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## **FOOD SAFETY CONCERNS TOWARDS INTEGRATION OF THE TURKISH AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM IN THE EU**

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Food safety and nutrition are essential public health issues for the countries. Microbial pathogens, biotoxins, and chemical contaminants in food represent serious threats to the public health. Food poisoning outbreaks involving agents such as *Escherichia coli*, *Salmonella*, and chemical contaminants highlight problems with food safety. Factors which contribute to potential hazards in foods include improper agricultural practices; poor hygiene at all stages of the food chain; lack of preventive controls in food processing and preparation operations; misuse of chemicals; contaminated raw materials, ingredients and water; inadequate or improper storage, etc. Food safety system is changing rapidly with regard to globalisation of trade, new technologies, and changing consumer preferences. Turkey's food safety strategy is to strengthen food control systems to protect public health, implement the principle of food safety from farm to table, prevent fraud and deception, avoid food adulteration, and facilitate trade. Food control and food safety services in Turkey are based on the Food law no.5179 "Adoption of The Amended Decree Having The Force of Law Concerning The Production, Consumption and Inspection of Foodstuffs" published on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2004. The food control system and related legislation are being strengthened and harmonised with EU Acquis Communariae and internationally accepted risk analyse-based food control systems with a focus on consumer protection. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) is the main decision making body in Turkey with respect to food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary issues. The central body of MARA consists of 5 Directorate Generals as main service units. Among these service units, General Directorate of Protection and Control (GDPC) of MARA is the central competent authority. Under the umbrella of the General Directorate of Protection and Control of MARA there are 81 Provincial Directorates, 39 Provincial Control Laboratories and one Food Control and Research Institute. Food control inspection services are carried out by about 5400 food inspectors (with bachelor degree in agronomy, chemistry, biology, veterinary and food engineering) that work in the Control Division Directorates under the Provincial Directorates of Agriculture. Being as a candidate country, existing food safety and control system are strengthened, EU legislation harmonised to national legislation and implemented.

**Key words:** Food safety, Turkey, EU, food control system, phytosanitary,