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## Safeguarding food quality and safety in the Asia-Pacific region

**"P**roductivity without safety is meaningless in today's world, and in increasing productivity we must protect our workers and consumers," APO Secretary-General Shigeo Takenaka declared in his statement at the annual Workshop Meeting of Heads of NPOs held in Cambodia in October 2008. The APO attaches great importance to the linkage between safety and productivity and devotes substantial resources to promoting the safety of workers and products, particularly food products, in the Asia-Pacific region. Food quality and safety are a major focus of the APO's Agriculture Program.

"Food safety has received greater attention from the APO as consumers have become increasingly concerned about food safety," explained Agriculture Department Director Song Hyun Choi. "Both developed and developing countries share concern over food safety as international food trade and cross-border movements of people and live animals increase." The global, multidimensional nature of this issue is clear from a series of recent incidents including outbreaks



Simulated food audit, training course, Malaysia, 2009

of avian influenza and bovine spongiform encephalitis (BSE or mad cow disease) and tainted milk from PR China. The socioeconomic benefits of food safety measures include prevention of food-borne illnesses, savings in disease prevention and mitigation expenditures, and increased worker productivity.

The APO's food safety focus now includes food safety management systems, food standards and certification systems, good agricultural practices, packaging and labeling, traceability systems, value addition, food chain management, and foods for which health claims are made. Training courses are designed and implemented to supplement the efforts of governments, public and private organizations, and food companies in member countries. They facilitate preventive, proactive methods with the ultimate goal of increased productivity through food safety.

A popular food safety training course deals with ISO22000:2005. This internationally harmonized food safety standard was developed by International Organization for Standardization (ISO) for global food supply chains from farmers to caterers. The standard is certifiable and auditable. "The training courses on ISO22000:2005 enable participants to understand the standard, its requirements and applications, and easy ways of implementation," said Agriculture Department Program Officer Dr. Muhammad Saeed. Dr. Saeed conducts projects on food safety, including the e-learning course on ISO22000:2005 initiated in 2007. The e-learning course attracted 258 participants in 2007 and 278 in 2008.



“ISO 22000:2005 is applicable to all organizations, regardless of size, which are involved in any aspect of the food chain,” explained Managing Director Yong Kok Seong, QMC Resource Center, Penang, Malaysia, who was the chief resource speaker for the ISO e-learning programs in both years. “The APO’s food safety projects have contributed to the increase in the number of ISO22000-certified organizations in the region from 100 to 500.” Many NPOs have organized follow-up projects. In 2007, the Thailand Productivity Institute and Vietnam Productivity Centre each held a national seminar-cum-workshop to share the outcome of an APO food safety seminar held in Japan in early January that year. The workshops discussed how to promote and conduct food safety management systems in local enterprises, including SMEs. The Japan Association for International Collaboration of Agriculture and Forestry (JAICAF), the host organization of the APO seminar, supported those activities by dispatching two Japanese food company managers responsible for food quality and safety control accompanied by a JAICAF staff member. In 2008, the APO deputed an expert to the follow-up national training course conducted by the Training and Productivity Authority of Fiji under the auspices of the APO’s Technical Expert Services. In addition, a group of delegates from Singapore visited Japan to examine Japanese food safety mechanisms and systems under the Bilateral Cooperation Between NPOs Program in June 2008.

The APO’s efforts to assist member countries in food safety will continue. The first project in 2009 was held in Malaysia, 14–20 January. This training course on the Food Safety Management System for Auditors/Lead Auditors was a face-to-face follow-up to the e-learning course in 2008. “It was an intensive course that met the requirements of the International Register of Certificated Auditors (IRCA) of the UK,” said Dr. Saeed. “Participants acquired the knowledge and skills to interpret and audit according to the ISO22000:2005 guidelines and satisfy the requirements for registration as a food safety management auditor. The course is expected to add 20 auditors of food safety management systems to the 19 IRCA-certified ISO22000:2005 auditors trained by the APO in 2007.”

Due to the need for additional references on this topic, The APO has begun preparing the *Food Safety Training Manual*, which will be published during the first half of this year. The manual will provide a background on food safety management as well as comprehensive coverage of the important concepts, practices, and techniques involved. “Concern over food safety in the Asia-Pacific is obviously significant due to its huge population and rate of consumption,” said APO Resource Speaker Yong. The APO is aware of this and will continue its efforts to safeguard food safety within its member countries and beyond. 