

The Global Food Regulators Summit 2023 shows a new direction for transforming the global food regulatory landscape

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The first-ever Global Food Regulators Summit (GFRS) 2023 that concluded on 21 July 2023 has paved the way for a more robust food safety and regulatory ecosystem. This groundbreaking initiative has garnered global acclaim for its potential to transform and strengthen the world's food safety systems. The discussion and outcomes of the sessions have laid a strong foundation for collective action in tackling regulatory challenges and ensuring the well-being of consumers worldwide.

The first technical session of the summit focused on food regulatory systems in different countries, key strategies adopted by food regulators to mitigate various risks associated with foods, challenges faced by the regulators globally, and the exchange of perspectives on strengthening food safety systems across the food value chain through a cohesive approach. Doctor V K Paul, a member, of NITI Aayog, India delivered the special address during the opening session. He deliberated on the importance of a national regulatory framework for an effective food safety control system. “Harmonized global regulator regimes can play a crucial role in setting and enforcing standards regulations to protect consumer health, promote fair trade practices and maintain public trust in the global food control system,” said Doctor Paul.

Raj Rajasekhar, vice chairperson of, the Codex Alimentarius Commission emphasized the initiatives taken by Codex in addressing emerging challenges in the area of food safety. Appreciating FSSAI's efforts in organizing the maiden Global Regulators he said, "This platform allows cross-fertilization of ideas from experts belonging to different countries and can help in developing a Global model for food safety". Rajesh Kumar Singh (IAS), secretary, of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry addressed the participants and emphasized the need for providing an enabling environment for the food industry by having simpler regulations and decriminalization of minor offenses, without compromising on the food safety.

Professor Susan Jebb, chair, Food Standards Agency, UK and Isabelle Laberge, senior director and chief food safety officer, Canada shared their insights on innovations in standards setting and quality assurance and role of modern food regulations in creating a balance between innovations and food safety. Hon'ble minister for food safety, New Zealand, Rachel Broking addressed the participants virtually, laying a greater emphasis on food safety across the globe. S. Gopalakrishnan, special secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare presented the regulatory system being followed by FSSAI which set a platform for the panel discussions.

The opening session was followed by a panel discussion on 'Global Regulatory Framework', with Panelists from eight different countries including Brazil, Bhutan, Chile, Ethiopia, Mauritius, Mozambique, US and New Zealand. During this session, moderated by Sanjeev Chopra, secretary, Department of Food and Public Distribution shared their experiences and successful initiatives from different countries, inspiring others to adopt similar approaches. The discussions revolved around the importance of collaboration and cooperation among global food regulators to maximize regulatory effectiveness and efficiency. Notably, the emphasis on harmonizing regulatory standards was highlighted as a key measure to ensure consumer safety and facilitate international trade. The best practices and success stories were shared by different countries which have the potential to be adopted by other countries in strengthening their food regulatory system. The discussions also centred around exploring possible opportunities for collaboration and co-operation among global food regulators for harmonizing regulatory standards and to enhance regulatory effectiveness and efficiency, protect consumer health and facilitate international trade. The Panel also suggested strategies for collaboration among multiple agencies/ stakeholders to develop robust national food control system with strong emphasis on safety parameters. The deliberations also focused on involvement of all the stakeholders while developing any new or amending any existing food regulation.

The second technical session, 'Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR): Challenges and Solutions,' addressed the complexities surrounding antimicrobial resistance. Discussions focused on the potential solutions, best practices for countering AMR globally, collaborative efforts, effective policies and the establishment of a global task force to address AMR issues. While setting the context, Shri Lav Agarwal, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare highlighted on the concerns of AMR, emphasizing on the role of National Action Plan (NAP) on AMR. He also said that NAP must be taken up by all countries along with the One Health approach and that collaboration is the key to tackle the inter-sectoral issue of AMR. Dr. Sridhar Dharamapuri, Senior Food Safety and Nutrition Officer, FAO Regional Office, Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok and Dr. Emmanuel Kabali, AMR Project Coordination and Technical Support Consultant/Global Project Coordinator, FAO, Rome also addressed the gathering emphasizing on the importance of food

security and alternatives to antibiotics using emerging technologies. The panel discussion on AMR aimed to enhance knowledge through stakeholder consultation and experiences shared by invited countries and organizations. The discussions enabled the formulation of possible policy recommendations to better contain AMR, leveraging insights gained from India's National Action Plan (NAP) on AMR and the forthcoming NAP-AMR 2. Encouraging other countries to develop their NAPs became a key focus of discussions to tackle AMR comprehensively. The session also highlighted on the importance of increased networking, collaboration and partnerships among regulators and organizations, such as Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Health Organization (WHO) and World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) to collectively combat AMR. As an essential aspect of the discussion, exploring alternatives to antibiotics through emerging technologies like nanotechnology and other innovative approaches was emphasized.

The concluding day of the GFRS 2023 began with a plenary session address by Doctor Chris Kebbel, chief food safety officer, New Zealand Food Safety. Doctor Kebbelemphasised on food safety as an important element in building consumer trust and confidence. He also said that the important aspects for robust standard setting include an articulated operational regulation management, well documented food safety management and effective quality control. He also underscored that safe and nutritious food should be accessible to everyone, no matter where they live. While setting the context, Anita Praveen, secretary, Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) mentioned that anything and everything which comes in contact with food should be safe. She highlighted about the important to frame science based standards but also mentioned that the periodic review of standards is equally important. It is strong enforcement and capacity building programme that helps in building a robust food safety ecosystem, quoted Praveen.

In his special address, Rajesh Kotecha, secretary, Ministry of Ayush, shared his insights on the use of botanicals as traditional medicines. He also stated that botanicals are already in high demand, with consumers incorporating them in traditional preparations. Hence, he emphasized the need for having a strong regulation in this area.

Continuing the deliberation on the importance of establishing robust regulatory standards, a session on 'Health Supplements and Nutraceuticals' moderated by Doctor Shashank Joshi delved into the escalating global demand for these products. This demand has been fueled by a growing emphasis on health and wellness, particularly in the post-COVID era. During the session, experts highlighted on the necessity of strong regulatory frameworks, scientific research and product quality assurance to ensure the responsible and safe use of health supplements and nutraceuticals. The discussions also focused on the guidelines being prepared by Codex on Nutrient Reference Values(NRVs) and their applicability for health supplements. The Panel also deliberated on the adverse effect of non sugar sweeteners (NSS) and suggested to conduct well designed studies for appraising the adverse effect of consumption of the NSS on human health. The discussions also revolved around the risk assessment of emerging new strains of probiotics and rediscovering and repurposing the rich traditional heritage of Ayurveda for its use for developing new food products.

Another session titled 'Contaminants and Residues - Risk Mitigation - Regulatory Intervention' highlighted on the importance of harmonizing food safety standards with international agencies to effectively address chemical contaminants and pesticide residues in food. The focus was on

establishing safety limits for contaminants and residues, ensuring compliance and employing mitigation strategies to prevent biological hazards.

The panel suggested on the best possible use of the National Reference Laboratories for data collection to plan the strategies for emerging contaminants and residues. An important point that emerged out of the discussions was on the determination of the processing factors for fixing the Maximum Residual Limits (MRLs) for residues and Maximum limits (ML) for contaminants in processed foods. The panel also discussed about the importance of data generation about the combination of various pesticide formulations in order to understand synergistic properties and exchange of surveillance and monitoring data on the MRLs and MLs for residues and contaminants between different countries.

The panel discussion on 'Organic Foods' focused on strengthening the organic food sector and adopting sustainable farming systems based on organic principles. The speakers also emphasized on the need to create awareness about organic foods and their authenticity, explore market trends and identify policy recommendations to facilitate market access for organic products globally. The importance of integrity and authenticity in organic food and the development of analytical parameters for rapid authenticity testing were other key points of discussion.

During the session on 'Impact of Animal Feed on Food Safety and Human Health', Doctor Meenesh Shah, chairman, National Dairy Development Board, Anand, India, emphasized on the need to ensure availability of good quality feed and robust regulation for animal feed which will not only ensure healthy livestock but also ensure that the food of animal origin is safe for humans.

In his keynote address, Professor Andreas Hensel, president, BfR, Germany said, "Traceability is the backbone of food supply chain". He further highlighted on the tools developed by BfR, Germany to establish traceability for improved feed safety. The panel discussion on 'Impact of Animal Feed on Food Safety and Human Health' was moderated by Alka Upadhyaya, secretary, Department for Animal Husbandry and Dairying. It focused on the significance of safety of animal feed including raw ingredients and feed additives. Experts discussed the need for mandatory regulations and national policy on effective traceability mechanisms for animal feed. The panelists focused on the need for exploring innovative approaches to monitor feed safety. The session aimed to develop insights into risk assessment strategies and formulate policies to enhance food safety through animal feed and its raw ingredients. The discussions also revolved around developing national policy/guidelines to address the issue of handling and storage of animal feed including raw material to ensure its safety and the promotion of use of ethno-veterinary medicines (EVM) as alternatives to antimicrobials and other veterinary drugs.

Further, the summit progressed with a session on 'Innovation in Food Emergency Response, Recall and Analysis'. This session underscored the revolutionary impact of innovation in food analysis and techniques in response to growing consumer concerns about food safety. One of the key highlights was the adoption of cutting-edge technologies like the Internet of Things (IoT) and Blockchain to establish robust traceability systems. These systems effectively track food products from their origin on the farm to the end consumer, facilitating efficient and timely recall procedures in case of safety issues.

Moreover, the session shed light on the emergence of a new era of digital transformation in food recall and analysis, revolutionizing real-time food safety monitoring. The panelists discussed about the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) with instrumental analysis in enhancing the efficiency and accuracy of food safety assessments. The deliberations also emphasized on the use of rapid analytical kits for regulatory purpose after thorough validation and the use of Big data analytics to identify patterns and detect potentials risks for establishing robust decision making platform for food emergency response.

The insights and experiences shared during these sessions are invaluable in advancing global food safety initiatives. By bringing together regulators and experts from various countries, the GFRS 2023 has laid a solid foundation for coordinated efforts in enhancing food safety and tackling challenges like AMR, antibiotic residues, regulating animal feed, analysis of food products, etc. Global Food Regulators Summit 2023 reaffirmed its commitment to fostering international cooperation, knowledge sharing and cross-learning, as well as promoting a safer and more sustainable global food system.

Background of the GFRS 2023

The Global Food Regulators Summit, inaugurated on 20th July 2023 by Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, Hon'ble Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, brought together food regulators from around the world to exchange perspectives and knowledge on crucial issues related to food safety systems. Various initiatives including Food-o-Copoeia, a collection of food category-wise monographs and a single point reference for all applicable standards for a specific product; 'SaNGRAH' - Safe food for Nations: Global food Regulatory Authorities Handbook and a Common Digital Dashboard were launched during the inauguration ceremony.