



Celebrating International Food Safety Day: ECOWAS promotes safe and healthy food practices

The international community celebrated on June 7, 2023, the 5th food safety day on the theme "food standards save lives" by inviting everyone to make efforts to adopt healthy food practices.

The Department of Economic Affairs and Agriculture of the ECOWAS Commission took advantage of this day to make an "inventory of the regulations and challenges for food safety in West Africa and the Sahel under the prism of food standards and the challenge of the availability of healthy food in the ECOWAS region".

During a webinar open to the public (99 participants connected, including 14 master's students in nutrition and food safety), the ECOWAS Directorate of Agriculture and Rural Development (DADR) presented the main standards and regulations and especially the ongoing activities to harmonize regional and national codes and regulations for food safety in West Africa and the Sahel. It is also an activity initiated by ECOWAS to raise public awareness because "According to the World Health Organization (WHO), each year, approximately 600 million people - nearly one in ten people in the world - fall ill after ingesting contaminated food and it is necessary to initiate and strengthen awareness-raising and awareness-raising activities for the regional population on the issues of food safety and on the necessary measures to be taken in the systems food products" underlined Septime Houssou-Goé, Program Manager at the DADR at the opening of this meeting on behalf of the Director Alain SY TRAORE.

An inventory of the regulations and challenges for food safety in West Africa and the Sahel was presented by Dr Gbemenou Joselin Benoit Gnonlonfin, Sanitary and Phytosanitary Expert (SPS) at the DADR. Dr. Gnonlonfin then gave perspectives in the implementation and harmonization of national and regional regulations which can be summarized as follows: i) Organize training in the country of sanitary and phytosanitary inspectors and competent authorities concerned on harmonized guides and decision-making, ii) support annual participation in Codex standard setting processes on priority regional food safety issues: contaminants, food additives, pesticide residues and veterinary drugs, food hygiene and contribution to the establishment of limits/standards within the respective Codex committee, support annual attendance at the WTO SPS Committee meeting in Geneva to coordinate trade negotiations and provide updates on implemented SPS measures, iii) support the generation, management and use of data for the establishment of regional and international standards (examples Okra: pesticide residues (to carry out an evaluation of pesticide residues and to generate data to be used in extrapolation (use in crop grouping) , Cocoa: concentration of metalaxil in cocoa), iv) Establishment of a functional one-stop-shop database.

The national experiences of Benin and Ghana were also shared. Food safety and CODEX Alimentarius implementation actions were presented. Experts in nutrition and food safety, students, teacher-researchers, journalists, actors from the private sector, decision-makers followed the presentations and especially participated in the discussions.

During this meeting, which was the first organized by the DADR, the actors and partners of ECOWAP were familiarized with the issues and questions of food safety, they had some approaches to adopt appropriate behaviors in order to avert diseases caused by lack of safe food through food safety. They were especially informed of the existence of regional regulations and Codex standards in ECOWAS Member States.



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Directorate of Agriculture and Rural Development

In view of the importance of the subject at the health and socio-economic levels, the participants congratulated ECOWAS for the initiative and suggested to (i) continue, support and strengthen the participation of ECOWAS Member States and Mauritania and Chad in participation in the process of developing international standards, ii) continue and strengthen the harmonization of national and regional regulations, (iii) strengthen qualifying and diploma training in the field of food safety throughout the value chain, (iii) build the capacity of analysis and control laboratories according to international standards, (iv) strengthen collaboration between national and regional institutions.

After this first experience, which was appreciated by all stakeholders and partners, ECOWAS made the commitment to make it an annual meeting which will serve not only to take stock of the implementation of food safety actions in ECOWAS space but also to make projections for the future.

Recall that the holding of this webinar was part of the implementation of the Food System Resilience Program in West Africa (FSRP) funded by the World Bank and coordinated at the regional level by ECOWAS in collaboration with CILSS and CORAF and other partners with 7 beneficiary countries currently: Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Chad and Togo.

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About ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established when the ECOWAS Treaty was signed by 15 West African Heads of State and Government on the 28th of May 1975 in Lagos, Nigeria. The ECOWAS region spans an area of 5.2 million square kilometres. The Member States are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Togo.

Considered one of the pillars of the African Economic Community, ECOWAS was set up to promote co-operation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa to raise the living standards of its peoples, and to maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations-among Member States, and contribute to the progress and development of the African continent.

In 2007, ECOWAS Secretariat was transformed into a Commission. The Commission is headed by the President, assisted by a Vice President, and Five Commissioners, comprising experienced bureaucrats who are providing the leadership in this new orientation. As part of this renewal process, ECOWAS is implementing critical and strategic programmes that will deepen cohesion and progressively eliminate identified barriers to full integration. In this way, the estimated 300 million citizens of the community can ultimately take ownership for the realization of the new vision of moving from an ECOWAS of States to an **“ECOWAS of the People: Peace and Prosperity to All”** by 2050.