oman's Food Safety and Quality Centre (OFSQC) and the National Food Safety Authority of Egypt (NFSA)
- □ Network Open to all agencies / competent authorities wishing to join sharing the same vision and objectives of Cooperation
- □ Network Governance: Through a Steering Committee that is made of NFSA OFSQC and other interested food regulators in the region,
- □ Network that may be operated / Supported by GFoRSS: offering secretariat support and facilitation
- □ Network may benefit from funding opportunities leveraged through various initiatives under way in the region, aligned with their respective objectives
 - Arab Codex Initiative
 - US DA supported collaborations,
 - Multi-stakeholder Initiatives



Modus Operandi (cont.)

- □ Agreement on Values of Transparency, Collaboration and Independence
- □ Network May contribute to the agenda of formalized mechanisms of collaboration at the regional (Arab / League of Arab States) and Sub-Regional Level (GCC/ GSO)
- □ Network not meant to duplicate other efforts being attempted through other initiatives under way in the region
- □ Network would offer mechanisms of collaboration and engagement with other stakeholders:
 - Industry Stakeholders,
 - Academic Institutions
 - Consumer / Health professional groups



Example of Early Deliverables

Steering Common Initiatives / Leveraging Each Other Experiences

- □ Arab Gluten Free Food Initiative: Aiming for reviewing current approaches to manage these foods, efforts of data collection, awareness raising and advisory capacity to stakeholders
- □ Arab Food Monitoring Initiatives: comparing current approaches in risk-based monitoring, developing advice on methodology to be adopted by food regulators in designing and deploying food monitoring efforts
- □Coordination of Efforts in Training and Availability of Risk Assessment Capacity in the Arab Region: Coordinated training and competency benchmarking, leveraging resources and even work-sharing for key areas of risk assessment
- □Common Environmental Scanning tools to identify emerging issues and develop mechanisms for collaborative interventions to address them



Possible Next Steps...

- Developing of a Draft Paper outlining the initiative for Discussion amongst food regulators in the region
- ☐ Seeking input from interested food competent authorities in the region
- ☐ Reviewing Initiatives that can serve as a proof of concept for the Deployment of the Network
- ☐ Discussing Association with the GFRS Initiative by FSSAI
- ☐ Draft terms of reference for discussion



LAUNCH!

Possible Official Launch with interested parties during the Oman Food Safety Conference April 2024





