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Adel Cortas

Former Agricultural Minister, Lebanon

The food safety law in Lebanon: What is next?

On 24 October 2016, the Food Safety Law in Lebanon was approved and published by the parliament as Law N0:35. Consumer's protection advocates, in Lebanon were waiting for the government to implement the provisions of the new safety law which will improve public health. The majority of the Lebanese public and international community agreed and questioned how come that Lebanon waited so long until the end of the Twentieth century without having a law covering food safety? It was until the beginning of the 21st century (in 2004) that a draft law was introduced, discussed and finally approved by the parliament. The answer to this 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 seek the highest profit possible. In fact, before the publication of the food safety law, there were nine government agencies in the different ministries and independent ones. All of them were dealing with food safety in one or the other. But there was no coordination among them whatsoever. Responsibilities, activities and terms of reference of these agencies are described in details in the paper. In articles 22-23 there is a detailed description of the Food Safety Lebanese Commission (FSLC) responsibilities. It is referred to as FSLC. In short it is the FDA of Lebanon. A detailed description of the FSLC will come out in the paper. The major objective of the paper aim at preparing a proposed program on what should be done by the Lebanese government in order to reach a better level in food safety conditions. A detailed analysis is made of these articles and confronts them with the work done by assisting the nine agencies dealing with food safety in Lebanon. The problem is that so far, we do not have a program or a policy dealing with food safety in Lebanon. The food safety law will help a great deal to fill this gap. The second objective is to look into more details into the problems of education and training of professionals dealing with food safety in Lebanon. We pride ourselves in Lebanon, from the number of universities we have. However, the number of universities dealing with agriculture will not exceed six and those dealing with nutrition and food safety are the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the Lebanese American University (LAU). Some incentives should be given to the other four universities teaching agriculture in Lebanon to do some research and give courses dealing with food safety. The third objective of this new program refers to the urgency for the Councils of Ministers in Lebanon to establish the FSLC and appoint its chairman and members. When the FSLC is established it has to organize itself and prepare all the documents mentioned in article 27 of the food safety law. Then FSLC will prepare the program or food policy in Lebanon in cooperation with representatives from the nine agencies. A food safety system will be established this way and should contain a sub-system of monitoring and evaluation of activities and responsibilities. This would help in the preparation of the annual report referred in article 31 of the food safety law. A continuous training program should be programmed annually between FSLC and representatives of the nine agencies, in cooperation with the universities 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 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.

Biography

Adel Cortas was the Minister of Agriculture in Lebanon from 1992 to 1995. His background is in Agriculture Engineering and Agricultural Economic and Planning. He has served FAO for 26 years as FAO Representative in Morocco and Assistant to ADG for Economic and Social Affairs and education background is mainly in agricultural production, planning and agricultural economics.

acortas@dm.net.lb