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CFS Informal Working Group on COVID-19

CFS Open "Platform-Sharing" Meeting on COVID-19 and its Impacts on Global Food Security and Nutrition; Thursday, 2 July 2020 (via Zoom)

<u>CONCEPT NOTE</u>

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<u>Context:</u>

At its meeting of 23 June to consider the Committee's options for addressing COVID-19 and its impacts on FS&N, the CFS Bureau agreed on different activities, including additional public "platform-sharing" events. Furthermore, it was decided that an informal working group of Bureau and Advisory Group members would meet to discuss options and planning for such events. In the context of that discussion, the Bureau heard a proposal from FAO and WHO senior managers for CFS to consider focusing on resilient food supply chains and worker health – specifically, in the meat/poultry processing sector, where relevant guidance/protocols would be particularly useful for the international community, in their view, to address major challenges related to the ongoing and future pandemics.

Should CFS conduct its next open meeting focused on this specific topic, its two core objectives would be: one, to review FAO and WHO's recent work on this topic with an eye toward validating its core conclusions and recommendations in a "Chair's Summary" document; and, two, to draw from experiences of the CFS Civil Society and Private Sector Mechanisms to provide ground-level context on strengthening food safety and resilient supply chains while protecting workers' rights and health.

<u>Key issues for the Working Group:</u>

1. Date(s) for next CFS open event(s);
    a. Options: 14 July; late-July; second half of September; winter 2020
2. Format/modalities:
    a. Webinar/other?; open to public/media?; Moderator/speakers?

Reference documents:

https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/guidance-for-schools-workplaces-institutions

https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331705/WHO-2019-nCoV-Food_Safety-2020.1-eng.pdf

https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331842/WHO-2019-nCoV-Food_Safety_authorities-2020.1-eng.pdf

CFS HLPE Interim Issue Paper on COVID-19:
http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/cfs/Docs1920/HLPE_2020/New_HLPE_paper_COVID_EN.pdf

CFS HLPE 2030 Synthesis Report: http://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-hlpe/reports/en/

International Finance Corporation: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33547

Background on Food Safety Issues:

COVID-19 response in meat-packing industry.

The world is facing an unprecedented threat from the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (referred to as the COVID-19 virus). Many countries are following the advice from the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding the introduction of physical distancing measures as one way in which transmission of the disease can be reduced. The application of these measures has resulted in the closure of many businesses, schools, and institutes of education, and restrictions on travel and social gatherings. For some people, working from home, teleworking, and on-line or internet discussions and meetings are now normal practices.

Food industry personnel, however, do not have the opportunity to work from home and are required to continue to work in their usual workplaces. Keeping all workers in the food production and supply chains healthy and safe is critical to surviving the current pandemic. Maintaining the movement of food along the food chain is an essential function to which all stakeholders along the food chain need to contribute. This is also required to maintain trust and consumer confidence in the safety and availability of food.

The meat packing industry is experiencing a dramatic challenge because of widespread transmission of COVID-19 among its workforce. This has led to the shut-down of affected operations, to shortages in meat supply, and to market

disruption for farmers - with noticeable economic impact throughout the whole meat supply chain and insecurity in meat supply (an important source of protein for many consumers) throughout the world.

To ensure our food is safe, the food industry implements Food Safety Management Systems (FSMS) based on the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles to manage food safety risks and prevent food contamination. Food industry FSMS are underpinned by prerequisite programmes that include good hygiene practices, cleaning and sanitation, zoning of processing areas, supplier control, storage, distribution and transport, personnel hygiene and fitness to work – all the basic conditions and activities necessary to maintain a hygienic food processing environment. The Codex General Principles of Food Hygiene lay down a firm foundation for implementing key hygiene controls at each stage of the food processing, manufacture, and marketing chain for the prevention of food contamination.

There are specific challenges with regards to managing the prevention of human to human transmission in meatpacking plants. The close physical proximity of workspaces, high humidity, the abundance of operations that can form or promote aerosolization, and the generally low temperatures in the facilities themselves are among the most noticeable challenges. **A specific guidance document from UN agencies addressing these challenges is not currently available**.

It may be helpful for FAO, WHO and CFS to consider development of specific guidance that aids the meat processing industry and the regulatory authorities involved to deploy the most effective prevention measures. Such measures will be key to keep meat-packing plants operating in a safe manner, protecting the workers from getting ill, preventing market disruptions and thereby aiding in the prevention of food shortages and especially insecurity of the meat supply which is a critical source of protein for many consumers.