



Food Safety Issues in China

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Dear Editor-in-Chief

As a global problem, food safety significantly affects the public health in both developed and developing countries, especially in countries with large populations, e.g. China. A 2011 survey reported that food safety was the most concerned issue in Chinese people, surpassing public security, traffic safety, medical safety, etc. (1). Food can be contaminated by many harmful factors at any step in the process from farm to table. In China, the major harmful factors include toxic animals and plants (e.g. puffer fish and toadstool), pathogenic microorganisms (e.g. *Salmonella* and *Vibrio Parahaemolyticus*), and chemical contamination (e.g. pesticide and veterinary drug residues) (2). For example, of 174 food safety incidents reported in 2012 in China, most were caused by toxic animals or plants (41.4%), followed by pathogenic microorganisms (32.8%), and chemical contamination (12.1%) (3). In addition, with the rapid industrialization in China, the use of illegal additives and toxic industrial waste in food processing is a growing food safety problem, e.g. Sudan red incident in 2006 (4), melamine scandal in 2008 (5), gutter oil incident in 2011(6), etc. All the food safety problems resulted not only in public health hazards, but also in public distrust of the food industry and the government.

In consideration of the many threats to food safety in the nation, the government has made great efforts to regulate food safety. The promulgation and implementation of Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China in 2009 marked that the reform of China's food safety laws entered a

new stage. In 2010 the State Council Food Security Committee was established to improve coordination among different administrative authorities (e.g. Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, and General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine). And in 2013 China Food and Drug Administration, as the central authority, was established to improve enforcement of food safety laws and strengthen the surveillance systems. The government is in charge of legislation and supervision, but more importantly, food industries in China should take their social responsibility and put food safety ahead of economic benefits, so as to ensure food safety. Moreover, to make the public knew the truth of food safety incident, improving transparency by media and increasing communication between the government and citizens should be encouraged.

Food safety has been a long standing problem in China. Considering the huge scale and complex situation of food industry in China, there are no shortcuts to resolving the country's food safety issues. Only through the joint efforts and collaboration of government, food industry and consumer, can China's food safety get gradual and healthy development.

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