

EDITORIAL

Food Safety as a contributor to Food Security: global policy concerns & challenges

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The theme for World Health Day campaign for this year 2015 is “Food safety: from farm to plate, make food safe”. The day focuses on demonstrating the importance of food safety along the whole length of the food chain in a globalized world, from production and transport, to preparation and consumption (1). Everyone needs food and needs it every day either plant sources or animal sources or both. The food we eat must be nutritious and safe but we often ignore or overlook the issue of food safety. Many cases of food borne diseases either acute poisoning or chronic exposure are largely under reported. In this globalized world, though the food chain extends over thousands of miles from different continents, an error or contamination in one country can affect the health of consumers on the other part of the world. To ensure full impact, these actions must build on principles of government stewardship, engagement of civil society, (2).

According to UN, access to a safe and secure food supply is a basic human right. Food safety and food security are interrelated concepts which have an impact on the health outcomes and quality of human lives. As per Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), Food security is a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life, (3). Based on the definition of Food security, four food security dimensions can be identified: food availability,

economic and physical access to food, food utilization and stability over time. Apart from that food security is also affected by Poverty and Climate change.

Food safety is an umbrella term that encompasses many aspects like food items handling, preparation and storage of food to prevent illness and injury. The other important issues are chemical, microphysical and microbiological aspects of food safety, (4). Control of allergens which can be life threatening to some people that are highly sensitive is the priority of food chemical control. Other chemical properties of food such as vitamin and mineral content are also important and affect the overall quality of the food but are not as significant in terms of food safety.

Microphysical particles such as glass and metal can be hazardous and cause serious injury to consumers. Pathogenic bacteria, viruses and toxins produced by microorganisms are all possible contaminants of food and impact food safety. Like food security, food safety is also effected by poverty and climate change. Hence Food safety is an integral part of food security.

Concerns:

1. First of all, the policy makers must include “safe food” as a top priority and integrating ‘food safety’ in the nutrition and food security policies and programs.
2. Issues related to the costs of implementation of food safety measures and the compliance with the standards

3. There is an urgent need for raising the awareness of the limitations of many developing nations and those susceptible to food insecurity
4. Currently there numerous food safety standards that are present in the market which includes public vs private, costs involved in certification, different requirements for different markets (European, American etc.)
5. Moreover, if there is an increase in cost of food to ensure the food safety, then it becomes less affordable to poor consumers thereby leading to food insecurity.

Challenges:

1. Food safety needs a commitment and effort from global governance institutions for better food governance. WHO has long collaborated on several joint activities with the FAO and the World Organization for Animal Health to ensure food safety at all stages of the food chain (5). At national level too, there must be such cooperation and coordination between various ministries, and institutions
2. Establishing closer collaborations between various involved in food namely agriculture, human health, animal health, trade and tourism to prevent, control and response to foodborne diseases.

3. Developing countries will be able to access the global market only when proving that their products comply with international food safety norms. This will be a greatest challenge for many developing countries if they don't follow the standards in food production and processing and may ultimately have an impact on their economies.
4. Food safety entails other public health concerns, and antimicrobial resistance is one such concern. Resistant microorganisms entering the food chain are a significant health security threat today.
5. Climate change, water availability and global financial crisis will be the major concerns for the near future.

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