

Food Safety: the Importance of Communication, Trust, and International Cooperation

**WHO Director General Margaret Chan's speech delivered by
Dr Bernhard Schwartländer, WHO Representative in China**

2015 International Food Safety Forum, 15 June 2015, Beijing

Recognition of VIPs – TBD

WHO Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan is not able to attend this meeting today due to other commitments. I am therefore pleased to deliver this speech on behalf of WHO.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me begin by congratulating the Chinese government on the recent milestone achievements in both food security and food safety.

China's recent transformations have lifted millions of its citizens out of poverty. Systems for food production have likewise been transformed, improving the safety, the abundance, and the diversity of the food supply.

With food exports on the rise, China is becoming a breadbasket, not just for its own citizens, but also for the world.

Though hunger has receded, food security remains a challenge for China as it aims to feed its own population. One set of statistics captures the challenge well: China needs to feed 20% of the world's population with 9% of the land and 6% of the water.

But food safety is likewise a high priority for the government. All around the world, the industrialization of food production has increased food supplies. It has also introduced new risks and complicated the job of keeping the food supply safe.

On behalf of WHO, I congratulate the government for a string of recent milestones for improving food safety.

A new food safety law was adopted in 2009.

A State Council Food Safety Commission was established in 2010.

The China Food and Drug Administration was reorganized in March 2013. Changes include a streamlined structure which consolidates most

competencies for food safety in a single administration. These competencies were previously scattered among many different services.

The Food Safety Law was further strengthened in April 2015 to concentrate more on prevention, science-based risk assessment and a farm-to-table approach. The China Food and Drug Administration will play a major role in implementation of the law, which enters into force on 1 October 2015.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Risk communication is a theme at this Forum, and rightly so, for economic as well as health reasons.

Decades of experience tell us this: Once a particular food item, be it beef, milk, or boxes of fresh raspberries, gets implicated in an incident of foodborne disease, consumer confidence is extremely difficult to restore.

That lack of confidence can extend not only to the food item itself, but also to the government in its role of safeguarding the safety of the food supply.

Well-informed consumers help drive food safety by making smart choices and adopting cautious behaviours, whether in restaurants, shops, markets, or homes.

Good communication is also important between risk assessors and risk managers, between regulatory authorities and the food business, and between regulatory authorities and consumers.

No system for safeguarding the food supply can work well in the absence of transparent information and teamwork among all stakeholders. Transparent information and a team approach are also priorities for China. During this Forum, we will be sharing experiences – good and bad – and best practices to help facilitate this process.

Ladies and gentlemen,

WHO enjoys a long history of fruitful collaboration with China. This Organization has provided guidance and advice on the strengthening of food safety systems in China. WHO stands ready to continue this support, through collaboration with international partners, like FAO, OIE, UNIDO, and the World Bank, and through a larger network of national food safety agencies.

China's recent transformations, especially in securing an adequate, safe, healthy, and nutritious food supply, have raised the expectations of WHO and the international community for more engagement by this country beyond its borders.

I would also encourage China to contribute to international experiences, knowledge, and strategies, especially in the areas of risk assessment, the setting of food standards, and the exchange of information during emergencies caused by foodborne disease.

As I conclude, let me draw your attention to videos on Five Keys to Safer Food, which will be shown during the Forum. The videos were jointly developed by WHO and the China Food and Drug Administration.

Messages communicated by the videos explain some basic common-sense measures that can prevent foodborne disease and help reduce the burden of foodborne diseases. They highlight the critical role of food handlers, but also of consumers.

We see these communication materials as contributing to bottom-up education and awareness building as yet another element in China's drive to improve food safety. Doing so will benefit not only the domestic population of this country, but consumers worldwide.

Thank you.