

The Laikipia County Food Nutrition and Security (FNS) Multi-stakeholder Workshop and Project Launch

Venue: 18th July, 2017

Date: Old House Hotel Laikipia County

Theme: Maximizing Economic and Health Returns from Current Food Production through Enhanced Food Safety and Reduction of Food Losses in Horticulture and Dairy

Introduction

The Food Nutrition and Security (FNS) Program was initiated in Laikipia in December 2016. There have been a number of meetings since, which have culminated in the multi-stakeholder workshop that brought together policy makers and other actors in horticulture and dairy in Laikipia.

Opening Remarks- Mary Njuguna (SNV)

Food safety and loss reduction under the Voice for Change Partnership, is a product of SNV's past experience working in value chains. The need to consider how to grow value chain quality and volumes in production arose. While it is a project of SNV, this cannot be achieved in isolation, which is why it was deemed fit to engage stakeholders in Laikipia.

Under the program, there is an aim to enhance the capacities of stakeholders. Despite the fact that resources are limited, the FNS team is dedicated to making a change in the county. Work on this will be done in conjunction with IFPRI, particularly on evidence generation, being that policy and operational changes have to be based on concrete evidence. It is envisioned that once issues are clarified within the forum, the county government will take them up and address them accordingly.

Presentations

Voice for Change Partnership - Food Safety and Nutrition (FNS)

The Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS) and the Society of Crop Agribusiness Advisors of Kenya (SOCAA) have been working together under SNV's Voice for Change Partnership, FNS. The goal of the project is improved food security and nutrition through increased consumption of safe food and reduction of food losses. Towards this, the FNS team has been working to fulfil the following specific objectives:

- Improved cohesiveness of food safety and food loss reduction through policy and institutional harmonization and increased collaboration (stakeholders)
- Increased capacity of consumers to drive demand for food safety, to organize and lobby, for high standards and accountability through functional and legitimate institutions
- Support value chain actors adoption of food safety and food loss reduction standards and mechanisms at county level

The team has been working with key ministries within the government at both national and county level, other consumer bodies, private sector, and research institutions in order to reinforce efforts in evidence generation, capacity building, and advocacy.

The Kenya Dairy Board (KDB) - Mildred Kosgei

Kenya Dairy Board is a statutory body established by an Act of Parliament, the Dairy industry Act cap 336 of the Kenyan laws, with a mission to regulate and direct a sustainable and competitive dairy industry that provides quality and safe products. The board has a regulatory, developmental, and promotional mandate.

Towards meeting the objectives for which it was set up, there have been challenges in the dairy sector with which the board has had to contend. Issues of low productivity, high production and processing costs, low utilization of milk processing capacity, and the seasonality of production have prevailed. As pertains to food safety there are three main challenges:

1. Limited compliance to quality standards and safety requirements within the sector, that is, non-compliance on microbial and contaminant limits.
2. The large informal milk marketing sector, within which milk handling practices are poor and pose a danger to public health.
3. Weak stakeholder organization at grassroots, county and National levels

The following are interventions by KDB, aimed at addressing the issues:

1. Drafting of dairy regulations – to enhance the dairy regulatory framework
2. Establishment of a dairy regulatory lab – design completed and submitted for approval by relevant authorities
3. Enforcement – Over 30 major enforcement activities have been conducted over the past six months
4. Consumer education – major activities undertaken including radio activations, roadshows and forums to educate consumers and traders on milk safety
5. Capacity building – of milk handlers on milk quality and safety
6. Partnerships and collaborations – with County Governments and development partners

Access to safe food is a basic human right provided for under the Kenyan constitution. As such, it is the government's mandate to enforce safety standards. The different safety regulations in the dairy sector are overseen by the Ministry of Public Health, the Directorate of Veterinary Services, the Pharmacy and Poisons Board, KDB, Kenya Bureau of Standards, and the Pest Control Products Board. There has been limited effort to create synergy between these entities in order to deliver on food safety at county and national level.

Discussions

- KDB has helped Laikipia County to develop a good training manual for value chain actors in the past.
- The Dairy Industry Regulations (2017) by KDB fails to address issues of feed quality, which is a starting point for milk contamination.

- Concerns have been raised regarding the quality of milk from Kenya. For what reason is Kenya unable to trade smoothly in dairy products with countries like Tanzania, Zambia, and the wider COMESA?

Response

Trade issues are complex, the rejection of products by countries like Tanzania and Zambia is not quality-based. The motive may be to protect milk producers and traders within their own borders as Kenyan dairy is subjected to higher quality standards locally, creating an unfavorable competition for producers in other countries in the region.

As regards the issue of animal feed, feed stuffs are covered by the Fertilizer and Animal Feedstuffs Act, under the Directorate of Veterinary Services. The best that can be achieved is collaboration with them, since the mandate of KDB begins post-production.

Aflasafe Basics- Jane Kamau

Today there is a range of diseases plaguing the country that did not exist before, marked by incidences of abnormal growth. This is a sign there is a problem in the commodities that are consumed and makes a case for promoting food safety.

Aflatoxin is a toxic soil-inhabiting fungus. While aflatoxin has been treated as a post-harvest issue, it begins in the field. Crops like Maize, groundnuts and sorghum are most susceptible to it. Animal feed is typically manufactured using “condemned” cereals, including maize found to contain aflatoxin. This leads to contamination of animal product with the toxin. A common misconception is that there will be a change in the colour of food to indicate the presence of contamination by aflatoxin. This is however not the case, it is possible that contaminated food could still maintain its original colour. Testing is therefore important to detect the presence of aflatoxin in food. In Africa, approximately 30% of cancers, liver cancer especially, are attributed to aflatoxin.

Aflatoxin contamination has negative economic impacts. Maize, if found to contain aflatoxin, is rendered unviable for consumption by humans. Similarly, there is a huge market for groundnuts in Europe which has been largely inaccessible to Kenya because of high aflatoxin levels in locally produced groundnuts. Apart from this, aflatoxin in animals has been known to lead to lower milk production and low birth weights in calves.

Food is supposed to have 10 parts per billion (ppt) of aflatoxin. Studies have shown that more than half of milk sold Nairobi, Kenya contains over 50 ppt of aflatoxin. Within the rural area, the incidence of contamination is lower but still alarmingly high. These studies are available on www.paca.org, www.aflasafe.com, and www.iita.com.

There are a number of practices to manage aflatoxin at various stages from planting to consumption. One of these is the application of aflasafe, a compound applied in soil before crops

begin to flower. The compound minimizes and eradicates aflatoxin in soil, preventing transference to cultivated crops. The product has undergone testing in some regions in Kenya with commendable results. Strategies to reach a wide group of farmers include working with farmer groups and using the National Cereals Production Board (NCPB) as a distribution channel. Using the NCPB will be strategic as they have raised concerns in the past regarding being unable to obtain enough aflatoxin-free maize.

Department of Public Health- George Macharia

Food safety is about handling, storing and preparing food to prevent infection and making sure that it retains enough nutrients, necessary for a healthy diet. Unsafe food makes for poor nutrition due to loss of nutrients during preparation, storage, handling and cooking. Secondly, it is estimated that 70 percent of diarrhea cases today are a result of contaminated food. Other diseases that can be attributed to unsafe food include cancers, typhoid, and cholera, among others. These often end in fatalities.

Towards promoting food safety, the Department of Public Health is tasked with:

1. Disseminating information concerning food safety to the community
2. Inspection of food processing plants
3. Licensing of food establishments and suspension and revocation of licenses.
4. Surveillance on quality Responding to food-related complaints
5. Enforcement of the Public Health Laws
6. Partnering with stakeholders in food safety

The work of the Public Health Department is met by barriers such as inadequate food systems and infrastructure like laboratories to respond to and manage food safety complaints. Another challenge is poor multi-sectoral collaboration among public health, animal health, agriculture and other sectors towards collective action on food safety issues. Lack of consumer awareness, inadequate food sampling kits, the proliferation of unlicensed food premises, lack of political goodwill, inadequate enforcement of public health laws, and evasive measures by vendors and food handlers are also challenges that the department is working to overcome. Finally, there has been a cause for concern in the fact that foods within learning institutions have been found to have high levels of contamination.

Enhancing multi-sectoral collaboration, advocacy on issues of food safety to the political system, public education on food safety, enhancement of law enforcement mechanisms, and setting up food management infrastructure e.g. laboratories in the county or region would be important first steps in enhancing food safety in Laikipia and the country.

Discussions

- Polythene bags are used rampantly in Nanyuki, for example, to warm food in hot water and in wrapping roasted meat. Does the Department of Public Health know what the effect of this is as relates to cancer Laikipia?
- What kind of testing capacity does the department need? What would tests be for?

Responses

There have been efforts to discourage the use of polythene bags where food is concerned. However, this has been difficult to monitor. It is upon consumers to refrain from buying food that is wrapped in these polythene bags as it would discourage retailers from carrying on with the practice.

If there was an illness in the region arising from food contamination, the department of public health would need to find out what was causing the problem in order to come up with appropriate interventions. Currently there is no such testing capacity in the county.

Department of Livestock- Dr. Thuo

Kenya has one of the most developed dairy sectors in Sub-Saharan Africa. The dairy sector is a source of food, employment, raw materials for industry, cash income, manure for crop production, green energy for biogas, and cash needs for social status.

Inefficiencies in marketing and production and poor hygiene are common and bring about milk loss and contamination of food. It is estimated that 30 percent of milk is lost to marketing inefficiencies. Fodder management, long calving intervals, and poor disease control, failure to observe drug withdrawal periods, and the weakness of institutions tasked with regulating the sector also lead to milk loss and safety issues.

A major barrier to food safety is the existence of itinerant milk traders and milk-hawking kiosks in urban areas (approximately 80% of produced milk goes through informal channels). This could be addressed through law enforcement and strengthening licensing mechanisms. Further, it is important to initiate a quality control programme in the county, offer training on hygiene, enforce a milk products and animal quality assurance enforcement programme, and empower value addition groups.

Ministry of Education- William Mutahi

In Kenya, nationwide food quality and safety systems are legally controlled by various government agencies including the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS), the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute, the Department of Public Health (DPH), and the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate, situated within different ministries. These agencies work under the Ministries of Trade, Industrialization, Public Health and Sanitation, Livestock, Fisheries and Agriculture.

In learning institutions, the Ministry of Education encourages food handlers to practice basic hygiene such as washing of hands and observing personal cleanliness. To enhance food safety within learning institutions, school authorities ought to ensure that personnel handling food should have a valid medical certificate, that schools should have a safe storage facilities, and that kitchens are kept clean.

Discussions

- Please comment on the assertion by the Department of Public Health that institutions of learning have a high incidence of contaminated food.

Response

Surveillance in institutions of higher learning started after fatalities from consuming contaminated food were reported in two different institutions; a polytechnic, and a secondary school. In both instances, tests revealed that there were high levels of aflatoxin in the food.

There is a broken procurement system in institutions of learning that permits the dumping of food in these centers. Rules that guide procurement do not touch on safety standards. There is admittedly a gap in monitoring this.

As a possible solution, procurement should be done with the involvement of parents as they would be more vigilant in ensuring that food is of better quality and safe.

Proposed Solutions

1. Multi-sectoral collaboration needs to be strengthened on issues of food safety.
2. There should be capacity building initiatives for small and medium enterprises that handle food to ensure that consumers are accessing safe food.
3. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) already works with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (MoALF) to train farmers. Their training can be extended to ensure that handling practice at farm level is done properly.
4. It is important that training for food handlers distinguish between quality and safety of food. First, the tendency has been to address quality and shelve safety. Secondly, authorities often address what requires minimum effort to solve and forget about other issues. This needs to change to enhance food safety.
5. Safety manuals for schools do not address food safety comprehensively. This should be looked into.
6. Food safety in schools ought to be taken up by all stakeholders. Re-introducing subjects like home science and agriculture would imprint food safety concepts in the minds of students from young age.
7. There is need for a policy that calls for the respect and protection of professionalism. This would allow entities tasked with upholding food safety to do their work without fear of repercussions from political interference (politicians sometimes vouch for those carrying out improper activities to garner the support of the public).

Counter-argument: There are laws and standards in place to protect professionalism. In a devolved system, politicians do not have leeway to ask professionals to neglect their duties, as all their undertakings are protected under the law. There is need for professionals in the food safety space to be made aware of the scope of their mandates and on how to make use of existing laws and codes of conduct. The new constitution also protects professionals. There is room to disagree with politicians as long as one can back it with law and policy.

8. Research agencies are detached from the reality on the ground. It is difficult to relate to findings from research studies conducted on a global or national scale. Research ought to be done at levels with which consumers and policy makers can relate, for example at ward level.
9. Discussions on food safety need to be accompanied by discussions on the capacity to implement laws and standards.
10. There is need to think through creating awareness among consumers in order for food safety standards and their enforcement to become demand-driven.