THIS REPORT CONTAINS ASSESSMENTS OF COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES MADE BY USDA STAFF AND NOT NECESSARILY STATEMENTS OF OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Voluntary _ Public

Date: 2/26/2015

GAIN Report Number: ET1502

Ethiopia

Post: Addis Ababa

Africa Contemplates Establishing Continental Food Safety Body

Report Categories:

Agricultural Situation

National Plan

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

Approved By:

Michael G. Francom, Ag Counselor

Prepared By:

Michael G. Francom

Report Highlights:

Over the past several years, the African Union Commission (AUC) has explored the possibility of setting up a food safety body to help address many of the systemic food safety challenges across Africa. This envisioned entity has been dubbed the African Union Food Safety Management Coordination Mechanism (AU-FSMCM). While agreed to in principle, the standing up of the AU-FSMCM is expected to require further deliberations and agreement within the AUC and Member States about its proposed roles, operational structure, etc. This deliberation and approval process could take a couple years to finalize.

Africa Considers Setting up Continental Food Safety Body:
At present, many African countries are plagued by a variety of systemic food safety constraints which have negative spillover effects on countries' economic growth and public health. In order to effectively address these challenges in a more coordinated fashion, the African Union Commission (AUC) is working towards establishing a continental food safety body, namely the African Union Food Safety Management Coordination Mechanism (AU-FSMCM).

The early beginnings of the AU-FSMCM concept date back to the Lisbon Summit in 2007 where leaders from the African Union and European Union met to discuss among other topics Africa's food safety challenges and the need to take continental-wide action to improve the food safety regulatory infrastructure. One of the recommendations from the summit was for "the AUC [to] establish a food safety authority within its structure and a rapid alert system for food and feed." The AUC subsequently held two workshops in 2012/13 where food safety experts from the AUC, Member States, United Nations, and the European Union met to come up with proposed recommendations for the mandate and role of this Africa-wide food safety authority.[1] In addition, the European Union has played an active role in shaping this envisioned food safety authority, as was noted in the Fourth EU-Africa Summit.[2]

The proposed mission of the AU-FSMSCM is to "coordinat[e], communication, advis[e], and [provide] capacity towards harmonized concepts, principles and procedures to allow African Union Member States and food business operators to more effectively meet their food safety management obligations." The establishment of the AU-FSMCM would be set up with the following broad objectives in mind:[3]

> (a) To protect public health by reducing the risk of food-borne illness, taking into account relevant animal and plant health issues, and the environment;
> (b) To protect consumers from unsanitary, unwholesome, mislabelled or adulterated food;
> (c) To increase market access and competitiveness in food trade, including raising production levels;
> (d) To promote inter-African food trade and exchange between the member States;
> (e) To contribute to economic development by maintaining consumer confidence in the food system and providing a sound regulatory foundation for trade in food.

More specifically, to carry out its far reaching mission, the AU-FSMCM would provide technical support, scientific advice and policy direction as they assist Member States and regional economic communities (REC) to develop modern, science-based food safety regulations based on international recommendations from the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and the Codex Alimentarius. Further, the AU-FSMCM would build on existing food safety initiatives, like the Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PACA) and the EU-

---

[1] http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/sites/default/files/documents/15th_africa-eu_jtf_final_report_en_20-02-13.pdf
http://www.au-ibar.org/pan-spso/399-second-continental-workshop-on-the-missions-functions-and-structure-of-african-union-_food-safety-authority-and-a-rapid-alert-system-for-food-and-feed

[2] http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_14847_en.htm

[3] http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/COM/com2014/com2014-un_system_wide_support_to_au_and_its_programme_nepad-_english.pdf

funded Participation of African Nations in SPS Standards Setting Organizations (PANSPSO), while increasing Africa-wide communication of public health risks through a rapid alert system, known as the Rapid Food & Feed Alert Mechanism (ARFFAM).

While agreed to in principle, the standing up of the AU-FSMCM is expected to require further deliberations and agreement within the AUC and Member States about the proposed roles, structure, organization, location, budget of this continental food safety authority.   The AUC Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture's (DREA) is leading this larger AUC effort, and as stated in DREA's Strategic Plan for 2014-17 (3.1.15), the goal is to complete the 'validation of the options proposed for establishing the Continental Food Safety Coordination Mechanism [AU-FSMCM]' sometime before 2017. While no decision has been made on where the AU-FSMCM would be housed within the AUC structure, it seems likely that it would fall under DREA's purview since the Department already oversees the technical agencies responsible for animal and plant health issues, the Inter-Africa Bureau of Animal Resources (IBAR) and the Inter-Africa Phyto-sanitary Council (IAPSC), respectively.