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## REPORT

### EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON THE SCOPE AND SETTING UP OF AN ARAB – GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES (ARAB – GAP) FRAMEWORK

CAIRO, EGYPT, 31 MAY – 1 JUNE 2016

#### Summary

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization / Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (FAO-RNE), organized an Expert Group Meeting on the Scope and Setting up of an Arab – Good Agricultural Practices (Arab – Gap) Framework, in Cairo during 31 May – 1 June 2016. The meeting brought together experts from government, non-government and private organizations with working experience in the areas of food quality and safety and good agricultural practices for improved food safety.

The meeting was held within the framework of a project financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), a component of which aims at promoting the adoption and use of GAPs for a responsible, effective and efficient food value chain in the Arab region. The meeting provided a platform to enhance understanding of GAPs and their relation to food safety and quality issues; review existing national, regional and international experiences; and exchange views on a proposed Arab-GAP framework.

The meeting resulted in a set of conclusions on how an Arab-GAP framework could be structured, and what modalities need to be followed for its operationalization. Options were formulated on a way forward to promote the adoption of GAPs for improved food quality and safety in domestic food markets.

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## **Introduction**

1. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization / Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (FAO-RNE), organized an Expert Group Meeting on the Scope and Setting up of an Arab – Good Agricultural Practices (Arab – Gap) Framework, in Cairo during 31 May – 1 June 2016.
2. The meeting was held within the framework of a project financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) entitled “Promoting Food and Water Security through Cooperation and Capacity Development in the Arab Region.” Specifically, component 3 of the project aims at promoting the adoption and use of GAPs for a responsible, effective and efficient food value chain in the Arab region with the overall aim being to promote the adoption and implementation of an Arab-GAP framework. The meeting provided a platform to enhance understanding of GAPs and their relation to food safety and quality issues; review existing national, regional and international experiences; and exchange views on the proposed Arab-GAP framework.
3. Attended by a group of experts representing various stakeholders, the meeting resulted in a set of conclusions on how an Arab-GAP framework could be structured, and what modalities need to be followed for its operationalization. Options were formulated on a way forward to promote the adoption of GAPs for improved food quality and safety in domestic food markets, as summarized in section I of this report. Section II provides a summary of interventions and discussions over the two-day meeting, whereas section III provides organizational information.

## **I. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD**

4. There was a consensus among participants on the importance of promoting good agricultural practices in the Arab region as a means of advancing safe and sustainable agriculture and improving food security in its various dimensions. Participants acknowledged that the food safety situation in several Arab countries needs strengthening in order to safeguard public health and reduce the occurrence of foodborne diseases. In the face of weak government monitoring and enforcement capabilities, voluntary GAP standards could provide a potent supporting, market-driven mechanism to incentivize agricultural producers to gradually adopt practices that offer safer products while ensuring sustainability.
5. Issues that were recurrently raised during the discussions, and which are further elaborated in section II of the report, include the following:
  - (a) The need to improve our knowledge about small farmers, their practices, the markets they target (local versus export), and why or why not they pursue GAP certification;
  - (b) Government incentives for GAP adoption, their importance in the initial phase and their long-term sustainability; noting that such government expenditures would be justified since protection from foodborne diseases is a public health priority;
  - (c) Institutional and governance deficits are among the leading barriers for enforcing food safety laws and regulations, and adopting GAPs;
  - (d) There is a need to strengthen the political will to adopt an Arab-GAP;
  - (e) The burden that a GAP certification scheme could pose on small farmers;
  - (f) Labels/logos and their importance if producers are to be recognized and receive a price premium for their products;
  - (g) The need for adequate extension services on GAPs even if certification is not the end objective;
  - (h) The need for an Arab agricultural policy that protects consumer rights;
  - (i) Scientific research and technology development for a sustainable agriculture;
  - (j) The role of civil society organizations in raising consumer awareness about food safety and increasing the demand for safe food products.

6. Diverging points of view emerged, however, regarding the rationale behind a regional Arab-GAP standard and certification scheme, and how such a scheme could be setup.

7. Arab-GAP supporting views included the following:

- (a) An Arab-GAP is needed as it can address local, national and regional food safety challenges while taking the specificities of the region into consideration. This includes particularities related to prevailing agricultural systems themselves (e.g. number of crops per year, irrigation practices, etc.) but also local social, cultural and labor considerations;
- (b) The Arab-GAP would be focused primarily on domestic consumers, who from a moral perspective, deserve as well enhanced food safety and quality standards that could be on par with those of export markets;
- (c) The Arab-GAP would constitute a more feasible option for small farmers in the region who cannot afford, or do not have the capacity to obtain a global certification noting, however, that it would not be a “new” standard, but rather an adapted implementation of GLOBALG.A.P. and as such could be a good stepping stone for farmers to eventually achieve global certification;
- (d) Once fully functional, the Arab-GAP would be benchmarked to existing global schemes such as GLOBALG.A.P. or Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI);
- (e) The Arab-GAP could facilitate intra-regional agricultural trade;
- (f) Even if an Arab-GAP is not widely known, it can pick up if backed by appropriate marketing and awareness-raising campaigns.

8. Arab-GAP skeptical views included the following points:

- (a) It would be difficult, and perhaps counter-productive, to introduce a new Arab-GAP standard whereas a global, and well-established standard (GLOBALG.A.P.) exists and is well known to governments in the region;
- (b) Multinational supermarkets and other large retailers operating in the Arab countries are best-suited to create the consumer demand for GAP certified products; However, they need to trust the GAP scheme they are dealing with and would be more inclined to procure fresh produce from producers that are certified according to a well-known, well-established scheme;
- (c) It could be assessed how to adopt or start with a localG.A.P., which allows for a gradual stepwise achievement of GLOBALG.A.P. over a five year period;
- (d) Rather than opting directly for an Arab-GAP, a starting point could be the harmonization of food safety laws and standards across Arab countries that can be enforced to protect the health of consumers in the region and enhance intra-regional trade.

9. In light of the above, the following next steps were proposed by ESCWA:

- (a) ESCWA consultant would review the draft Arab-GAP proposal, taking into consideration the meeting’s suggestions during the deliberations;
- (b) The revised report would be circulated to meeting participants as peer reviewers and would be finalized accordingly. Participants are invited to nominate additional peer reviewers that the report could be circulated to;
- (c) ESCWA in cooperation with partners would undertake further consultations at the national level, possibly through national focus groups, in order to further validate the proposal, and acquire more information;
- (d) ESCWA would investigate the possibility of having pilot programmes at country level to guarantee ownership of the Arab-GAP;
- (e) Meeting participants to act as members of an unofficial advisory board during the setting up of an Arab-GAP.

## II. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

### A. OPENING SESSION

10. The opening session included remarks by the meeting organizers. *Mr. Nabil Gangi*, Senior Advisor to the Regional Representative, spoke on behalf of FAO-RNE. He welcomed all participants at FAO-RNE premises and expressed his appreciation for the cooperation with ESCWA on this important topic. He indicated that the adoption of GAPs has had positive impacts on farming and food security in a number of countries and wished that this expert meeting would result in tangible results for advancing the adoption of GAPs in the region.

11. Speaking on behalf of ESCWA, *Ms. Reem Nejdawi*, Chief, Food and Environment Section thanked FAO-RNE for hosting the meeting at their premises and commended the joint ESCWA-FAO work being undertaken within the context of the Food and Water Security project. She noted that while GAPs have become a way of life in developed parts of the world, the Arab region has yet to make substantial strides to ensure their wide adoption, use and monitoring with a view to enhance food safety and quality for Arab people and increase regional trade in agricultural products. *Ms. Nejdawi* noted that the adoption of GAPs may come at a cost for small farmers in the region and that devising an Arab-GAP framework will face challenges on a number of fronts. Nevertheless, she hoped that this meeting will succeed in identifying viable options for an Arab-GAP system that will engage and benefit all food stakeholders.

12. Opening remarks were followed by a tour de table and a review of the agenda.

### B. SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL OVERVIEW OF GAPs

13. The session was moderated by *Ms. Reem Nejdawi* from ESCWA. It provided an introduction about GAPs, their linkage to the global sustainable development goals, and an overview of lessons learned from GAP experience in the region.

14. *Mr. Fidele Byiringiro*, Economic Affairs Officer at ESCWA, introduced the concept of GAPs. He noted that GAPs are rooted in globalized food markets and have gained currency due to rising concerns over food safety and quality, farmer and animal health and the conservation of the natural resource base. Providing recent examples of food safety-related issues in a number of Arab countries, *Mr. Byiringiro* highlighted the role of GAPs as a first line of defense in the food chain against food contamination. He reflected on the linkage of GAPs to other schemes such as Codex standards, ISO and Fairtrade certifications to name a few, and reviewed potential elements of GAPs frameworks, the sectors covered, membership, and governance structures at the regional and national levels. *Mr. Byiringiro* also touched upon the ESCWA project component on GAPs and the envisaged role of ESCWA and partners in relation to GAPs.

15. *Ms. Jana El Baba*, Project Coordinator at ESCWA, highlighted the linkages between GAPs and the recently adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. She briefly presented the components of the 2030 Agenda, noting that it is indivisible and integrated, and balances between people and the planet. *Ms. El-Baba* went on to show the contribution of sustainable agriculture and rural development to the implementation of the dedicated sustainable development goal on food security (SDG2) but also to the achievement of other SDGs, including goals on poverty, health, water, sustainable consumption and production, and others. She highlighted as well how compliance with GAPs can help directly in the achievement of, and reporting on, specific SDG indicators. She concluded by indicating that all stakeholders have a role to play in advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

16. *Mr. Dost Muhammad*, Plant Production Officer at FAO-RNE, provided a review of FAO experiences in GAPs at the global, regional and national levels. He indicated that upon high demand from member states, FAO has implemented activities and projects on various aspects of GAP through multidisciplinary teams. Among the key lessons learned from these projects is that what constitutes "good" agricultural practices may differ between stakeholders, hence the need to build consensus through multi-stakeholder platforms. Mr. Muhammad stressed on the fact that the successful implementation of GAPs requires to meet specific information, financial and institutional needs. Recognizing the increasing pressures on small farmers in particular, he gave a number of examples of GAPs that can address regional challenges of water scarcity and arid climate, climate change, shrinking agricultural lands and erosion of genetic resources. Mr. Muhammad concluded with a set of questions on the proposed Arab-GAP, including ones regarding the markets to be targeted, the commodities to be covered and capacity-building needs.

### C. SESSION 2: OVERVIEW OF GLOBAL AND REGIONAL GAPs FRAMEWORKS

17. The session, which was moderated by Ms. Nejdawi from ESCWA, aimed to review and learn from existing GAP experiences at regional and international levels.

18. *Ms. Shashi Sareen*, Senior Food Safety and Nutrition Officer at FAO – Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, made a presentation by video conference on GAPs frameworks in Asia and the Pacific. Following a brief introduction on food safety and the importance of GAPs, Ms. Sareen explained that ASEAN-GAP is a voluntary standard adopted in 2006 by country members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and noted that it focuses on the production of fresh fruits and vegetables. She went on to present FAO's experience in supporting country members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to establish and implement GAP systems that ensure safe produce in domestic markets, facilitate regional trade and ensure global acceptability. Ms. Sareen presented the scheme concept and the key players involved, as well as their roles and responsibilities. She discussed/provided the implementation steps and the decisions to be made regarding the GAP standard and scheme owner, conformity criteria, governing structure, certification process, requirements for certification and accreditation bodies, and the use of certification logos.

19. Ms. Sareen also presented the outputs of the FAO project, notably the GAP scheme and training manual for fruits and vegetables (a 2-volume document), which constitute a good resource material for other countries/regions envisaging such schemes. She concluded by highlighting a set of good practices that came out of this experience, including: ensuring the independence of scheme owners and certification bodies to prevent conflict of interest; encouraging exchange visits among countries for information sharing and peer learning; translating regulatory requirements into 'critical' or 'major' control points; using GAPs logos on produce if backed by testing; ensuring national buy-in and avoiding duplication of efforts; establishing demonstration farms; providing Government incentives in the early stages; and aiming towards harmonizing regional and international standards.

20. *Ms. Manal Saleh*, General Manager of Blue Moon Ltd, and GLOBALG.A.P. Farm Assurer, shared her experience in supporting Egyptian food suppliers to comply with the requirements of global customers. She highlighted the results of an on-going USAID-funded premium project that aims to improve management practices at Egyptian small producer organizations, and increase their incomes. Through the project, supply contracts with international restaurant chains and fairtrade markets were secured. Through internship and entrepreneurship programs, the project is also helping to build human capacity and improve socio-economic conditions in the agriculture sector.

21. Ms. Saleh also briefly presented GLOBALG.A.P. as a partnership for safe and sustainable agriculture, and highlighted its governance structure. She went on to introduce localg.a.p. as a stepping stone towards global certification and a cost effective solution for emerging markets such as in the Arab region. Ms. Saleh explained that localg.a.p. is an assessment, rather than a certification

scheme. Every localg.a.p. has a program owner that can customize the applicable rules to suit local conditions, within the limits of the requirements set by GLOBALG.A.P. The program owner also decides on who will conduct the localg.a.p. inspections. There can be more than one localg.a.p. program in one country and producers (or producer groups) can select the program to comply with.

22. *Mr. Gumataw Abebe*, Assistant Professor at the American University of Beirut, presented a conceptual analysis of the adoption of GAPs. He made an analogy to technology adoption and diffusion models documented in the literature, namely the epidemic and probit models. The epidemic model stresses on the importance of access to information as a determinant for technology adoption, whereas the probit or choice based model reflects differences in the goals, needs and abilities of individuals or firms. Mr. Abebe listed the determinants of GAPs adoption, which include firm characteristics, characteristics of the practices themselves (including their relative advantage, costs, impacts, risks and trialability), and most importantly institutional factors. He noted that the adoption of GAPs is a learning process that follows a sequence of steps; it is not guaranteed and dis-adoption may also take place. Mr. Abebe concluded that GAPs are easily adopted when market driven and that the choice of GAPs governance greatly matters. He proposed co-regulation – i.e., a governance structure that combines primary legislation and self-regulation – as a way forward for the development and implementation of an Arab-GAP.

#### *Summary of discussions*

23. The ensuing discussions raised the following points:

(a) Government incentives are important in the early phases and may include preferential treatment in government procurement, access to credit, advertisement campaigns, waiving of certification fees, and even direct payments to farmers. However, such incentives may not always be sustainable in the long term.

(b) The design of the GAP standard is important as every additional requirement will add costs to the food producer and as such it is important to ensure that it is needed based on the country priorities. However, seeking equivalence between national and global schemes may also be beneficial.

(c) Use of logo is an important issue if the producer is to capture benefit from the certification; otherwise a premium on price will not be possible. Logo use will depend on whether the objective is to increase export or protect domestic markets.

(d) The role of organizations such as ESCWA and FAO is mostly to facilitate the process and raise awareness, as the countries need to take the decisions and formalize the process. It is also important that all stakeholders in a country are identified and engaged through a steering committee.

(e) Among the main challenges in the region is that prevailing culture in local markets favours low price over quality and safety. Changing the mindset of farmers is also a major challenge.

#### D. SESSION 3: GAPs NATIONAL EXPERIENCES

24. The session was moderated by *Mr. Mohamed Al-Hamdi*, First Economic Affairs Officer at ESCWA, and aimed at reviewing national experiences in six Arab countries.

25. *Mr. Hesham Allam*, Chief Researcher at the Ministry of Agriculture in Egypt, indicated that Egypt has no national GAP certification scheme. However, substantial efforts are being undertaken to improve agricultural practices at three levels: production environment; pre-harvest stage; and post-harvest stage. At the production environment level, practices that improve soil characteristics, reduce gaseous emissions into the atmosphere, save irrigation water and cut farmers' electricity bill would be needed. At the pre-harvest level, practices such as trees pruning, fruit thinning, vermicomposting and vermiculture, seedling grafting and protected cultivation are encouraged to improve produce quantity and quality. Good post-harvest practices such as maturity indices, packing and pre-cooling are equally

important as well as a good traceability system. Mr. Allam concluded by recommending the upscaling of capacity-building activities at all levels.

26. *Mr. Mohammed Khier Al Hiary*, Head of Technical Monitoring Division at the Ministry of Agriculture in Jordan reflected that GAPs remain an unclear concept for farmers in the region, with many misconceptions. He noted that despite efforts exerted over the past ten years by government and non-government actors, little GAP progress has been achieved. Mr. Al Hiary indicated that early adopters were driven mostly by access to European markets; however, as export quantities remained limited, some producers did not renew their certification and the number of certified producers effectively declined over time. Among the reasons behind the decline are marketing over-expectations, costs of adoption, inspection service quality, level of effort required, and reliance on subsidies. Mr. Al Hiary concluded that while GAPs open new marketing channels in principle, there is no price premium; hence comprehensive and detailed feasibility studies are required before implementation.

27. *Ms. Maya Mhanna*, Head of Rural Projects and Irrigation Department at the Ministry of Agriculture in Lebanon, gave a brief overview of the agriculture sector in Lebanon. She indicated that while Lebanon does not yet have a specific policy on the implementation of GAPs, the concept was addressed in several policy papers since 2010, and some measures have been applied. Ms. Mhanna highlighted the activities implemented within the framework of a joint MoA-FAO project, namely the organization of training sessions, preparation of field guides and GAP guidelines for fruits and vegetables, and the organization of field visits to farmers, cooperatives and wholesale markets. Moreover, the terms of reference for a national technical working group on GAP have been prepared but the group is yet to be established. Ms. Mhanna concluded by informing that the MoA's current strategy 2015-2019 envisions to enhance GAPs for the benefit of domestic consumers and export markets.

28. The Moroccan experience was presented by *Ms. Hakima Bahaddi*, Head of Service of Institutions Supervision, and *Mr. Salah Ritoune*, Head of Plant Protection Service at the National Office of Sanitary Food Safety in Morocco. Ms. Bahaddi gave an overview of the measures taken by the Office in the area of food safety monitoring. Within the framework of the Green Morocco Plan, a food safety law 28-07 was drafted that encompasses the entire food chain. Among the principles of law 28-07 is the need for food producers to be licensed, to follow good hygiene practices and to maintain records that allow traceability. Enforcement of the law is supported by an extensive food safety monitoring programme from field to fork that involves product testing and inspection of food producers.

29. Mr. Ritoune focused his intervention on good plant protection practices in Morocco. He highlighted the set of laws (more than 37 laws and 280 decrees) that govern plant protection, and which cover produce intended for the domestic market (local production and imports) as well as those intended for export. The focus areas of plant protection practices include the adequate use of pesticides and the promotion of integrated pest management that combines physical, biological and chemical pest control measures. Mr. Ritoune noted that the Office is able to effectively implement its mandate through a web of inspection and intervention mechanisms (directorates, labs, and mobile teams in various regions).

30. *Mr. Mohammed Al-Dhahouri*, Plant Protection Specialist at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in Oman, shared the country's recent GAP experience. Starting with a brief overview of agriculture in Oman, Mr. Al-Dhahouri explained that a FAO-supported project is currently under implementation that aims to assist 30 exporting farms in the Batinah region. He noted that the approach being followed involves a combination of infrastructure rehabilitation, training, testing and inspection, as well as certification. Through the project, GAP analysis was undertaken for 50 farms and 20 were able to obtain GLOBALG.A.P. certificates. Mr. Al-Dhahouri noted that it was challenging to change farmer mindsets and existing practices, and that farmers were reluctant in view



of the lack of skilled labor and limited market opportunities. He concluded that an Arab-GAP that suits regional specificities would be helpful.

31. *Ms. Muna Ahmed*, Manager of the Agricultural Technology Transfer Society (ATTS) in Sudan, presented Sudan's experience in biosafety. Following an introduction on agriculture in the country, Ms. Ahmed highlighted efforts to obtain organic certification for selected products (sesame, hibiscus sabdariffa and gum Arabic) that are intended for European markets. She pointed out that non-governmental organizations such as ATTS can play an important role in disseminating beneficial technologies such as bio-fertilizers, "effective micro-organisms" technology for compost production, as well as agroecology and agroforestry practices.

#### *Summary of discussions*

32. In the ensuing discussions the following points were raised:

(a) In some cases, farmers are aware of food safety requirements and convinced about them; however, they do not apply food safety measures due to weak law enforcement and a lack of financial incentives as their application requires high investments. Some producers rely on two production lines: one for export markets where food safety measures are applied; and another for domestic markets where food safety measures are ignored.

(b) There is a significant disparity among Arab countries in terms of GAP readiness, and some countries lack the long-term commitment and market stability which are needed to sustain efforts. The implementation of an Arab-GAP should be adapted to the region and take these disparities into consideration.

(c) In order to have a GAP scheme that is beneficial to both farmers and local consumers, it will need to be designed based on a scientific quantification of the food safety issues relevant to each country and an accurate identification of the source of contamination. However, an important handicap in the region is the lack of availability of accredited labs and the high testing cost.

(d) The food safety situation in some Arab countries is deteriorating and is having a high impact on the health bill and the operation of the health system, which is already very congested.

(e) Small farmers cannot practically be included in a GAP scheme; Hence, the establishment of farmer cooperatives or associations is an important requirement for GAP success.

(f) GAP standards for water and the use of treated wastewater in agriculture are important for the region. In the past, this issue has prevented access of agricultural products from the region.

(g) Public-private partnerships, including with academia, is important in order to raise awareness of farmers and consumers.

#### E. SESSION 4: TOWARDS AN ARAB-GAP FRAMEWORK

33. The session was moderated by *Mr. Atef Idriss*, CEO of MENA Food Safety Associates (MEFOSA, Lebanon based) and aimed to present and discuss the scope and set-up of a proposed Arab-GAP scheme, taking into consideration the lessons learned from related schemes.

34. *Ms. Dima Faour-Klingbeil*, ESCWA food safety consultant under the project, presented a preliminary proposal for the Arab-GAP as a third party voluntary scheme. In terms of scope, it is proposed that the Arab-GAP would cover fresh produce, being the most potentially hazardous foods that have caused recent outbreaks globally. Ms. Faour-Klingbeil noted that food safety systems have evolved over the past years and that the number of certified producers worldwide is increasing. She went on to briefly present the Arab GAP guide prepared by the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) in 2007, and which builds on the GLOBALG.A.P. framework.

35. Ms. Faour-Klingbeil proposed a staged setup process as follows. Stage 1 would involve the identification or establishment of an official and legal Arab-GAP body or commission set up as an independent private entity with a management board that includes experts and government officials. Stage 2 would involve a review of scheme requirements, including food safety, environmental sustainability/biodiversity, food traceability, and worker operational health and safety. Stage 3 would involve the selection of a certification body that is impartial, competent and cost effective. Stage 4 would involve the design of a flexible, phased compliance scheme, where the first phase could focus on securing compliance with food safety related major requirements, the second on securing compliance with all major requirements and the third on securing compliance with most minor requirements. Stage 5 would involve endorsement by stakeholders and promotion of the Arab-GAP system. The final stage (stage 6) would involve implementation at the micro level by producers, who need to be supported with theoretical and practical training sessions.

36. *Mr. Elie Massoud*, Head of Agriculture and Agro-Industries Department at the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, proposed steps to setup an Arab-GAP scheme. His proposal is based on the lessons learned from the Med Diet experience, a restaurant certification involving six Mediterranean countries. The steps proposed involve the formation of a committee of experts to design the list of requirements that are subsequently approved and implemented by the countries. Mr. Massoud provided a list of recommendations to ensure success, including: selecting the right experts; starting with a voluntary scheme that is easy to apply and link adoption to a set of incentives; undertake effective awareness raising and marketing of the system; and ensure sustainable funding. He noted that a GAP system cannot guarantee the product is free from microbial contamination, but it should ensure that producers have taken proactive measures to reduce the risk of contamination.

#### *Summary of discussions*

37. In the ensuing discussions the following points were raised:

(a) GLOBALG.A.P. is a known and trusted system that farmers would be willing, in principle, to invest in order to achieve it (assuming there are sufficient returns to the farmer). Referring to the Arab-GAP, some participants suggested that farmers may be reluctant to invest in a system that is not known. Other participants suggested that the Arab-GAP needs to be benchmarked against GLOBALG.A.P. or even to set the bar higher than GLOBALG.A.P. in order to build consumer trust.

(b) A study of the farmer's target markets and trading partners is an important step before an Arab-GAP scheme can be designed. The design will differ based on whether global, regional or domestic markets are targeted.

(c) Health concerns should be among the drivers behind the development of an Arab-GAP, in addition to export/market concerns. Such a system would achieve both private (farmer access to markets) and public benefits (reduce food-related public health hazards).

(d) The Arab-GAP will be attractive to farmers if it generates a lower documentation burden compared to global schemes.

#### F. SESSION 5: ARAB-GAPS STAKEHOLDERS AND ISSUES

38. The session, which was moderated by *Ms. Manal Saleh*, aimed to shed light on the role of selected stakeholders and to discuss related issues.

39. *Ms. Amy El-Zeiny*, Executive Manager and Assistant Quality Manager at the Egyptian Centre of Organic Agriculture, presented the key characteristics and principles of organic farming. She noted that while there is no direct equivalence between organic and GAP certifications, there are important similarities that can facilitate the transition from one scheme to the other. Ms. El-Zeiny indicated that principles of organic farming include: health of soil, plant, animal, human and planet; working with

and sustaining living ecological systems and cycles; fairness to people and the environment; precautionary management to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment.

40. *Mr. Fazal Hamid*, GAP Unit Head at the Abu Dhabi Farmers Services Centre in the United Arab Emirates, presented the Centre's experience with GAPs, stressing that GAPs are among the Centre's strategic priorities. Mr. Hamid showed in pictures the significant improvements that the Centre was able to introduce in terms of pesticide management, workers' health, produce handling, waste management, irrigation and food safety measures. Mr. Hamid shared the results of an independent survey conducted with GLOBALG.A.P. certified producers. The survey reflected that producers were generally satisfied with the benefits of certification; others related their dissatisfaction to not receiving premium prices and the difficulty in maintaining farm records. Mr. Hamid indicated that the number of GLOBALG.A.P. certified producers in the UAE has been significantly increasing over the past years; in addition to technical assistance, government support in the form of a guaranteed price premium has helped maintain interest in GAP.

41. *Mr. Zuhair Jweihan*, Chairman of the Jordan Exporters and Producers Association for Fruits and Vegetables (JEPA), introduced the Association as non-profit organization grouping 250 members, which was established in 1993 with support from USAID. As part of an export promotion project, JEPA introduced GLOBALG.A.P. certification, which allowed Jordanian exporters to access new markets and sell to supermarket chains new items such as ready-to-eat salads. Other benefits included better workers health and access to training and information. Mr. Jweihan noted that although Jordan Standards and Metrology Organization is accredited to issue certifications, exporters prefer to go through foreign certification bodies in nearby countries.

42. *Mr. Atef Idriss*, CEO of MENA Food Safety Associates (MEFOSA, Lebanon based), highlighted that the region has good export potential for food products; however, this potential is constrained by high trade barriers in many developed countries. He attributed the lack of farmers' compliance with food safety standards to a number of challenges including weak surveillance and diagnostic capacity in countries of the region and other institutional deficiencies. Mr. Idriss stressed on the importance of having an Arab common agricultural policy and a regional food safety programme that follows a preventive and collaborative paradigm that is based on science.

#### *Summary of discussions*

43. In the ensuing discussions the following points were noted:

(a) Besides the interest to increase export, producers in the region will only be enticed to adopt GAPs if the consumer is aware and demands safe and healthy foods. Hence the important role that civil society organizations can play in raising consumer awareness.

(b) Some participants assured that the Arab-GAP should not be seen to compete with GLOBALG.A.P. It should offer a feasible alternative for producers in the region who cannot, or do not want to, become GLOBALG.A.P. certified. Other participants proposed that further investigation, perhaps in the form of a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis, is required in order to confirm the benefit of an Arab-GAP.

(c) Agricultural research in the region should be further strengthened and linked to the problems that farmers in the region face.

(d) GAPs adoption success in the United Arab Emirates was achieved through a strong, sustained and relatively expensive public support, which might not be replicable in other countries. Nevertheless it was often emphasized that farmers might need support or incentives in order to adopt such food safety schemes.

### **III. ORGANIZATION**

#### **A. DATE AND VENUE**

44. The meeting was held at FAO-RNE premises in Cairo over two days 31 May – 1 June 2016.

#### **B. AGENDA**

45. The meeting was organized in five main sessions in addition to the opening and final closing sessions. The detailed agenda is included in Annex I.

#### **C. PARTICIPANTS**

46. The meeting was attended by 27 participants including experts from government, non-government and private organizations with working experience in the areas of food quality and safety and good agricultural practices for improved food safety. The full list of participants is provided in Annex II.

#### **D. EVALUATION OF THE MEETING**

47. An evaluation questionnaire was distributed to assess the substantive and logistical aspects of the meeting. A total of 16 participants responded to the questionnaire. About 93% of respondent said the overall quality of the meeting was good to excellent, 94% said it had clear objectives, 93% said it was successful in reaching its intended objectives, 98% said the quality of presentations was good to excellent and all agreed that the logistics and other administrative arrangements were good to excellent. In addition, 93% of the participants expressed the need for follow up actions in the form of additional meetings notably to further elaborate on the concepts and to exchange views as most felt the time allotted for presentations and discussions were not sufficient as well as to outline a clear path forward or action plan.

#### **E. DOCUMENTS**

48. Presentations delivered during the meeting may be accessed through the following meeting webpage: <https://www.unescwa.org/events/arab-gap-consultation-1st>.

## Annex I. Agenda

### Day 1 – 31 May 2016

- 08:30 – 09:00 Registration FAO-RNE, Dokki, Cairo
- 09:00 – 09:30 Welcome and opening remarks/statements
- FAO-RNE: *Mr. Nabil Gangi, Senior Advisor to the Regional Representative*
  - ESCWA: *Ms. Reem Nejdawi, Chief, Food and Environment Section*
- Tour de table
- Organization of work and review of the agenda, *Mr. Fidele Byiringiro, ESCWA*
- 09:30 – 10:45 **Session 1: Introduction and General Overview of GAPs**  
*Moderator: Ms. Reem Nejdawi, ESCWA*
- Overview: Food safety and GAPs, *Mr. Fidele Byiringiro, ESCWA*
  - GAPs in achieving selected SDGs: Linkages, *Ms. Jana El Baba, ESCWA*
  - GAPs: A view from FAO, *Mr. Dost Muhammed, FAO-RNE*
- Q&A and General Discussions
- 10:45 – 11:00 Coffee break
- 11:00 – 12:45 **Session 2: Overview of Global and Regional GAPs Frameworks**  
*Moderator: Ms. Reem Nejdawi, ESCWA*
- GAPs Frameworks in Asia and the Pacific, *Ms. Shashi Sareen, FAO-RAP (VC)*
  - GLOBALG.A.P and Blue Moon experience, *Ms. Manal Saleh, Blue Moon Ltd*
  - Adoption of GAPs through co-regulation, *Dr. Gumataw Abebe, AUB, Lebanon*
- Q&A and General Discussions
- 12:45 – 13:45 Lunch break
- 13:45 – 15:45 **Session 3: GAPs National Experiences**  
*Moderator: Mr. Mohamed Al-Hamdi, ESCWA*
- Egypt, *Mr. Hesham Allam, MoA*
  - Jordan, *Mr. Mohammed Khier Al Hiary, MoA*
  - Lebanon, *Ms. Maya Mhanna, MoA*
  - Morocco, *Ms. Hakima Bahaddi and Mr. Salah Ritoune, ONSSA*
  - Oman, *Mr. Mohammed Al-Dhahouri, MoA*
  - Sudan, *Ms. Muna Ahmed, ATTAS*
- Q&A and General Discussions
- Wrap-up first day

## Day 2 – 1 June 2016

- 09:00 – 10:45 **Session 4: Towards an Arab-GAP Framework**  
*Moderator: Mr. Atef Idriss, MEFOSA, Lebanon*
- Scope and setting-up of the Arab-GAP, *Ms. Dima Faour-Klingbeil, Consultant*
  - Lessons from related schemes: Med Diet, *Mr. Elie Massoud, CCIABML, Lebanon*
- Q&A and General Discussions
- 10:45 – 11:00 Coffee break
- 11:00 – 13:00 **Session 5: Arab-GAPs Stakeholders and Issues**  
*Moderator: Ms. Manal Saleh, Blue Moon, Egypt*
- Organic Farming, *Ms. Amy El-Zeiny, ECOA, Egypt*
  - Farmer Support Service, *Mr. Fazal Hamid, ADFSC, UAE*
  - Exporters, *Mr. Zuhair Jweihan, JEPA, Jordan*
  - Preventive food safety paradigms, *Mr. Atef Idriss, Lebanon*
- Q&A and General Discussions
- 13:00 – 14:00 Lunch break
- 14:00 – 15:30 **Session 6: Discussions on Way Forward**  
*Moderator: Ms. Reem Nejdawi*
- Ms. Dima Faour-Klingbeil, Consultant
  - Ms. Manal Saleh, GlobalGAP/Blue Moon
  - Mr. Dost Muhammad, FAO-RNE
  - Mr. Fidele Byiringiro, ESCWA
- General Discussions
- Wrap-up of the meeting, *Ms. Reem Nejdawi*

## Annex II. List of participants

### **A. EXPERTS**

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