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Agriculture

**World Bank, APEC Forum Sign MOU
On Food Safety Ahead of APEC Meeting**

The World Bank and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Food Safety Cooperation Forum signed May 18 a memorandum of understanding to work together on training programs to improve food safety standards and practices in the region.

The training programs will enable more growers, producers, and food safety officials to understand and utilize preventative controls, which will result in safer food for consumers and fewer safety incidents in food trade, according to a State Department news release. The APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum was established to bring together food safety regulators to develop a food safety framework and strategy and build capacity.

APEC is a forum of 21 Pacific Rim countries seeking to promote free trade and economic cooperation throughout the Asia-Pacific region. The MOU is part of APEC's agenda to strengthen food security given that the region accounts for half of world grain production and includes major exporters and importers of agricultural products.

Supply Chains

"Food trade is increasingly becoming a global issue with complex and inter-related supply chains, which raises the need address the question of food safety, APEC Secretariat Executive Director Ambassador Muhamad Noor said at the signing ceremony.

He said global and regional cooperation on building the capacity of regulatory systems was key to reducing food incidents, enhancing domestic commerce and export markets.

The signing took place preceding May 19-21 meetings of APEC trade ministers and small and medium enterprise ministers taking place in Big Sky, Mont.. The United States will host the APEC leader's meeting in November in Honolulu, Hawaii, with President Obama expected to attend the meeting.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.), who did not attend the signing ceremony, said in a May 18 release said that he would be attending the APEC Big Sky meetings to break down trade barriers to make it easier for U.S. businesses and farmers to export to the fast-growing Asian-Pacific region.

China, Australia Chair APEC Food Group

Inger Andersen, World Bank vice president for sustainable development, signed the MOU on behalf of the bank. Andersen said the MOU would strengthen joint World Bank and APEC efforts to mobilize resources and promote capacity building to better ensure food safety concerns are adequately addressed.

Signing the MOU on behalf of APEC were co-chairs of the APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum, Steve McCutcheon, chief executive of Food Standards Australia and New Zealand, and Lin Wei, deputy director of the General Import Export Food Safety Bureau of China's General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection & Quarantine (AQSIQ).

China and Australia chaired the APEC food safety forum. McCutcheon and Lin said in a joint statement that the MOU would open the way for an upscaling of food safety capacity building in the region.

APEC held its first APEC ministerial meeting on food security in October in Niigata, Japan, when Japan hosted APEC in 2010.

Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Demetrios Marantis said in remarks at the signing that the MOU showed a commitment to establishing preventative controls in food supply chains. He said building the capacity to prevent food safety incidents protected public health, established greater confidence in trade, and thereby created a more prosperous region.

Marantis also said that advancing regulatory cooperation and convergence are key U.S. priorities for APEC during its host year.

Margaret A. Hamburg, U.S. Food and Drug Administration commissioner, said at the signing that the FDA was in the process of implementing the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act in the United States. "This collaborative effort is extremely beneficial to enhancing global food safety as the APEC region accounts for 41 percent of the world population and nearly 50 percent of global food production,"

Pamela G. Bailey, president and CEO of the Grocery Manufacturers Association, said at the signing that the United States has one of the safest food supplies in the world, but that the Partnership Training Institute Network established by the APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum would allow growers, producers and regulators in the APEC economies to better anticipate and manage food safety issues.

Asked about ongoing negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade talks, Marantis said that the nine TPP participating countries would be meeting May 19 to seek the best way to achieve the most progress on the talks before the November APEC leaders' meeting in Honolulu.

By Amy Tsui