



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

3<sup>rd</sup> Global Food Regulatory Science Symposium  
21-24 October 2024, Dubai, UAE

*Organized as part of the Dubai International Food Safety Conference (DIFSC)*

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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 these 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



## 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).



## Arab Perspective

❑ GSO : Collaborative Efforts – TC5



❑ 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

# Creation of the Arab Food Regulatory Network

- ❑ 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



# Collaborative Structure

**Global Food Regulators' Summit (GFRS)**



**ATF League of Arab States**



**Arab Food Regulators' Network (Arab FoRNet)**



**GCC Food Safety Cooperation**



**GSO  
TC5  
Other Structures**

# 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



