CASE STUDY
Modernizing Food Safety Regulations

Modern food import controls improve the trade environment

Photo: ASEZA

At the Food Inspection Center, Areej Omari uses the new system to check on the threat level of new food imports.

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Challenge

During negotiations to join the World Trade Organization, Jordan was encouraged to modernize its controls on food and agricultural imports. Jordan's policy of taking samples from 100 percent of incoming food shipments for laboratory testing, even when the products posed little or no risk to human health, routinely caused delays of ten days or more. The process also did not systematically monitor results or respond to importer complaints. Upon accession to the WTO, Jordan agreed to bring its food import standards into line with WTO requirements.

Initiative

As part of a broader initiative supporting Jordan's WTO membership, USAID helped implement a computerized, risk-based food safety inspection system at the port of Aqaba, where 80 percent of food imports enter the country. Rather than test every shipment, the system ranks food imports according to the level of threat they pose and tests shipments on a graduated scale — shipments that carry a higher risk are more likely to be tested. In addition to providing training on sampling techniques, laboratory analysis and risk assessment, USAID helped design and build the infrastructure for the system and provided equipment and software to create a national database.

Results

Launched in September 2002, the new system has shortened inspection times, significantly reduced costs to importers and to Jordan and made the process easier to monitor — all without compromising food safety. Low-risk consignments, which make up about a third of all shipments, now clear inspection in as little as a day. The number of tests conducted has decreased by 80 percent, the costs of testing by one third. Jordan now has a national database for food imports, allowing authorities to constantly update and improve risk analysis and cooperate with international efforts to improve regional food safety. "The risk-based system is key to creating a fair, transparent and equitable trade environment," says Rima Zu'mot, director of health control for the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority. "With USAID's assistance, Jordan has developed a food import control system that not only meets international standards but also serves as a role model for the region."