



The global nature and growing complexity of the food chain means that risks posed by unsafe foods have the potential to quickly evolve from a local problem to an international incident in a short period of time. In reality, the food chain exists as more of a complex maze without a clear line-of-sight throughout the farm-to-table continuum. While global trade of foods brings many benefits to consumers and contributes significantly to economic development, new challenges are presented to food authorities around the world. Experience over past years shows that with the increased volume of foods traded globally, comes an increased risk of the spread of foodborne pathogens and contaminants across national borders. This necessitates more efficient global sharing of food safety information. There is a growing need for food authorities to be able to identify and respond to food safety incidents and to communicate food safety information to all stakeholders. We have seen many examples of international food safety emergencies in the past, and they will continue to happen in the future. In order to strengthen the network of food safety authorities it is necessary to improve collaboration among such authorities at national and international levels. Similarly, there is a need to develop agreements and protocols for response and the rapid exchange of information on risks posed by food or feed, and on measures to be taken, or not to be taken, to counter such risks.

The need to build closer links among food safety authorities internationally is well recognized by FAO and WHO. Since 2004, INFOSAN has provided an important platform for the rapid exchange of information in the case of food safety crises and for sharing data on both routine and emerging food safety issues.

INFOSAN benefits its members in a number of ways by:

- providing alerts about food safety risks and hazards;
- identifying food contamination sources;
- linking members to knowledge and resources via the INFOSAN Community Website;
- enabling communication and access to food safety authorities in other countries;
- providing assistance with recalls during food safety events;
- implementing and developing codes of best practice and protocols; and
- protecting consumer safety.

Members benefit INFOSAN in that:

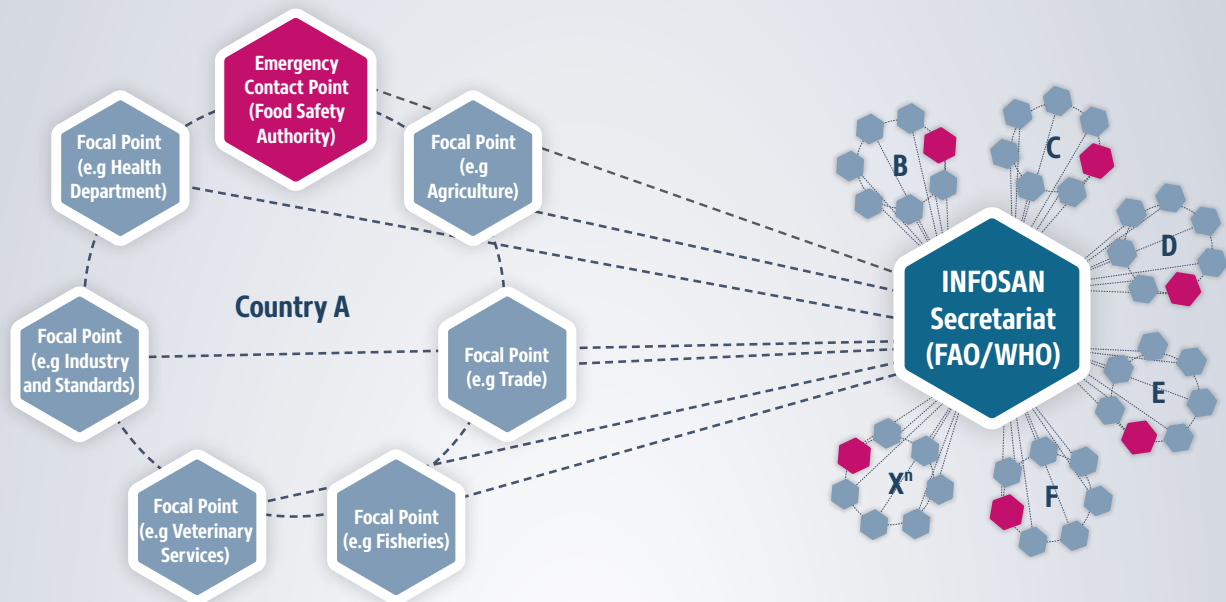
- active participation creates a rich pool of resources for others to utilize;
- information and data sharing facilitates international response to food safety events;
- contributions to science are made by publishing and sharing new knowledge;
- assistance with recalls occurs when new information is shared;
- identification of emerging risks may be of international importance; and
- capacity building among members and within one's organization contributes to the overall strengthening of the Network.

Working together for Global Food Safety

- Quality and safe food sustains life; quality information sustains food safety
- INFOSAN was established for the purpose of exchanging high-quality information among food safety experts around the world
- When faced with an urgent issue, the ability to draw on the experiences of others is a major asset. Members are encouraged to utilize the INFOSAN Community Website to connect with each other directly. (Registered members can log in to the website here: <https://extranet.who.int/infosan/>)
- By actively participating in INFOSAN, members can collectively help to make food safer for people around the world



INFOSAN Member Coordination at the National Level



Roles and Responsibilities of the INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point

- Reports urgent food safety events of potential international significance to the INFOSAN Secretariat
- Responds to the request for assistance by the INFOSAN Secretariat in the verification and assessment of events by providing all necessary information, and reviews INFOSAN Alert messages pertaining to an event in their country
- Requests international assistance through the INFOSAN Secretariat to respond to a food safety event or emergency, as necessary
- Takes action on INFOSAN Alerts and disseminates information accordingly
- Collaborates with their National IHR Focal Point on food safety events that fall under the IHR - Carries out additional functions outlined for Focal Points within their agency

Roles and Responsibilities of INFOSAN Focal Points

- Collaborates with and provides technical support to the INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point on food safety events and emergencies involving their respective agency
- Engages in sharing information with the INFOSAN Secretariat and other members on food safety issues that may be relevant at the international level and beneficial to all members, such as, but not limited to: risk assessments on emerging hazards, lessons learnt, identified good practices, etc.
- Disseminates INFOSAN Information Notes, FAO/WHO guidelines, and other important food safety information from INFOSAN within their agency, as appropriate
- Provides comments to INFOSAN on information products disseminated to the Network
- Collaborates with their National IHR Focal Point on food safety events that fall under the IHR

INFOSAN seeks to reflect the multidisciplinary nature of food safety and promote intersectoral collaboration by requesting the designation of Focal Points in each of the respective national authorities with a stake in food safety, and a single Emergency Contact Point in the national authority with the responsibility for coordinating national food safety emergencies.

Countries choosing to be members of INFOSAN are committed to sharing information between their respective food safety authorities and other INFOSAN members.

In some countries, an INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point or INFOSAN Focal Point may have the dual role of being their country's International Health Regulations (IHR) National Focal Point (NFP); in countries where this is not the case, it is important for the INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point and the IHR NFP to liaise with each other to ensure that food safety events that also constitute Public Health Emergencies of International Concern (PHEIC) are reported through the appropriate channels as required by the International Health Regulations (2005) (<http://www.who.int/ihr/en/>).