Mrs. Delese Afia Amoakoa Darko the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA), has launched Africa's first ever National Food Safety Alert System (NFSAS) workshop in Accra on 8th October, 2019.

The three (3) days workshop which is being organized at the Sunlodge Hotel in collaboration with the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) of the World Health Organization (WHO) is to strengthen collaboration and communication for a national food safety alert system in Ghana.

In her welcome address, the Chief Executive Officer of the FDA said, food safety emergencies are increasingly becoming a challenge within countries, hence the need to strengthen the national food control system to detect, assess and manage food safety incidents and emergencies. Mrs. Darko emphasized that, food production and control systems provide a necessary foundation for national Early Warning Capabilities and Capacity.
She further stated that, strengthening national food control capacity will improve a country's ability to prevent the escalation of adverse food safety events into possible human illnesses, outbreaks of disease and improve food trade. She therefore called for the need to have a sound understanding of these systems to be able to identify the most suitable points in the supply chain for surveillance and subsequent actions in order to protect public health and safety.

Mrs. Darko was of the view that, a national rapid alert network ensures that the right people and processes are in place and connected to one another to move from an Early signal to appropriate action.

Mrs. Jocelyn Adeline Egyakwa Amusah, the Head of Food Safety Management at the FDA, in her presentation, said the objectives of the workshop is to help identify opportunities and ways to strengthen the National Food Safety Alert System (NFSAS), clarify when and how to issue Food Safety Alert as part of a National Food Alert System, and to develop a common understanding for a National Integrated approach to Food Safety Event Management.

Mrs. Amusah mentioned that the NFSAS will also provide a clear understanding of what INFOSAN is and how it operates during an International Food safety Emergency, discuss and clarify roles of INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point as well as provide hands-on training of the INFOSAN community website.
The Country Representative for the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Owen Kaluwa in his speech was of the opinion that, participants should take a critical look at international best practices in food safety to guide them in developing the national alert system.

He further revealed that, the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2015 estimated 600 million cases of food borne diseases as well 420,000 deaths annually worldwide.

The Country Director of the World Food Programme (WFP) Mrs. Pukia Yacoub remarked that, on a daily basis, the risk of food causing public health issue increases if the country fails to control and manage the food supply chain in a manner that will ensure food safety.

She therefore urged organizations such as the Food and Drugs Authority, the Ghana Standards Authority (GSA), the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA), World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO) as well as several other commercial food processing companies, that have the adequate knowledge and expertise in food safety and quality to work together to achieve a robust national food safety alert system capable of managing food safety incidents to safeguard public health and safety.

Mrs. Pukia reiterated that, the emergence of multiple communication channels such as mobile phones, social and traditional media (radio, television and the press) should help various stakeholders work towards strengthening this system. She therefore stated that, the WFP is keen to build more partnerships and strengthen existing ones in order to help improve food safety in Ghana.

The workshop which is scheduled to end on Thursday 10th October, 2019 brought together, representatives from the World Health Organization (Ghana-AFRO), the INFOSAN Team-AFRO, FAO, WFP, GSA, the Ministry of Trade and the Customs Division of the Ghana Revenue Authority.

At the end of the workshop, it is expected that, there will be an improved coordination and communication mechanisms across sectors by 2020, a well-established and functional National Food Safety Alert System by 2020 and to provide improved participations in the work of the INFOSAN. It is also expected that the workshop would optimize use of the support the network provides for managing food safety event in protecting public health and safety.