

SPEECH BY MR DESMOND LEE, MINISTER OF STATE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE 2ND GLOBAL FOOD SAFETY PARTNERSHIP (GFSP) CONFERENCE ROUNDTABLE MEETING, ON THURSDAY, 12 DEC 2013 AT 9.00AM, THE RITZ-CARLTON SINGAPORE

Mr Juergen Voegele
Director, Agriculture and Environmental Services
World Bank

Delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. Good morning. Thank you for inviting me to attend the opening of the Roundtable Meeting of the 2nd Global Food Safety Partnership conference.
2. Singapore is very pleased to co-organise this conference together with the World Bank.
3. The Global Food Safety Partnership is the first global *public-private-academic* initiative centred on food safety capacity building.
4. It is also the first public-private partnership on food safety in which the World Bank is involved.
5. This indeed is a major milestone.
6. All of us here today share a common goal - to address global issues on food safety holistically, and to reaffirm our commitment to building capabilities to address food safety challenges, both domestically and internationally.

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Why food safety is important

7. Ensuring food safety matters to all of us. It is a key element of food security and is integral to individual well-being and public health. Singapore, in particular, accords high priority to food safety as we import more than 90% of the food we consume.

8. Today, the food supply and distribution chain from manufacturer to consumer has become increasingly complex.

9. Unsafe food in one part of the world, if not detected, can be distributed quickly and widely to consumers in other parts of the world, making control and tracing difficult.

10. For example, in the last few years, there have been incidents of plasticizer contamination of food products, and dioxin contamination of meat and dairy products due to contaminated animal feed.

11. In addition, recent food scares resulting from other causes, such as environmental disaster or intentional food adulteration, have shown us that food safety risks can occur when we least expect them.

12. On a separate front, new food products and production technology are rapidly emerging.

13. For instance, there are functional foods that blur the line between food and drugs.

14. There is also growing interest in alternative food types such as insects and lab-grown meat.

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15. In addition, we are seeing new genetically modified foods, new types of food additives, and the use of nanotechnology in food production and packaging.

Challenges that impact food safety

16. Societal trends are also presenting new difficulties that impact food safety.

17. First, with changing consumer trends, more people work and have less time to prepare food at home. There is increasing demand for ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat food, which can involve many levels of processing along the supply chain. Food contamination risks can occur with each additional step of processing.

18. Second, we are seeing changing food business models, especially where there are manpower constraints, such as in Singapore.

19. Many food service outlets are moving their food preparation upstream to factories, for instance, pre-cut meat, vegetables and fish.

20. Even sashimi fish served in Singapore is partially pre-cut upstream in food factories locally or abroad.

21. It becomes more difficult to ensure that the safety of our food is not compromised when the processing takes place in other countries.

22. A third challenge lies in increasing public expectation for rapid response from regulators, and for transparency in how regulators and the industry manage and communicate food safety risks.

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23. Official risk communication does take time, as regulators must carefully gather and evaluate the facts.

24. In contrast, inaccurate or misleading information can be spread virally and irresponsibly on the internet and social media, creating public misunderstanding, fear or even panic.

Singapore's Experience

25. To tackle these challenges, regulators must approach food safety management on the basis of robust, reliable regulatory systems.

26. In Singapore, we have built up a reputation of ensuring the safety of our food imports through our integrated food safety system. Such system comprises the following:

- First, we follow international standards, such as those set by Codex Alimentarius, and adopt a science-based approach towards risk assessment, risk management and risk communication.
- Second, we address risks from farm-to-fork by setting stringent food safety requirements, monitoring for threats, and verifying and enforcing compliance of our safety requirements along the food production and supply chain.
- Third, we leverage on strong networks with other relevant authorities.
- Fourth, we encourage our food industry to build capacities and capabilities, adopt high levels of quality assurance, and raise awareness of safe food handling practices.

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27. Considering the risks and challenges facing food safety, relying only on Government regulation is clearly not sufficient. There is a need for more. This is why Singapore is joining the Global Food Safety Partnership to co-operate and collaborate with overseas regulators, the private sector and the academia to boost food safety in Singapore and around the world.

28. Indeed, the Global Food Safety Partnership is a move in the right direction to reduce food safety risks and facilitating trade of agri-food products.

29. It has the potential to level up the standards of global food safety by harnessing resources and expertise in the government, industry and academic sectors.

30. I strongly encourage our industry players and academia to participate in this endeavour.

Conclusion

31. Food safety is a global public good, and addressing it requires both global and local solutions.

32. I believe the Global Food Safety Partnership will go a long way in ensuring the health and well-being of all our people.

33. Let me wish all of you a fruitful Roundtable Meeting of the 2nd GFSP Conference. Thank you.