

Food Safety Initiatives

1.0 Purpose

1.1 The matter for tabling is an update on Food Safety Initiatives being undertaken in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

2.0 Background

2.1 Food safety is an issue of growing importance due to several world-wide trends that contribute to increasing safety risks in food systems, such as the growing movement of people across borders; increased movement of agricultural and food products across borders; rapid urbanisation; changes in food processing and handling practices; and the re-emergence/emergence of critical diseases, pathogens, toxins and other issues. Against this background, focus is being placed on the ability of all stakeholders in the food chain to be able to demonstrate adequate traceability of all food sources. Issues relating to food safety will therefore impact on agricultural production, agro-processing, food service industry, trade and commerce, public health and overall economic development.

3.0 Initiatives

3.1 Policy Environment

The National Agricultural Health and Food Safety Coordinating Committee (NAHFSCC) was established over ten years ago and has played an advisory function relating to the coordination of food safety matters in Jamaica. The food safety regulatory programme is currently administered by six main entities/agencies distributed across the Ministries of Agriculture and Fisheries (MOAF), Health (MOH) and Industry, Investment and Commerce (MIIC) which are all represented on NAHFSCC.

In September 2013, the National Food Safety Policy and Implementation Plan was tabled in Houses of Parliament to provide the road map to improving the National Food Safety System

which also focuses on Animal and Plant Health. The effective coordination of the system will be achieved through the implementation of a strategy based on the principle of “joined-up government”. The institutional arrangements will be comprise the following:

- an Inter-Ministerial Food Safety Committee (IMFSC)
- a National Food Safety Council
- a Secretariat

In March 2014 Cabinet gave approval for the tabling of Plant Health Policy and Implementation Plan as a White Paper. An Animal Health and Welfare Policy has been drafted and will be submitted to Cabinet in this financial year.

3.2 Animal Identification and Traceability

Work began on the establishment of National Animal Identification system in 2013. This was borne out of the need to satisfy numerous requirements under the Food Safety Modernization Act as well as to serve as a strategy for the prevention of theft and illegal slaughter of animals.

Animal Identification, Registration and Traceability System (AIT- System) means the prevailing centrally coordinated integrated animal identification, registration and traceability system, including animal identification devices, animal identification coding systems, premises identification and registration, recording systems and a centralized database.

The National Animal Identification System is geared towards the following:

- Establishment of AIT regulations, thereby making the identification of cattle mandatory;
- Provision of traceability of bovine animals from farm to slaughter;
- Identification and registration of bovine animals and establishments;
- Establishment of a central register;
- Establishment and maintenance of a computerized data base for cattle;
- Establishment of Movement Documents for farm animals.

The Government of Jamaica signed a contract with ADT Project Consultants in the amount of €150,218.00 for the implementation of the National Animal Identification System for Jamaica, starting with cattle and pigs. The start date of the project was 11 February 2013.

Achievements to date:

- Definition and documentation of the proposed National Animal Identification System
- Determination of economic cost and impact of the National Animal identification system with recommendations for financing;
- Preparation of detailed implementation plan for the National Animal Identification System;
 - AIT Implementation plan developed for cattle;
 - AIT implementation Plan developed for pigs;
- Establishment of AIT Unit in the VSD of the MOAF
- Drafting Instructions for AIT Regulations for the Identification of Bovine Animals pursuant under the Animals(Diseases and Importation)Act developed;
- Tagging Equipment procured (conventional ear tags, tissue tags, cattle passports and pliers), with expected delivery by June 2014;
- Procurement of computers for parish offices, for use in the web based application.

The planned launch at the national level, of a comprehensive public education campaign on the National Animal Identification System is scheduled for the First Quarter of the FY 2014/2015.

First tagging of the island's cattle population is estimated to take approximately 12 months and should commence in the Second Quarter of FY 2014/2015.

Method of Identification

Cattle:

- Each bovine animal will be identified with identical double visual ear tags.
- Tissue sample collected and genetic data uploaded to the system.
- Specific animal identification passport created to accompany the animal's every move
- The air tag numbers are coded to represent each animal's unique number, the specific area and location of origin.

Movement control

On-farm register

Each farm will maintain an on-farm register which will contain information on births, deaths, losses and movements onto and off the farm, for individually identified bovine animals.

Cattle Passport

The Veterinary Services Division will issue a ***cattle passport*** for each bovine animal identified. The cattle passport must accompany the bovine animal whenever it is moved from any establishment. This passport **MUST** be presented to the Health or Veterinary inspector at slaughter as well as the police for inspection.

Movement Notification

Notification of movements to the veterinary services is obligatory; the seller reports the movement off the farm, whereas the buyer reports movement onto the farm.

The Veterinary Services will update the central data base to reflect the movements.

3.3 Lab Accreditation

A major tool used in the lowering of barriers to trade is Accreditation. The International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) is the primary forum for accreditation at that international level. This organization fosters multilateral recognition among members based on their acceptance of certain testing procedures and methods of calibration.

The two major international standard setting bodies - the International Organization for Standardization (**ISO**) and the International Electro-technical Commission (**IEC**) work together to develop and harmonize international standards.

One of these standards is the **ISO/IEC 17025**, which is applicable to testing and calibration laboratories and designed to assess competence. Laboratories across the globe have begun the process of implementing ISO/IEC 17025 in order to enhance capabilities and to meet international standards.

The implementation of ISO/IEC 17025 Accreditation is not without challenges, the major ones being:

- the Accreditation process involves substantial investment,
- difficulty in accessing proficiency testing suppliers,
- supply and maintenance of calibrated equipment.

Laboratory accreditation is designed to ensure that laboratories are competent to perform specific tests/analyses and have Quality Management Systems (**QMS**) to ensure that reliable test data are produced each time such specific tests are performed.

In order to gain accreditation, a laboratory must possess the necessary resources to undertake specified tests correctly and consistently.

3.3.1 Importance of ISO/IEC 17025 Accreditation

The major advantage of laboratory accreditation is that it ensures international acceptability of tests, thus facilitating trade.

In addition, accreditation enhances confidence in conformity assessment of products and aids in market surveillance, thereby safe-guarding consumers from unsafe products.

The Veterinary Services Division has since 2007, embarked on a process towards the acquisition of Laboratory Accreditation. In order to facilitate the process of acquisition of ISO 17025 Accreditation, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Veterinary Services Division has done the following to date:

- Scope of accreditation determined;
- Scope of accreditation completed;
- Selection of accreditation body to provide the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory with the relevant guidance documentation necessary for accreditation;
- All laboratory staff at the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory who conduct relevant tests are involved in the process;
- Development of quality manuals and procedures. Quality Management section 65% complete; Twenty (20) SOPs created; One Protocol validated and verified based on relevant international standards;
- Engaged the services of short term consultant/expert in the field of ISO/IEC 17025 accreditation, to assist in the development of the QMS;
- On-going training programme for laboratory staff; Five (5) persons already trained;
- Participation in inter-laboratory proficiency testing schemes with qualified laboratories; one (1) proficiency test completed as per schedule.
- Refurbishing to buildings/infrastructure 95% complete;
- Replacement of ceiling in all working areas;
- Repair of walk-in refrigerator for storage of laboratory supplies and reagents;
- Installation of security access doors at all entry points to the laboratories;
- Acquisition of equipment (Atomic Absorption Spectrophotometer, HPLC Upgrade, Still for distilled water production)
- Internet Access and Networking of all working departments;
- Stand-by Generator procured and installed;
- Replacement of furniture and equipment including computers, printers, networking, cables, modems, filing cabinets;
- Acquisition of Autoclave for media preparation;
- Establishment and filling of position of Laboratory Quality Manager;

- Procurement of the following laboratory equipment in the sum of **\$60,347,167.00** through funding from the EPA Water purification system (1), Biosafety cabinets (2), drying oven (1), Water bath (1), LC/MS (1), Top loading balance (1), Analytical balance (1), Roto-evaporator (1) .

The plan is to submit application for ISO/IEC 17025 Laboratory Accreditation to Jamaica National Agency for Accreditation (JANAAC) by the end of the First Quarter of FY 2014/2015. Export earnings from products of animal origin continue to be a major source of income for Jamaica. Products include meat patties, lobster, conch, milo, horlicks, soups, Vienna sausages, fresh and processed poultry and pork products, UHT milk, cheese, other dairy products and animal feed. The VSD will continue to work with local producers to target markets in North America, Europe and other areas, for these products.

4.0 Food Safety Modernization Act Programme

The FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) was signed into law by President Obama on January 4 2011. It aims to ensure the U.S food supply is safe by shifting the focus of federal regulators from responding to contamination to preventing it.

Jamaica’s food exports could be denied entry to the United States’ market if firms are not compliant with the US Food Safety Modernization Act. All exporters of food and related products to the US (fresh and processed) must ensure compliance with this Act or they may be excluded from the US market. This could result in a serious fall out for Jamaica’s exports of foods to the US which was valued at approximately US\$118 million in 2010.

It is important to note that MOAF immediately took the necessary steps to set up a National FSMA Committee whose responsibility it was to ensure the country’s compliance with these regulations. To date much has been achieved through:

I. Capacity Building

➤ Institutional strengthening

Following on collaboration with local and overseas collaborators, a minimum of 50 officers within the Ministry have received training in Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), Good

Management Practices (GMP), Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) and several other quality management systems. In addition, the FDA approved Joint Institute for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (JIFSAN) course, has raised the awareness and competence level in the Ministry, along with stakeholders such as the Ministry of Health, Food Storage Prevention and Infestation Division, Pesticides Control Authority, Scientific Research Council, Bureau of Standards, Farmers and Exporters. This broad participation was essential as the MOAF sought to improve food management systems.

➤ **Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs)**

200 farmers in a pilot programme have been trained in GAPs for crops such as yams, hot pepper, callaloo and pumpkin. Additionally, all have completed a course in Food Handling and with these certification; significant steps have been taken in ensuring that these farmers will produce foods that are safe and of good quality.

Within this pilot programme, soil testing has been done at the participant's' farms and work is underway regarding water quality analysis. These programmes are important determinants when assessing for food safety.

Training for an additional 3,500 crop farmers commenced with the first group of 127 participants completing GAPs.

➤ **Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs)**

53 Plant Quarantine/Produce Inspection Officers and 73 Exporters and Middlemen were trained in the standards and practices required for export facilities and fresh produce packaging. The impact of the training is a higher level of compliance with FSMA.

It is important to note that between 2012 and 2013, there were several yam shipments that were detained or rejected at US ports, due to pesticides levels, exceeding allowable limits. This resulted in losses of over \$41 million.

II. Infrastructure Assistance to Fresh Produce Exporters and Farmers

To date, approximately \$20 million has been provided as a grant to 19 exporters to assist in their on-going efforts to upgrade infrastructure at their facilities, in order to achieve higher levels of compliance with the FSMA and other international requirements.

In partnership with JSIF, approximately \$24 million have been awarded to farmer groups in Springfield, St. Thomas, Walkerswood, St. Ann, Alpart, St. Elizabeth and Braco, Trelawny. These funds are being used to construct packaging sheds, toilets and hand-washing facilities, pesticide and fertilizer storage areas, ensuring that at the farmer field levels, farms are compliant with international standards.

III. Technical Assistance

The United States Environmental Protection Agency, has advised that “*Thiabendazole*®, *Boscalid and Pyraclostrobin*”, may be used as post-harvest treatments for yam. This development is important as it represents a potential shift from complete dependence on “Botran”, which is the only pesticide presently approved for use on root crops.

Through the Ministry’s FSMA committee, work is on-going to indicate the efficacy rates at which these chemicals can be applied, while at the same time, not exceeding the maximum residue level.

IV. Rehabilitation of the Agricultural Marketing Complex (AMC)

During the 2013/2014 financial year, contracts for electrical and civil works at the AMC were awarded. These works provide the platform that will facilitate the complete rehabilitation of the AMC to international food safety standards by the second quarter of 2014/2015

Roger Clarke
Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries
16 April 2014