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## Food Safety Policy Environment: Constraints and Challenges for Growing Food Businesses

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Photo: A. Diop, Senegalese food business production manager checking container lids before filling product (2022)

Public policy plays a vital role in a country's food system and directly impacts the role of the private food sector. Safe food supplies support national economies and global trade, in addition to contributing to food security, nutrition, and sustainable development. Effective and predictable food policies can facilitate private sector growth and investment and ensure local ownership by governments, private sector businesses, and consumers. Food Safety policies are not always straightforward, and growing food businesses (GFBs) are particularly vulnerable when policies are ambiguous or overly complex. These challenges put greater responsibility on GFBs including food producers, post-harvest sheds, transporters, storage facilities, processors, retailers and foodservice providers.

Globally, modern food safety legislation, enforcement and regulation have become more important. The World Health Organization<sup>1</sup> states that "in some industrialized countries, the percentage of the population suffering from foodborne diseases each year is estimated to be up to 30%. While less well documented, developing countries bear the brunt of the problem." Despite many countries adopting modern food safety legislation, enforcement and regulation are oftentimes lacking. For example, Nepal's National Food Safety Policy of 2019 and Food Hygiene Bill of 2021 are a declaration to improve the safe food supply for Nepalese consumers. However, there continue to be inadequate resources devoted to compliance and access to updated information for the food business sector. This can lead to distrust from consumers, and a lack of incentive for producers/food business owners to follow food safety laws.

Similar policy challenges face many other countries. Local incidents can quickly evolve into international emergencies due to the speed and range of product distribution. Serious foodborne disease outbreaks have occurred on every continent in the past decade, often amplified by globalized trade.

Encouraging the private sector to embrace "a safer food culture" by imparting modern food safety standards, as outlined by Codex Alimentarius,<sup>2</sup> contributes to ensuring that safe practices will have a positive impact on the health of consumers, as well as gaining market access by food companies. These measures, combined with other policies that encourage access to finance and capital investments, will help in creating a safer food system. In Nepal, many agribusinesses are co-investing with farmers and farm cooperatives in supply chain infrastructure as a result of the Nepal Rastra Bank approving the issuance of 18 billion rupees (~155 million USD) in agricultural bonds.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/foodborne-diseases-global-burden>

<sup>2</sup> The Codex Alimentarius is a collection of internationally adopted food standards and related texts presented in a uniform manner. These food standards and related texts aim at protecting consumers' health and ensuring fair practices in the food trade. The publication of the Codex Alimentarius is intended to guide and promote the elaboration and establishment of definitions and requirements for foods to assist in their harmonization and in doing so to facilitate international trade.

Joint investments to expand storage, transportation, and processing facilities allow growing food businesses to have a pull effect on other food enterprises in the segments that make up the supply/value chain.

As new food safety standards and policies are adopted in emerging economies, large food businesses are typically able to adjust their operations accordingly. This is due, in part, to their access to formal financing, in-house quality control staff, ability to pay for expensive audit services for certification, and ability to allocate time and resources to technological advancements. Small and growing food businesses tend to have less access to financing, limiting their potential market share. Similarly, GFBs are not able to compensate for infrastructural gaps, such as unreliable or unsafe water access, power, and food testing services.

GFBs trying to enter the export markets in hopes of expanding their market access must adhere to the quality and food safety standards required for the export market. Systemic problems in the global food supply also impact these GFBs as the regulations and standards are not consistent across countries.

To increase uptake of food safety practices and improve investment readiness, Feed the Future Business Drivers for Food Safety project (BD4FS), funded by USAID and implemented by Food Enterprise Solutions, co-creates food safety solutions with growing food businesses. Following Prerequisite Programs standards for sanitary food production, transportation, and processing, BD4FS develops trainings curriculums, tools and strategies for GFBs to implement food safety practices. While local enforcement may remain limited, GFBs can benefit from higher profits and greater market access by aligning with internationally recognized safety practices.

Learn more about FES and BD4FS activities at <https://www.foodsolutions.global/> and <https://agrilinks.org/activities/business-drivers-food-safety>; and follow us at:



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