



LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
Peace Independence Democracy Unity Prosperity
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Ministry of Health

No 020/MOH.

Vientiane Capital, date 13/01/2009

(adopted by Prime Minister, No. 028/PMO, date 3 Feb 2009)

National Food Safety Policy

Part I

Introduction

1. The importance of Food Safety

The National Food Safety Policy serves as a reference for implementing the control and management of quality and safety of food in Lao PDR, throughout the food chain, including the growth cultivation, rearing, processing, service, industrial production, storage, purchase, transportation, importation-exportation, and distribution to the point of consumption, and international technical cooperation and scientific research. It is necessary to establish an integrated national food safety policy that is coherent with other aspects of government policy in a new period of socio-economic development. In the VIIIth Party Meeting of Lao Revolution Party is stressed on the importance of the management of food safety and quality of food was stressed as a key concept: “..raise awareness of the knowledge of nutrition, eating and living in a clean and hygiene manner and helpful for the body; control and inspect the quality of food and drug including traditional medicine as well as services related to life and health of humans...” . This expressed the attention as well as the concern of party to the activities of food quality and safety management in Lao PDR. To strengthen the correct and fair policy approach of the party, it is necessity to establish a specific policy and strategy at the national level to determine effectively the approach on these important issues.

The National Food Safety Policy emphasizes a science- and risk-based approach to protect consumer health and ensure fair trade practices. It also promotes transparency and the participation of all stakeholders from farm to table in decision-making.

2. Food Safety Situation in Internationally

Unsafe food is currently a global health and socio-economic concern. The risk of unsafe food can be measured in terms of a wide range of potential foodborne illnesses. The risk can also be measured in the potential increased expense of treatment and loss of family and societal income, including decreased industrial production and trade that is evaluated in many billions of dollars per year.

The potential impact of food contamination, associated with serious human disease consequences, has been illustrated in some events such as the incident of mad cow disease (bovine spongiform encephalopathy or BSE) that appeared in the United Kingdom and more recently in Canada, the US, and Japan. As a result, the UK experienced human disease and

deaths, and its beef industry was devastated. In Japan, the meat industry lost many millions of dollars. In addition if disease related seriously to human such bird flu (Avian influenza) would considered as food borne disease.

In the Pacific region, China suffered bans on the export of its food products because of unsafe chemical residues detected by importing countries of the European Union Countries, and several Asian countries are banned from exporting shrimp, because of unsafe antibiotic residues and microbial contamination; soy sauce products were banned because of unsafe chemical contaminants.

3. Food Safety Situation in Lao PDR

Since 1986, the government of Lao PDR introduced the New Economic Mechanism to promote domestic production contributing to exportation and to extend trade collaboration with foreign countries. Domestic trade has expanded and the quantity of exported food products has increased, contributing to a better quality of life for the people of Lao PDR. At the same time, the inadequate control of food imports and the insufficient quantity of domestically produced food, has resulted in unsafe and adulterated food distributed in the market.

In the past few years, the system of diseases surveillance and reporting in Lao PDR is not strengthened and distributed. In year 2000, severe diarrheal illness were seen by health officials, indicating the occurrence of a large epidemic. In 2006, another group of illnesses caused by *Shigella flexnerii* indicate the continued occurrence of food borne disease outbreaks. In 2005, there were at least (reported) 4,693 cases of diarrhea with 6 deaths. Helminthes infection was also found to be a major health problem, e.g., *Opisthorchis*, which is transmitted via consumption of contaminated raw fish. In developing countries in general, food borne illnesses such as diarrheal diseases contribute to the high rates of morbidity and mortality among children under five years of age. These developing countries subsequently incur the additional and significant expense of treating food borne diseases.

Documented reports and research on food borne disease are limited. At the same time, the monitoring on food contamination is also limited, particularly analytical results for contamination of heavy metals, pesticides, mycotoxins, inappropriate or unsafe additives and preservatives, etc.

The prevention of foodborne illnesses and other adverse consequences of unsafe food is a major component of the Lao PDR government's approach to achieve economic growth and sustainability of its social progress. To that end in 1995, Lao PDR became a member of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and established the National Codex Committee in 1998. Concurrently, the Food Law and other law related to food safety were adopted by the National Assembly and enacted by the President, Lao PDR. Regulations, rules and codes of practice related to food that were previously issued are being revised, and some necessary regulations and standards for food safety have been drafted to comply with the Law and to conform with the international standards of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

To protect the health of consumers in Lao PDR and to promote fair trade related to food safety, the Ministry of Health takes a lead in developing a national policy and plan of action for food safety, which requires the joint participation and responsibility of all relevant organizations and people involved in the food chain, from farm to table, in order to assure food safety control.

4. Rationale for the development of The National Food Safety Policy

The National Food Safety Policy involves the cooperation of many sectors, such as: The Ministries of Health, Agriculture and Forestry, Industry and Commerce, Finance, Information and Culture, Education, Social Security, Science and Technology, Water and Environment Resource Agency and concerned central and local sectors that are related to the food chain, in order to protect the safety and health of consumers.

The sustainable development of the food sector of Lao PDR relies on an efficient and effective food safety programme to protect the health of consumers from foodborne illness, to prevent fraud, and to use science and technology, focusing on the agricultural production by addressing the control of potential hazards and contamination.

Globalization of food trade, including the implementation of international and regional trade agreements, will create an influx of imported foods into the Lao PDR market. At the same time, the requirements of The Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) agreements of World Trade Organization (WTO) create new obligations requiring the safety of food traded internationally in order to protect the sovereign rights of the member nations. It is increasingly important to identify the potential risks and benefits of these changes and to prevent adverse human health and economic consequences.

Therefore, these impositions and challenges have led to the need to formulate an integrated National Food Safety Policy.

Part II

Terms of definitions, Scope and Objectives

1. Terms of definitions

Safe food is a food without contamination of bacteria, chemical substances toxic or adulterated agents that are dangerous to the consumers health

Nutrient means ingredients or substances constituted in food which are useful to the physical integrity

Hazard is a biological, chemical or physical agent in, or condition of, food with the potential to cause an adverse health effect.

Sanitary and Phytosanitary refers to the hygiene and safety of plants and animals and their products, which are free from plant pests and animal diseases.

Technical Barrier to Trade means the application of measures which are not based on sound principles and science and which establish a barrier to fair trade activities.

2. Scope of Food Safety Policy

The National Food Safety Policy covers the entire food chain from primary production to consumer, in order to protect the health of the consumer by coordinating and cooperating with many organizations and concerned sectors including government ministries, food and related industries, the scientific and academic communities, consumers, and others.

3. Objective of National Food Safety Policy

The primary objective of The National Food Safety Policy is to protect and promote better health for the people of Lao PDR by ensuring that people consume safe, hygienic and nutritious food which would reduce morbidity and mortality due to food borne illness and promote safe food production and international and domestic trade in safe food.

Part III

Essential Elements of the National Food Safety Policy

A. Essential Elements of the National Food Safety Policy

1. The National Food Safety Policy (NFSP) shall be implemented through the application of law, regulation and standards that are appropriate to a farm to table.
2. Use risk analysis to carry out science-based evaluations and for reaching sound, consistent solutions to food safety problems.
3. Address food safety and control throughout the food chain from farm to table; shall engage all key activities such as: food security, food production, food processing, food distribution, consumers participation, review system and emergency response.
4. Insure that the knowledge and skills of regulators, inspectors, and food analysts will be strengthened and improved in both quality and quantity
5. Promote collaboration and cooperation at the national level across all the ministries and committees involved in food safety and quality, e.g., between the Food and Drug Committee, the National Codex Committee and other related sectors (both government and private).
6. Promote better food safety management by strengthening information collection, including inspection and surveillance activities, and analysis for risk management decision making.
7. Promote and support food trade to be safe, following the standards of Codex Alimentarius and agreements related to food safety such as those of ASEAN and World Trade Organization (SPS, TBT).
8. Promote the cooperation and strengthen international assistance in developing a national program of food safety. It shall also recognize international obligations of Lao PDR, in relation to food safety and trade.

B. Strategies of food safety

1. Insure the safety of foodstuff in the primary production

- a.) Promote the organic agricultural production, good agricultural production (clean production), without using chemical and toxic agents, reduce the exposure and occurrence of human diseases.

- b.) Establish criteria and monitoring systems for the safety of raw materials which become food
- c.) Promote and disseminate the information to farmers and producers regarding to the methods of clean and safe production, harvests, hunt/catch, storage and transportation

2. Legislation.

- a) Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of government agencies responsible for food control , and mechanisms for interactions between them.
- b) Disseminate and increase the knowledge and understanding of policy, law and regulation, rules and standards related to food safety among regulators, inspectors and other related sectors from central to local level (including producers and consumers) in order to improve the capacity to implement laws, regulations and standards and to enforce these at each step of the food production-food business.
- c) Establish indicators and monitor and evaluate activities of law implementation and improvement to comply with the actual situation.
- d) Review and revise the existing laws and regulations (laws, regulations and standards) and establish new regulations to comply with the actual situation in each period and to agree with international norms such as those of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

3. Risk Analysis.

- a) Initiate training in risk analysis in order to establish a national risk analysis approach to determine food safety priorities and to identify food safety problems.
- b) Establish food controls, including standards, using risk analysis to foster a comprehensive scientific evaluation, wide stakeholder participation, transparency of process, consistent treatment of different hazards and systematic decision-making by risk managers.
- c) Use risk analysis to link the occurrence of food hazards with the actual human health risk.

4. Integrated Food Chain Approach.

- a) Increase the effectiveness of coordinating bodies such as the Food and Drug Commission and the National Codex Committee to assure that oversight of the food chain is continuous, so that there are no gaps in responsibilities and authorities.
- b) Enforce laws, regulations, and standards at each step of the food chain.
- c) Establish technical and information networks at local and central levels nationally and at the international level.
- d) Educate and train primary producers, processors, distributors, and consumers on food control and food safety issues.
- e) Collect data from all steps in the food chain to provide the basis for more effective risk assessment approaches to food safety.

5. National Human Resource Capacity.

- a) Develop human resources for food control and management through domestic and international training programs, both short and long term.
- b) Initiate training among regulators and inspectors on quality assurance systems (GAP, GHP, GMP, and HACCP) to encourage and facilitate food business operators to implement these preventive food safety systems.

6. National Food Safety Strengthening and Cooperation.

- a) Improve and strengthen the role of the Food and Drug Committee and the National Codex Committee.
- b) Build analytical capacities at the central level and then subsequently expand an analytical laboratory network into some provinces where it is appropriate and needed in order to gather information needed for risk assessment and to prioritize food safety activities and hazards in foods..

7. National Data Collection and Scientific Research.

- a) Establish a process of collecting and analyzing data on food borne illness and food contamination to provide integrated information for better risk-based management of food safety program.
- b) Initiate studies and research on priority food hazards, including chemical and microbiological hazards.
- c) Implement monitoring and surveillance for priority hazards and risks associated with foods.
- d) Conduct special studies at central and local levels to generate the data needed to complete risk analysis activities, especially in support of public health emergencies.
- e) Establish strong relationships between government and academic scientists and institutions to enhance food safety efforts, nationally and internationally.
- f) Establish clear lines of communication within the scientific community to improve information sharing and collaborative activities and to prevent overlaps and duplication of efforts and conserve limited resources.
- g) Promote collaborative research and communication at the regional level and harmonize efforts where possible.

8. International Standards, Trade and Cooperation.

- a) Disseminate and increase knowledge and understanding among regulators and inspectors on international standards and regulations related to food safety (e.g., ASEAN, Codex Alimentarius, WTO.(SPS & TBT), IPPC,OIE, etc.)
- b) Establish technical cooperation and information networks both domestically and internationally to increase availability of information on food safety.
- c) Work with International Organizations to support and strengthen the national food safety programme.

9. International Cooperation.

Establish a national approach to coordinate donor activities and international support, providing national guidance to donors to increase the effectiveness of projects and to prevent inappropriate overlaps/duplications or gaps to achieving food safety.

10. Consumer Participation.

Disseminate information on food safety to consumers and establish consumer protection associations to improve the food safety awareness and the participation of consumers.

Part IV Organizational Responsibilities and Coordination

1. Coordination and Collaboration

The Food and Drug Administrative Committee is chaired by the Minister or Vice Minister of Health and comprised of members representing the Ministries involved in food safety activities such as: The Ministries of Agriculture and Forestry, Industry and Commerce, Finance, Information and Culture, Education, the Agency of Science and Technology, the agency of water and Environment Resource and other related sectors. The specific food safety responsibilities for each Ministry are detailed in a separate document (Annex I Ministerial Responsibilities for the Lao PDR National Food Safety System).

The Food and Drug Administrative Committee has the role in consultation, to make decisions on important issues at the national level regarding the control of quality and safety of food and drug production, import-export and distribution including domestic service, in order to protect the sovereign right and ensure the health and life of consumers.

2. Mechanism of coordination

-To comply with the objective of the National Food Safety Policy, each relevant organization has a role in implementing their own identified duties and implementing programs, plans and detail projects according to the Action Plan of the National Food Safety Policy.

-The Ministry of Health is the key ministry to coordinate with other relevant sectors both vertically and in parallel and to conduct a discussion meeting to review the progress and achievements under the Action Plan for the National Food Safety Policy and to plan appropriately for specific periods of time, e.g., trimester, semester, yearly, to provide feedback to each sector to improve the program and implement in the next period.

-Provincial health authority has to review programs and report regularly the progress and achievement to Ministry of Health in each period.

- Mechanisms of coordination both with many relevant sectors vertically and in parallel should be continually reviewed and strengthened at each level with training and necessary communication material.

3. Plan of Implementation

- **Period 1 (2009-2010):** The National Food Safety Policy, Plan of Action (Annex II) will provide the needed guidance to implement Lao PDR food safety policy. It will be based on the essential elements and the strategies of the National Food Safety Policy. It will be drafted and approved by the TWG with participation by all sectors involved and interested in food safety.

The action plan will outline specific activities, responsible and supporting sectors, time lines, performance indicators (monitoring mechanisms) and where possible, costs.

-Period 2 (2010-2015): The NFSP Action Plan will be less specific than the short term Period 1 plan and will be modified according to the experiences and achievements accomplished during 2006-2010.

Part V Implementation

1. Ministry of Health is the key in collaboration with concerned organization to give advice, consensually disseminate the national food safety policy in the whole country and collaborate with other sector in establish the legislation related to food safety.
2. Ministries, Agencies, Provinces, Capital and special zone grant a cooperation in implementing effectively the national food safety policy.

Minister of Ministry of Health