

Region to establish food safety and risk authority

May 14, 2009

Abu Dhabi: Residents in the UAE and other GCC countries can expect quicker actions against food-related health risks such as food contamination, thanks to a new body which will be set up soon.

A GCC level 'risk management body' is to be set up soon to assess such risks based on the scientific data and analysis, with a view to alerting food safety authorities for quick action, a senior official told Gulf News on Wednesday.

This was the major recommendation made by the two day 'GCC Risk Analysis' workshop which ended in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday, said Dr Mariam Hareb Al Yousuf, Executive Director, Policy and Regulation at the **Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority (Adfca)**.

She is also a member of GCC Food Safety Committee and chaired the workshop's technical sessions. As the risk assessor, the body will assess risks related to food, animal and plant health based on scientific data and analysis, and alert the risk managers - food safety authorities - to take prompt action. which includes banning certain foodstuffs.

"For example, in the event of a melamine contamination in milk [which happened recently], the body will quickly decide the permissible limit of melamine content in milk and advise the member countries to ban the milk brands or products which do not comply with the permissible limit," she said.

Dr Mariam said all GCC states were bound to take any action against any products on the basis of scientific explanation, owing to their World Trade Organisation (WTO) membership. At present, each country depends on their own scientific data and sources but the GCC body will network with international organisations to make it more effective, she said.

She said the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) was a good example, which coordinated such efforts among 27 European countries.

"We will visit the EFSA to learn its functioning," Dr Mariam said.

Asked about the location of the new body's headquarters, she said the GFSC would refer the matter to GCC secretariat.

"But the workshop has finalised the terms of reference, structure and pre-requisites to establish the body and the road map with the next steps to establish it," she explained.

(Zawya)