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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

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

INFORMATION NOTE

I. BACKGROUND

Every year, all over the world, there are fresh food products that are involved in human disease outbreaks some of which are fatal. While many outbreaks find their origins in how consumers handle and store their food, there are others that are often traced back to the farms where the produce originated from or somewhere along the supply chain linking producers and consumers. This has prompted consumers to look more carefully into where and how their food is produced and handled. As a result, many voluntary programmes that aim to promote greater food safety and traceability among others have sprouted and these programmes require network participants to follow strict good practices in order to be certified.

Good agricultural practices (GAPs) are production and handling guidelines that go beyond official food safety standards and codes such as, for example, the Codex Alimentarius or the ISO standards. GAPs are voluntary and are privately administered and participants have to strictly adhere to set guidelines in order to be able to benefit from interconnections within the network that might result in higher financial payout and/or less waste. GAPs promote the use of practices and techniques that include, for example, the use of a conform and reasonable amount of inputs, the use of drinking water quality to wash produces, the systematic recording of all farm activities and so on in order to promote food safety, food quality, animal health, environmental sustainability and increasingly social/ethical issues as well. The adoption and use of GAP principles in the production and handling of food is usually a proactive undertaking by market participants to reduce or eliminate instances of unsafe produce and products particularly among fresh ones.

GAPs have been widely adopted in developed countries as a result of consumers' initiated efforts. In the Arab region, stringent food safety guidelines are found in most countries of the GCC while in the remaining others their adoption is primarily linked to internationally traded produces (e.g., fresh fruits and vegetables and flowers). There is little evidence that actions are being taken to ensure that produces for domestic consumption are subject to strict standards of food safety and quality as well. To remediate to this discrepancy, the Arab Organization of Agricultural Development (AOAD) proposed a set of guidelines, also referred to as Arab-GAP, in 2007. However, since their publication little has been done to ensure that domestic food market participants adopt and implement Arab-GAP guidelines in order to enhance food safety and quality both within countries and at regional level.

ESCWA in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other partners are implementing a project financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and entitled "Promoting Food and Water Security through Cooperation and Capacity Development in the Arab Region." The project aims to enhance food and water security in the Arab region through improved and coordinated policy design, strategy development and programme implementation. 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. In order to initiate actions in this area, this meeting is being called upon in order to review a draft outline of the overall structural setup and operational modality of the Arab-GAP and consequently make recommendations and outline a way forward to put the Arab-GAP framework into practice.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

The objective of the meeting is to review, discuss and formulate a set of options on how the Arab-GAP framework should be structured, together with its overall operational modalities, taking into consideration AOAD's Arab-GAP framework. The recommendations will be used to develop a coherent structural setup and operational modality.

Specifically, the expert group will get acquainted with a few existing international GAPs frameworks (e.g., GlobalGAP, ASEAN-GAP), examine the proposed Arab-GAP framework, and formulate a detailed outline of an appropriate structural setup and operational modality for the Arab-GAP. The expert group will also benefit from a review of existing national, regional and international experiences related to GAPs and possibly food safety and quality.

As such, the Expert Group Meeting will attempt to:

- Enhance understanding of GAPs and their relation to food safety and quality issues;
- Review existing national, regional and international experiences;
- Exchange views on the proposed Arab-GAP framework;
- Exchange views on a structural setup and operational modality of an Arab-GAP; and
- Formulate options on a way forward to promote the adoption of GAPs for improved food quality and safety in domestic food markets.

III. PARTICIPANTS

This meeting will bring together national, regional and international experts with working experience in the areas of food quality and safety and good agricultural practices for improved food safety. This might include experts from concerned government institutions (agriculture, health, standards, etc.), non-governmental organizations (NGOs, unions & chambers), private entities and regional and international organizations (LAS, AOAD, ESCWA and FAO). Experts from entities such as Global-GAP and ASEAN-GAP might also be invited to share their experience and contribute to the discussions.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

The expert group meeting is organized by ESCWA in collaboration with FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (FAO-RNE). The meeting will be held in Cairo, Egypt, in FAO-RNE premises, on 31 May & 1 June 2016. Participants are kindly requested to arrive at 8:30 am on Tuesday, 31 May 2016 to register for the meeting while the meeting would start at 9:00 a.m. Simultaneous interpretation between the Arabic and English languages will be provided.

V. LOGISTICAL INFORMATION

ESCWA will cover travel costs and provide a daily subsistence allowance for the duration of the meeting, in accordance with UN rules. Participants are invited to initiate their own hotel reservations and airport/hotel transport arrangements.

Sponsored participants are kindly requested to return their completed registration form to ESCWA no later than 6 May 2016 to allow sufficient time to make the necessary arrangements for their travel. Sponsorship cannot be assured for registration forms received beyond that date.

Participants are responsible for securing their own entry visa to Egypt.

VI. CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence and inquiries concerning the expert group meeting should be addressed to:

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