5. Strengthening food safety

In November 2018, Papua New Guinea will host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit – a unique opportunity for the country to showcase its food, people and culture to the world.

However, if appropriate controls are not in place, large numbers of people can be exposed to unsafe food. Food safety risk management plays a key role in the prevention and control of foodborne diseases at such gatherings.

A national food safety system is the foundation for the planning and implementation of all food safety control measures. In Papua New Guinea, the Government is focusing on strengthening the system to prevent food safety incidents and emergencies, not only for the APEC Summit, but also beyond.

Guiding this process is the Regional Framework for Action on Food Safety in the Western Pacific, endorsed at the October 2017 session of the Regional Committee. It builds on the lessons learnt from the Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011-2015 and provides guidance on strategic action and a stepwise approach to strengthen food safety systems in the Region. Coordination across sectors and collaboration with the food industry and consumer groups is an integral part of the implementation of the framework.

Under the leadership of Papua New Guinea’s National Department of Health, strategic priorities for strengthening the national food safety system have been identified and are being implemented in preparation for the APEC Summit. These priorities include training of food handlers on safe practices and adherence to the WHO Five Keys to Safer Food: keep clean; separate raw and cooked; cook thoroughly; keep food at safe temperatures; and use safe water and raw materials. Food inspectors are being trained, and information is being prepared for dissemination to meeting participants on how to protect themselves from foodborne diseases. The country is also preparing for potential deliberate food contamination and outbreaks of foodborne illness, as part of public health emergency preparedness for mass gatherings.

With WHO support, the National Department of Health is making food safer for visitors at the APEC Summit and for the people of Papua New Guinea.