



Ad Hoc Group on Food Safety

OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL FOOD SAFETY SYSTEMS AND ACTIVITIES

*This document was approved by the Ad Hoc Group on Food Safety at its 27-28 April meeting.*

Contact: Wayne Jones,  
Tel: 33 1 45 24 78 74, Fax: 33 1 45 24 18 90  
e-mail: wayne.jones@oecd.org

90749

Document complet disponible sur OLIS dans son format d'origine  
Complete document available on OLIS in its original format

## FOREWORD

As part of the OECD response to the request of G8 Heads of State and Government “to undertake a study of the implications of biotechnology and other aspects of food safety”, the OECD Council established the Ad Hoc Group on Food Safety. This Group, composed of senior officials and experts from capitals with food safety policy responsibilities, was asked to report on what is being done at the national and international level to address current and emerging food safety issues. Specifically, the Terms of Reference for the Ad Hoc Group were:

- To supervise the compilation of a compendium of current and planned international food safety systems and activities, as outlined in Annex 3 of *OECD Work on Biotechnology and Other Aspects of Food Safety* [C(99)148(REV4)];
- To undertake the compilation of a compendium of current and planned national food safety systems and activities, based on reports from Member countries in which reference may be made to precautionary approaches and principles;
- To provide a report to Council on the results of its work, including the compendia of international and national food safety systems and activities, the ongoing work across the Organisation and related work underway in capitals or otherwise available to members, as part of the response to the G8 request, in order to contribute to international and national efforts in the area of food safety.

Under the chairmanship of Dr. Ewald Wermuth, Special Advisor to The Netherlands Minister for Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries on Biotechnological and Safety Issues, the Ad Hoc Group on Food Safety prepared and approved the final report for transmission to the OECD Council. This report includes the following elements:

- Overview of Food Safety Systems and Activities: Executive Summary [SG/ADHOC/FS(2000)6/FINAL]
- Overview of National Food Safety Systems and Activities [SG/ADHOC/FS(2000)5/FINAL]
- Overview of International Organisations with Food Safety Activities (Part I of Overview and Compendium of International Organisations with Food Safety Activities) [SG/ADHOC/FS(2000)4/FINAL]
- Compendium of National Food Safety Systems and Activities [SG/ADHOC/FS(2000)5/ANN/FINAL]
- Compendium of International Organisations with Food Safety Activities (Part II of Overview and Compendium of International Organisations with Food Safety Activities) [SG/ADHOC/FS(2000)4/FINAL]

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

I. INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK ..... 4

II. ACTIVITIES ADDRESSING FOOD SAFETY ISSUES ..... 8

    Developing National Food Safety Frameworks..... 8

    Regulation of Modern Biotechnology..... 9

    Precautionary Approaches and Principles.....10

    Regulatory Enforcement and Compliance .....10

    Addressing Socio-Economic Concerns.....11

    Communication and Consultation.....12

## OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL FOOD SAFETY SYSTEMS AND ACTIVITIES

1. A description of the national food safety systems and activities of 28 OECD Member countries and the European Commission is provided in a companion document, *Compendium of National Food Safety Systems and Activities [SG/ADHOC/FS(2000)5/ANN/FINAL]*. This overview aims to identify key principles, common trends and different approaches in the regulation of food safety across OECD Member countries.

### I. INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

*“The basic aim of food safety systems within OECD Member countries is to facilitate the provision of a high level of health protection for the public in respect of food.”*

2. Food safety laws and regulations establish both general requirements and specific criteria, which must be met in order to ensure the appropriate level of protection from risk to human health, as defined by each OECD country. These regulatory frameworks are strongly based on contemporary scientific understanding of food safety hazards and therefore regulatory decisions evolve over time in line with developments in scientific knowledge. Regulations may specify requirements for specific commodities (e.g. hygiene standards in the production of dairy products), or impose requirements on the supply of food products in general.

3. Food safety regulations cover all aspects of the food supply chain from farm inputs (including animal feed, feed additives, pesticides, fertilisers, veterinary drugs) through production and processing (including agricultural products, processed food, novel foods, food additives, other food ingredients, packaging materials) to transportation, storage and retail and catering establishments. Potential sources of contamination throughout the food supply chain are also subject to controls. There are also regulations aimed at providing consumers with information pertinent to health, safety and consumer protection in the form of product labelling.

4. Food products and ingredients are subject to various process and product standards, with certain differences in the manner in which different foodborne hazards and/or food products are regulated. Process standards can lay down requirements for the safety and, in some cases, the quality of the raw materials, production conditions, hygienic practices, packaging, transportation, storage, labelling and documentation. Product standards set out specific performance requirements, such as maximum residue levels (MRLs). MRLs are well established for chemical hazards, for example pesticides or heavy metal contaminants such as mercury. Performance requirements are less widely used as a means to control microbial hazards.

*“OECD countries set different food safety standards based on the level of protection a country determines appropriate, but measures for the protection of human health are based on scientific risk analysis.”*

5. Responsibility for food safety regulation is typically divided amongst government agencies, separate statutory bodies and/or departments. For example, ministries or departments of health and/or consumer affairs might regulate processed foods while ministries or departments of agriculture might

regulate raw agricultural commodities. A number of OECD countries have, or are striving to, consolidate and/or better co-ordinate responsibilities for food safety regulation, so as to enhance public health protection, improve the efficacy of controls and thereby increase public confidence in the safety of the food supply.

6. Food safety legislation is laid down at a number of levels of government and in different legal forms. Within federal systems of government, food safety legislation may be applied at both the national and sub-national level. Legislation at the national level generally applies to all food products that are traded nation-wide, imported or exported, whilst legislation at the sub-national level is complementary and, in some countries, may be applicable to foods produced and sold solely within the sub-national jurisdiction. Some OECD countries are required to comply with supranational regulations. In the European Union (EU), legislation is implemented in forms of Regulations Directives and Decisions. They serve to ensure food safety as well as to harmonise requirements within the EU and to permit the free movement of agricultural and food products. In the case of non-harmonised matters, EU legislation provides for the possibility to take account of national legislation, provided the EU Treaty rules are fully enforced. In particular, Member States may enact their own national food safety legislation without prejudice to the free circulation of agricultural and food products, unless a Member State can justify it on the grounds of health protection. In this case, it should not be an arbitrary discrimination or a disguised restriction on trade.

*“OECD countries are dealing with many of the same emerging trends at the national level, whilst working towards increased harmonisation through co-operation and standard setting at the regional and international levels.”*

7. Food safety systems in OECD countries have evolved over time and continue to do so, due to new scientific information about food safety issues, emerging pathogens, new technology, improved regulatory approaches and consumer interest in a high level of public health protection. There are common elements in the focus and nature of food safety regulation across OECD countries. For example, increased priority is being given to microbial pathogens. This priority reflects heightened concern and consumer awareness about certain foodborne illnesses and the fact that, with developments in food science and technology, many of these can be prevented if the necessary controls are applied.

8. The scope of food safety regulation is increasing to encompass the **entire food supply chain** from primary production (including animal feed and pesticides) through to consumption. This is a recognition that multiple and co-ordinated interventions are required throughout the food supply chain to increase assurance of the safety of the final product. There has been a progressive evolution in the focus of food safety regulation from detailed specification standards to include **horizontal standards and outcome-based requirements**. Increasingly, regulation lays down the criteria that the product offered for sale must meet but does not necessarily dictate the exact means that suppliers must adopt in order to comply, thereby allowing suppliers to take responsibility for producing safe food and gain flexibility for processing innovation. Nevertheless, for specific concerns, regulations may specify precise and specific requirements.

9. Simultaneously, greater emphasis has been put on the process through which a product is manufactured, rather than end-point safety measures. **Process controls** usually require that suppliers maintain appropriate control of the production process and can demonstrate that this is the case through verified documentation. Further, food safety regulation increasingly requires that **suppliers be proactive** in adopting food safety self controls. For example, food suppliers are being required to establish process control-based systems such as the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) system.

Governments are encouraging the development and adoption of codes of good hygiene practice, working with stakeholders (e.g. trade organisations and professional bodies).

10. In many OECD countries, **HACCP systems** are a major tool employed to place responsibility on food processors to identify, analyse and minimise hazards in accordance with government requirements. Generally, food processors are given some flexibility in developing controls appropriate for their products so long as requirements are met and the product is safe. HACCP focuses on those hazards that have a significant impact on food safety and includes many of the science based principles of risks assessment and risk management.

11. Food safety regulation across OECD countries is becoming **increasingly harmonised**. In many instances, international standards established by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) are the basis of national food safety legislation. Further, there have been efforts to harmonise food safety regulation at the regional level (for example the European Union) with the aim of facilitating trade between regional trading partners whilst supporting international harmonisation and at the same time achieving individual countries' own appropriate level of protection.

12. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreements have strengthened **international disciplines** on the establishment and application of regulations, with the objective of providing for the protection of health whilst preventing the unjustified and/or arbitrary distortion of trade. The SPS Agreement encourages WTO Members to base their requirements on international standards (Codex for food safety and International Office of Epizootics (OIE) for animal health and zoonoses). WTO Members may employ food safety measures which result in a higher level of protection than would be achieved on the basis of international standards if there is a scientific justification, or as a consequence of a Member's appropriate level of protection.

*“Risk analysis is the basis of food safety regulation.”*

13. **Risk analysis** consists of three inter-related components: risk assessment, risk management and risk communication. In OECD countries, risk analysis is being employed in a more structured and comprehensive manner over time in the development and implementation of food safety regulation. Whilst the basic principles of risk analysis are widely applied, there is variation across countries in the manner in which risk analysis is undertaken and the degree to which it has been formalised within the regulatory process.

14. All OECD countries are actively involved in international efforts to improve understanding of, and to develop and implement standards for, risk analysis procedures; especially in Codex and its parent bodies, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations. Two key issues are the manner in which scientific uncertainty is factored into risk analysis where scientific evidence is insufficient, and the manner and extent to which socio-economic factors are taken into consideration. Both these issues are the subject of international discussion in the Codex Alimentarius Committee on General Principles.

*“International consultation and co-operation in risk assessment is increasing.”*

15. **Risk assessment**, as defined by Codex, is a scientifically based process consisting of (i) hazard identification, (ii) hazard characterisation, (iii) exposure assessment, and (iv) risk characterisation. In OECD countries, risk assessment is generally undertaken by experts on the staff of regulatory bodies or through a system of expert committees, the members of which are selected according to their scientific

qualifications in fields relevant to food safety. These committees follow specified procedures, which may differ between individual countries, in terms of formal constitution, consultation process, modes of decision-making, declaration of interests, transparency of meetings and publication of proceedings.

16. More resources are being allocated to risk analysis at both the national and international level. Increasingly, risk assessments provided by international or regional organisations assist and complement those of national institutions. Examples include WHO-FAO expert committees and expert consultations (e.g. Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants, Joint Expert Meeting of Pesticide Residues and the Expert Consultation on Biotechnology) and the International Committee on Microbiological Standards in Food (ICMSF). As a consequence, national institutions are increasingly seeking to interpret international risk assessments in the national context given dietary patterns and other local conditions.

*“Different approaches to risk management reflect national requirements while respecting international commitments.”*

17. **Risk management**, as defined by Codex, is the process, distinct from risk assessment, of weighing policy alternatives, in consultation with all interested parties, considering risk assessment and other factors relevant for the health protection of consumers, and for the promotion of fair trade practices, and, if needed, selecting appropriate prevention and control options.

18. Risk management frameworks are developed at many levels of government including legislatures, ministries or departments and administrative agencies. As a general rule, the objectives and general principles of food safety regulation are laid down by the legislature, whilst routine decisions are delegated to ministries, departments and/or administrative agencies. In some countries, formal procedures are employed for consulting stakeholders and obtaining advice on appropriate risk management decisions (e.g. advisory committees). Indeed, in some countries it is a legal obligation to involve stakeholders in the risk management process. Where transparency of decision-making processes had not been evident in the past, initiatives have been undertaken to improve transparency of these processes. Improved transparency has involved, for example, publication of scientific reports and advice upon which regulatory decisions are made, and improved consultation procedures with interested parties.

19. OECD countries establish their **appropriate level of protection** through legislation, regulations and/or policies. Establishment of this level is inherently a political choice made by countries. However, as noted above, WTO Members are encouraged to adopt international standards, guidelines and recommendations where they exist and they are required to base their measures on risk assessment to justify regulatory decisions if higher standards are set.

20. Monitoring and surveillance programmes identify potential hazards to human health. These systems help verify the effectiveness of risk management decisions and assess regulatory compliance. They may be linked to rapid alert/recall systems involving government ministries, departments and/or administrative agencies charged with implementing and enforcing food safety controls and, in some cases, food suppliers and consumer groups. Increasingly, these systems are co-ordinated internationally.

*“Risk Communication is an interactive process involving all stakeholders.”*

21. **Risk communication**, as defined by Codex, is the interactive exchange of information and opinions throughout the risk analysis process concerning hazards and risks, risk-related factors and risk perceptions, among risk assessors, risk managers, consumers, industry, the academic community and other

interested parties, including the explanation of risk assessment findings and the basis of risk management decisions. In all OECD Member countries, greater emphasis is being placed on risk communication and, in particular, improving methods and strategies and/or policies of risk communication. This occurs at a number of levels within OECD countries:

- The exchange of information on the process by which food safety is regulated and the manner in which regulatory decisions are made;
- The exchange of information on the impact on human health of foodborne hazards and the impact of control and/or monitoring measures;
- The exchange of advice on necessary action when emergencies arise;
- The invitation to comment on risk assessments and subsequent risk management decisions.

22. A key issue which governments are addressing is the effective translation of complex scientific information on food safety problems into understandable messages for the general public, often as part of a more general initiative on public education in food safety and health. Training in effective risk communication is becoming more widespread amongst government ministries and administrative agencies involved in the implementation and enforcement of food safety regulation. A variety of mechanisms are used to communicate food-related risks to the general public, including press releases, information brochures and information on the Internet. Increasingly, more active methods of communication are being employed including media-based information campaigns, food safety-related events and electronic information services.

23. Stakeholder consultation from planning to implementation is now seen as a critical component of risk assessment and risk management to make sure all relevant issues have been considered. To ensure ownership, and in order that decisions objectively and transparently address their concerns, governments have recognised that all stakeholders need to be involved in the regulatory process. Many countries have created consultative councils, involving specialist representation from government, regulatory agencies, industry and consumer and environmental organisations.

## II. ACTIVITIES ADDRESSING FOOD SAFETY ISSUES

*“Heightened consumer awareness of food safety issues and a desire to create a credible, consistent and seamless food safety system are driving change in food safety frameworks.”*

24. **Developing National Food Safety Frameworks:** OECD countries expressed a common view that, in general, their current food safety systems are effective, responsive and flexible. There is some evidence, from several OECD countries with active systems for surveillance, that food safety interventions by government and industry have reduced the incidence of certain illnesses. At the same time, the incidence of some other foodborne diseases, most notably those associated with emerging pathogens, appears to be increasing. In some countries, improved monitoring procedures and increased public awareness of the symptoms of foodborne illness have resulted in increased reports of illness, and it is not easy to ascertain whether there actually is an increase in the number of cases of foodborne illnesses or just in the number of reports. Changing dietary patterns have also increased the need for more effective and flexible systems. In addition, in some OECD countries, other factors, such as public confidence, trade effects and ethical considerations not directly related to food safety, continue to influence government actions.



25. It is possible to identify a number of common trends in the reform of food safety frameworks across OECD countries. There have been attempts to **better co-ordinate existing institutional structures** for the implementation and enforcement of food safety legislation. In some cases this has involved the creation of new, generally more centralised, structures for the development and/or enforcement of food safety regulation. Some OECD countries have established a clear separation between risk assessment and risk management bodies, in part to improve the independence of scientific advice. Efforts have been made to **enhance the efficacy of control activities** through, for example, the development of monitoring and rapid alert systems, and mechanisms of enforcement. Changes are occurring in food safety regulations themselves and/or the way they are implemented. There have been attempts to **consolidate and simplify legislation** and to ensure consistency in the way that controls are applied to different foods and/or foodborne hazards.

26. Prevailing institutional structures applied to the regulation of food safety have been subject to **enhanced public scrutiny** and, in many cases their transparency and openness has been challenged. In some countries, concerns have been expressed, for example, about the perceived inappropriate influence of commercial interests on regulatory decisions and the public access to information on the manner in which regulatory decisions are made. A number of countries have implemented changes to address these concerns.

27. There are concerns about the **secondary impacts** of food safety regulation on agricultural producers and food processors including costs of compliance and the effect on international competitiveness, capacity to innovate and market responsiveness. As a consequence, there have been efforts to implement food safety controls that provide flexibility in methods to achieve the desired food safety results whilst minimising regulatory costs. Further, concerns have been expressed about a range of wider socio-economic issues, including animal welfare, environmental protection and ethical issues. However, there are differing views amongst OECD countries regarding the legitimacy of such factors within the framework of food safety regulation *per se*.

*“Acceptance of the products of modern biotechnology is mixed. A common approach is pre-market safety assessment whilst addressing other relevant issues associated with the technology, such as consumer information and choice.”*

28. **Regulation of Modern Biotechnology:** In OECD Member countries, the effective regulation of the products of modern biotechnology, in particular genetically modified (GM) foods, has been a subject of debate in recent years. There is recognition of the need to address consumer concerns about this technology by establishing controls that are transparent and that ensure the safety of the food supply, while not unduly restricting the development of a technology that may offer potential benefits to consumers and industry. All OECD countries strive to facilitate the availability of consumer protection and food safety information such that consumers may make informed choices about the foods they eat. Wider considerations, such as the impact on the environment, are also being taken into account by national regulatory authorities.

29. At the current time, the regulation of GM food products is evolving and there is diversity in the approaches adopted by individual OECD Member countries. In some cases existing food safety measures are applied to GM products, whilst in others specific new legislation has been, or is being, enacted. There are two elements to the regulation of GM food products, although both may not be present in all OECD Member countries: systems for risk assessment and pre-market approval of products, and labelling requirements associated with food safety and/or consumer information and choice.

30. In certain OECD countries, the approval process is generally based on a formal process of risk assessment in which the concept of '**substantial equivalence**' (developed by FAO, WHO and OECD) is a key element. The interpretation of 'substantial equivalence' differs among regulatory authorities and stakeholders. For some, the concept incorporates an analysis of possible intended and unintended effects of genetic modification. For others, it focuses on the substantive quality and characteristics of the final product. Efforts are currently under way through the Codex Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology and the OECD Task Force for the Safety of Novel Foods and Feeds to strengthen the existing common set of principles and information, including 'substantial equivalence', which can be applied to the safety assessment of novel foods.

31. In a number of OECD countries, regulations are being developed or implemented for the **labelling of products** that are derived from genetically modified material. In some countries, products are only subject to mandatory labelling in those instances where significant nutritional or compositional changes have been made, or where certain consumers at risk need to be alerted to potential health or safety risks, such as allergens. Other countries regard reliable labelling of all products derived from genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or containing GMOs as a prerequisite to ensure consumer choice, information and confidence. However, there is continued debate over the appropriate use of mandatory versus voluntary labelling requirements for foods derived from, or containing, GMOs, particularly those which identify methods of production not related to the product characteristics. Other issues include the establishment of thresholds in the case of adventitious presence of genetically modified material for the purpose of labelling, and the appropriate analytical and/or identification methods.

32. Certain OECD Member countries face challenges as to how to reconcile the social, economic, environmental and ethical aspects of the products of biotechnology, with science-based regulatory frameworks. To aid the development of a coherent and effective regulatory framework for genetically modified foods that takes account of both scientific evidence and consumer concerns, certain OECD Member countries have instituted advisory committees consisting of scientific experts, representatives of relevant government departments, and in some cases, other interested parties. This reflects a general trend towards greater transparency and openness of regulatory decision-making with respect to food safety.

*“Discussion is underway aimed at increasing understanding of how precaution should be applied to food safety.”*

33. **Precautionary Approaches and Principles:** There is general agreement within OECD countries that precaution has been and should remain an essential element of risk analysis. However, in some countries, an additional precautionary element, which they refer to as the “precautionary principle”, is applied when scientific information on a risk is incomplete and there is sufficient evidence of potential unacceptable health effects. There is agreement that the adoption of a precautionary approach does not remove the need for risk assessment to be undertaken and progressively refined, as further scientific information becomes available, and that any precautionary measures should be applied on a provisional basis.

34. Whilst the legitimacy of a precautionary approach to the regulation of food safety is recognised, there are significant differences in the terminology used to describe this approach, and differences in how and where it should be incorporated into food safety decisions. In all OECD countries, precaution is regarded as an integral part of risk analysis. In some countries, explicit reference is made to the 'precautionary principle', which is seen as an element of risk management. It is evident, however, that the concept of precaution is evolving over time with discussion underway in various international fora and within OECD Member countries. **Important attempts are being made within Codex** to develop guidelines on appropriate use of precaution in dealing with scientific uncertainty.

*“Enforcement and compliance are being enhanced.”*

35. **Regulatory Enforcement and Compliance:** The role of enforcement of food safety regulation is to enhance public confidence in food safety systems and to enhance compliance with legal requirements by food suppliers. Other means of promoting compliance include clear requirements and guidance, involving industry (as well as other stakeholders) in the development of the legal requirements, and training. Compliance is determined principally through the inspection, sampling and analysing of foods offered for sale and a system of remedies, including penalties, which are available to public authorities in cases of non-compliance. In the case of hygienic requirements, for example, enforcement officials are employed to inspect food premises to assess compliance and often, in cases of non-compliance, the premises may be officially closed, until requirements are met. Additionally, in many countries, offenders may be prosecuted under criminal law. In addition to inspection, surveillance is undertaken to monitor levels of foodborne hazards (e.g. microbiological and chemical contaminants). This has the dual function of identifying suppliers that fail to comply with legal requirements and highlighting emerging problems.

36. There are different approaches to the enforcement of food safety regulation across OECD Member countries:

- Enforcement may be undertaken centrally by a ministry or agency; this may, or may not, be the ministry or agency responsible for promulgating food safety regulation;
- Enforcement may be decentralised, being undertaken by sub-national government; these activities may, or may not, be funded by central government;
- These two approaches can co-exist, reflecting the constitutional powers of different levels of government, as may exist in federal systems of government, and/or are applied simultaneously to different types of food product;
- In certain cases the central government (or even supranational bodies as, for example, in the case of the EU) may be responsible for auditing and inspecting the activities of regional and/or national enforcement authorities.

37. OECD countries have sought to enhance the effectiveness with which food safety regulation is enforced. Some OECD countries are seeking more effective institutional structures for enforcement, for example, greater centralisation of responsibility or other means to improve consistency and efficiency of enforcement activities. Risk-based enforcement, work with developing countries to enhance the safety of food that will be offered for importation and development of codes of good hygienic practice are examples of approaches that have been introduced.

38. There is a trend towards **increasing the responsibility of the supplier** to ensure the product satisfies defined safety standards, with auditing and monitoring being undertaken by the competent authority. This is usually based on HACCP principles, with in-processing monitoring. Full records must be available for the audit and to facilitate traceability.

*“Food quality, food availability and cost, animal welfare, the environment and biodiversity are emerging socio-economic concerns in many countries.”*

39. **Addressing Socio-Economic Concerns:** The extent to which socio-economic concerns should influence risk decisions varies across OECD countries. Many OECD countries consider economic cost, technical feasibility and risk perception to be legitimate factors in risk management decisions. The question of whether socio-economic concerns such as animal welfare, environment and biodiversity

considerations should be addressed within, or separate from, the food safety regulatory system is more controversial. Some countries emphasise the importance of taking account of such factors in their food safety regulations. In those countries, such factors are included in the basis for selecting risk management measures but not in the assessment of health risks. Others express concern that such factors may be used to unjustifiably impede trade in agricultural and food products. Still others stress that the integrity and credibility of their science-based food regulatory systems could be undermined by the introduction of other factors. Efforts to discuss and agree on the legitimacy of such factors in food safety regulation are underway in a variety of international fora, including Codex.

40. In some OECD countries, there is a recognition that consideration should be given to the costs that food safety regulation imposes on consumers, food businesses (and the consequent impact on international competitiveness) as well as society as a whole. These are frequently assessed as part of the risk analysis process. For example, regulatory impact analysis may be applied to new regulatory or legislative proposals in order to assess the associated costs and benefits. Concerns about the costs of not regulating are also considered, including the costs to society of medical care, lost productivity and premature mortality.

*“The key objective is to promote public health and foster transparency, thereby building consumer confidence in the safety of the food supply.”*

41. **Communication and Consultation:** In OECD countries, mechanisms generally exist for consulting interested parties in the development of food safety regulation, including consumer organisations, the food industry, trade organisations and other interest groups. These mechanisms differ, however, in their level of formality and in the specific measures employed **to elicit and reflect the views of stakeholders**. In particular, there are differences in the degree to which regulators are proactive in consulting interest groups, rather than simply making information available and inviting views on regulatory proposals.

42. The degree to which regulatory decision-making is transparent and information on which decisions are based is made available to the general public reflects national cultural and political norms. In OECD countries, a range of different measures are used to inform the general public about the basis on which regulatory decisions are made. These might include, for example, publication of minutes of scientific advisory committees or advice provided in response to consultation exercises. In a number of countries, the mechanisms employed to consult stakeholders have also been reformed to address, amongst other things, perceptions that regulators place inordinate emphasis on expertise and advice from the food industry.

43. Regulatory authorities responsible for food safety in OECD countries recognise the importance of risk communication and aim to allocate the resources required to communicate effectively with the general public. Risk communication is seen as a means to enhance consumer confidence in food safety regulation and controls and to address consumer concerns about food safety. It is increasingly regarded as an essential element of food safety strategy that consumers are better informed and become more aware of foodborne risks.