

The Food Safety Law in Lebanon: What is next?

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Introduction

On 24 October 2016, the Food Safety Law in Lebanon was approved and published by the Parliament as Law N0:35. Consumers' protection advocates, in Lebanon, were expecting the government to implement the provisions of the new safety law which can improve public health.

Situation before the law

The majority of the Lebanese public and international community questioned why that Lebanon waited goodbye until the top of the 20th Century without having a Law covering Food Safety? it had been until the start of the 21st Century (in 2004) that a draft Law was introduced, by the Minister of Economy and Trade, Dr Bassil Flueihan, discussed and eventually approved by the Parliament. The solution to the present query came out that special private interests of some Lebanese agricultural producers and merchants were benefitting from the loose enforcement of the law and regulations to hunt the very best profit possible. In fact, before the publication of the Food Safety Law, there have been many government agencies within the different ministries; all of them were handling Food Safety, in a method or the opposite. But there was no coordination among them whatsoever. As a matter of fact the Ministry of Agriculture was handling regulations and rules associated with production of agricultural crops and animal products, marketing until reaching the consumers.

The same applies to the Ministry of Economy and Trade where the Department of the Consumers Protection is responsible of the principles and regulations concerning the implementation of the law associated with the protection of the buyer. However, the Ministry was never able of covering the entire territory of Lebanon and that they never had the capacity to hide some if not all problems associated with food safety. The Ministry of Public Health, relatively speaking, was doing a touch bit better. LIBNOR (the Lebanese Norms Organization) located at the Ministry of Industry, compared to other administrations was doing better, but was never ready to cover all agricultural commodities in Lebanon. The Ministry of Environment, although it had good ministers since its inception, the issues of food safety were of minor priority to the Ministry. The Ministry of Social Affairs didn't give any priority to problems of food safety.

The Municipalities which cover the entire territory of Lebanon, which may be a good advantage, because they're in touch with many users of food; but they were never trained during this field and that

they never tried to be responsible during this area. As we will see these are scattered activities, rules and regulations on food safety in many ministries and organizations, but unfortunately there was no coordination among them, and there was no system or a policy on food safety. Hence, the importance of getting a replacement law concerning this field.

The tasks of the Food Safety Commission

The new Law on Food Safety, in articles 22-23, there's an in depth description of the Food Safety Lebanese Commission (FSLC) responsibilities. It's mentioned as FSLC. In short, it's the FDA of Lebanon. The first task of FSLC is to organize a proposed program on what should be done by the Lebanese Government so as to succeed in a far better level in Food Safety conditions. An in depth analysis is formed of those articles and confront them with the work done by existing agencies handling food safety in Lebanon. The matter is that thus far, we didn't have a program or a policy or a technique handling food safety in Lebanon. The New Food Safety Law will help an excellent deal to fill this gap. Meaning that the primary task of FSLC is to build-up the system of food safety and sub-systems altogether the ministries and organizations.

The second task for FSLC is to place its house so as in preparing and drafting for the approval of the Council of Ministers:

- The bye-laws of FSLC;
- The terms of reference of its staff;
- The financial regulations concerning FSLC

The third task for FSLC, under article 29, is to organize the Strategy on Food Safety of Lebanon. In other words, the task for FSLC is to define the system on food safety, which can prepare the program or food policy in Lebanon, in cooperation with representatives from other organizations and agencies. A food safety system will establish the system of monitoring and evaluation of activities and responsibilities.

The fourth task is to seem into more details into the issues of education and training of execs handling food safety in Lebanon.

Training in Food Safety: A continuous educational program should be established, annually, between FSLC and representatives of other agencies of the Lebanese Government, in cooperation with the schools teaching Nutrition and Food Safety. LAU, within its Food Safety program is giving annually a course with a certificate in Food Safety. This certificate was highly appreciated by the Syndicate of the Lebanese Food Industries (SLFI) and therefore the General Union of Arab Chambers of Commerce. They were willing to pay higher salaries for those having the certificate on Food Safety training. The success of this new law depends on how it will be

implemented. A campaign should immediately be launched, now that the law is enacted, to draw attention to its importance and added value to Lebanese citizens. A major task for FSLC is to impose its respect to the other agencies of the government dealing with food safety and have good cooperation between the two sides.

Conclusion

We don't need new laws and regulations concerning food safety as we need better trained people to implement them. The major task, were ones existence, is in the area of inspectors, almost everywhere FSLC should have its own team of well-trained inspectors, to fill the gap of the ministries.

Well organized meetings under the leader's help of FSLC should be established regularly to discuss problems and find solutions. Finally, accreditations for new laboratories should be initiated by FSLC, to help and assist the existing ones at the Ministry of Agriculture, in Fanar.