

Press Release APEC, World Bank sign agreement to boost food safety

Issued by the APEC Sub-Committee on Standards and Conformance's Food Safety Cooperation Forum

Big Sky, Montana, 18 May 2011 – APEC and the World Bank today signed a memorandum of understanding to strengthen collaboration on food safety in the Asia-Pacific region, which accounts for over 40 percent of the world's population and nearly half of global food production.

The APEC Sub-Committee on Standards and Conformance's Food Safety Cooperation Forum and the World Bank will work together closely on training programs to improve food safety standards and practices in the region, as well as to facilitate trade.

The programs will enable more growers, producers and food safety officials to understand and utilise preventative controls – resulting in safer food for consumers and fewer safety incidents in food trade.

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

Ambassador Noor added that global and regional cooperation on building the capacity of regulatory systems is key to reducing food incidents and boosting trust in trade. This enhances domestic commerce and export markets.

"More widespread movement of food and livestock around the world requires vigilance on food safety and disease risk," said Inger Andersen, World Bank Vice President for Sustainable Development. "More exacting standards pose challenges to poor farmers competing in these growing markets."

Signing the MOU with APEC today, Andersen said, "Food safety is an increasingly significant part of the World Bank's lending and technical assistance programs in East Asia and the Pacific, as well as in other regions. We are extremely pleased to be working with APEC to bring more attention to this critical issue. This new agreement will strengthen our joint efforts to mobilize resources and promote and support capacity building to better ensure food safety concerns," she said.

Ms Andersen and the co-chairs of the APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum, Steve McCutcheon from Australia and Lin Wei from China, signed the MOU in the margins of a series of APEC meetings currently underway in Big Sky, Montana.

"The MOU opens the way for an upscaling of food safety capacity building in the region," said McCutcheon and Lin in a joint statement.

APEC Trade Ministers and Small and Medium Enterprise Ministers meet from May 19-21 in Big Sky, focusing on APEC's 2011 agenda to further advance free and open trade in the region.

The APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum was established to bring together food safety regulators to develop a food safety framework and strategy and to carry out capacity building programs in this important area.

The memorandum of understanding is part of APEC's agenda to strengthen food security in the diverse region, home to about one quarter of the world's undernourished people. The region also accounts for half of world grain production and includes major exporters and importers of agricultural products.

APEC held its first APEC Ministerial Meeting on Food Security last October in Niigata, Japan, and committed to focus on raising agricultural productivity, facilitating trade and investment and expanding markets.