

*Food Safety Institute of
the Americas*

Workshop Issues

Workshop Issues
October 13 - 15, 2004
Miami, Florida

Background

Pursuant to the goal of enhancing food safety and security in the Western Hemisphere, USDA is establishing the Food Safety Institute of the Americas (FSIA) to bring together the multifaceted food safety resources within the Americas to address critical issues in regional information, education and policy harmonization. The institute will coordinate programs that focus on food safety; in particular, it will focus on those practices that create the opportunity for increased microbiological and unsanitary conditions to occur in food products from the farm to the table. Per the regulatory authority of USDA, the FSIA will focus, at least initially, on meat, poultry and egg products.

As is currently contemplated, the subject matter within the FSIA will be divided into nine areas or "colleges." They are: 1) Regulatory Foundation, 2) Codex Alimentarius, 3) Public Health, 4) Animal and Food Production, 5) Laboratory Procedures, 6) Retail Programs, 7) Food Security, 8) Consumer Education and 9) Manufactured Foods.

The following issue papers are intended to generate discussion on the threshold issues concerning the establishment of the FSIA; creativity is encouraged.

ISSUE 1: Identifying and Assessing Educational and Informational Needs

In recent years, many organizations and institutions have made efforts to establish and develop food safety training and education programs that respond to the needs of a specific audience in a specific area or region. The Food Safety Institute of the Americas (FSIA) is an effort to bring together these disparate resources into a broad, science-based food safety and security collaboration.

A critical first step in the establishment of the FSIA is to identify the most salient food safety and security issues in the Hemisphere toward which FSIA and its cooperators will direct their collaborative efforts. This needs assessment is a threshold requisite in the establishment of the FSIA.

The critical food safety and food security needs in the Americas should be identified with focus on tangible and deliverable needs, though such needs as may not be deliverable until the FSIA's baseline requisites are established should not be discouraged. Both technical and educational needs should be identified, and it is encouraged that this exercise be undertaken while keeping in mind the ability of the FSIA and its cooperatives to deliver those needs identified.

ISSUE 1: Identifying and Assessing Educational and Informational Needs

Questions for Discussion:

1. Please identify the critical food safety and security training and educational needs and issues in the Americas. Discussion should focus on critical, tangible and deliverable needs, though long-term and as yet undeliverable services, may be addressed at a later time once baseline requisites have been established. Again, creativity is encouraged.
 - a. Technical needs should include both food safety and security needs.
 - b. Educational needs should include, but not be necessarily limited to: food safety, food security, continuing education, undergraduate programs, graduate programs and job certification.
 - c. The discussion should focus on short-and long-term needs and should be explored with regional considerations considered.
2. As is currently contemplated, the FSIA will group the various food safety and security areas into the distinct subject matter fields described on the cover page. Are all critical needs and issues covered by this grouping? Please provide commentary on this proposed structure.
3. What recommendations can be made for development of a needs assessment and course inventory of food safety and security programs for the various subject matter areas?
 - a. Are there organizations or institutions throughout the region that have already conducted needs assessments, course inventories or studies that can be used to assist in the FSIA?
 - b. Are there methods you would recommend for conducting the assessment and survey to make them most effective and efficient in obtaining responses?

ISSUE 2: Identifying Existing Resources and Programs and Fostering Collaboration and Partnership Development

The nations of the Americas make up a regional community deeply concerned about the many challenges of ensuring food safety and security. One approach to these complex problems is for our countries to exchange information and education on food safety risks and how to manage them. There are a myriad of organizations both governmental and nongovernmental that have key responsibilities and interests in improving food safety and security in their country as well as throughout the region.

In order to accomplish the FSIA mission of bringing together the various resources into a synthesized and holistic food safety and security information network, the efforts and programs already existing and operating in the Western Hemisphere must be identified. Once identified, these various existing resources must be defined in the context of the FSIA to determine how best to utilize and synthesize their operations.

The FSIA is an ambitious and innovative initiative that will not succeed absent the participation and collaboration of the multitude of interested organizations and institutions. Therefore, it is critically important that the FSIA encourage collaboration and the development of partnerships throughout the region. Intra- and inter-regional governmental and nongovernmental organizations must be linked together through the FSIA, and such linkages should cross borders in a manner reflective of the regional continuity which FSIA will promote.

ISSUE 2: Identifying Existing Resources and Programs and Fostering Collaboration and Partnership

Questions for Discussion:

1. Please identify the food safety and security training and educational programs already existing and operating in the Hemisphere. It is a vital precursor to the work of the FSIA to catalogue these existing programs.
 - a. For *food safety* programs, please identify those programs currently existing and operating, including those which are governmental and those which are not. Likewise, please identify those countries in which such programs exist and operate.
 - b. For *food security* programs, please identify those programs currently existing and operating, including those which are governmental and those which are not. Likewise, please identify those countries in which such programs exist and operate.
2. Once identified, what elements or attributes of the programs are missing and therefore what requires development?
3. Are there regional differences which need to be considered when determining the utility and role of these efforts under a synthesized approach?
4. In conjunction with the question above, are there specific recommendations on how to further identify other individual organizations and institutions as well as currently-existing networks throughout the Americas which have interest and responsibility in food safety and security?
 - a. Are there some that immediately come to mind as potential partners in the FSIA?
 - b. How do we define the roles of each these organizations and efforts and how might their respective programs and efforts best fit under the FSIA?
5. How can the FSIA facilitate links between organizations in different parts of the Americas in partnering and collaborating with FSIA cooperators in food safety and security?

ISSUE 3: Strategies and Best Practices for Delivering Programs

The FSIA has the potential to go beyond offering individual educational courses and informational programs. Courses and materials can be organized into curricula for continuing education and job certification training for workers in specific areas of the food safety system. Curricula can be extended to formal undergraduate and graduate degree programs in the area of food safety and security.

Fundamentally, the FSIA must determine how it develops training and education programs. The FSIA envisions using a menu of delivery methods including, but not limited to: resident classroom instruction, self-instruction guides, internet communication methods, train-the-trainer programs, videoconferences, videos, DVD's and CD's. Essentially, the FSIA will develop and deliver programs using whatever format best meets the needs of the target audience.

Program evaluation will play a critical role in the long-term success and sustainability of the FSIA proposal. This evaluation should be multifaceted and address several factors. Such continuing evaluations must be built into the structure of the FSIA to ensure that the program is constantly assessed, that there is a clear opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of the outreach effort, that there is continuing improvement in the products and services that the FSIA provides and that the most salient food safety and security interests continue to receive the attention necessary.

ISSUE 3: Strategies and Best Practices for Delivering Programs

Questions for Discussion:

1. Are there existing food safety and security programs in the Americas that can serve as models and “best practices” for program development and delivery within the FSIA?
2. Given the variety of methods for course and program delivery, what methods are likely to be most successful?
3. How should evaluation of FSIA programs be conducted?
 - a. What sorts of available baseline data may be utilized in the evaluation?
 - b. What sorts of first quarter objectives might be established against which evaluation assessed?
 - c. What other measures might be utilized in evaluation?
4. It is intended that the FSIA will bring together various courses into an organized curricula. Should the FSIA priority initially focus on development of: a) technical assistance training programs; b) continuing education programs to certify workers in food safety and security responsibilities; c) undergraduate and graduate programs giving academic credit or; d) both certification and academic programs?
 - a. What barriers to delivery can the FSIA anticipate?
 - b. Are there ways to assess capacity in different countries to receive programs in different formats?
 - c. As part of this exercise, please keep in mind possible regional differences which may impact decision making.

ISSUE 4: Planning Next Steps for the FSIA

The FSIA requires both short- and long-term planning to ensure its initial viability and long-term sustainability. In layman's terms, this planning should identify *what* should be done and *when* it should be done. Therefore, it is vital to create short-term and long-term strategic plans which delineate the goals of the FSIA and the timeline along which such goals should be actuated.

For the short term, the FSIA and its cooperators must set goals and identify the intended accomplishments for the next three to five years. Because the FSIA and its mission, within this time frame, will still be a relatively new entity and effort, these goals should be realistic enough to account for the project's still formative status yet ambitious enough to deliver concrete results.

For the longer term, goals and a time frame must also be similarly developed. A key component to this long-term planning is the identification of sources of support for the FSIA in the future. The initial funding for this effort comes from the U.S. Government. However, as a matter long-term stability, other sources of support must be identified. A number of such alternative sources exist; identifying them and securing their support is a vital component to the long-term viability of the FSIA undertaking.

ISSUE 4: Planning Next Steps for the FSIA

Questions for Discussion:

1. What should the FSIA try to accomplish in the next one, two, three, four and five years? Concrete deliverables and a timeline for actualizing such deliverables should be identified.
 - a. As with the questions posed in issue #3, how should evaluation of FSIA programs be conducted? What sorts of available baseline data may be utilized in the evaluation? What sorts of objectives might be established against which evaluation assessed? What other measures might be utilized in evaluation?
2. What recommendations do you have for making FSIA self-sustaining? Please identify potential sources of long-term financial support for the FSIA.
 - a. How might such potential sources best be solicited and secured?
3. Support for the FSIA may be realized by contributions of a non-monetary nature. This includes tangible contributions such as in-kind support, but it may also include less tangible support such as through services. Please identify potential sources of non-monetary support.
 - a. How might such potential sources best be solicited and secured?