

5th February 2010 – Washington D.C., USA

2010 FOOD SAFETY CONFERENCE - Press Highlights Day 2

Private vs. Public Food Safety Efforts

Safe food is a shared accountability between governments and companies. On the second day of the Global Food Safety Conference in Washington DC, one of the opening sessions looked at the question. In a panel discussion, the growing understanding of how both the private and public sectors manage food safety and develop policy was evident.

The huge scale of the public effort is not always evident, but Kevin McKinley, Deputy Secretary General, ISO pointed out that there are 18,500 standards and 700 committees within the ISO framework. Kevin said “We provide a bridge between multiple stakeholders and governments. I want a discussion about the opportunity to improve implementation rather than to debate our past differences.”

Karen Hulebak, Chair of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Chief Scientist, Office of Food Safety, USDA agreed “The aim of safe food is important – it’s not the standard that matters – it’s how it is put into place”.

Kevin Edwards, US Food Business Development Manager for SGS described a case study on third party certification in shrimp aquaculture that has been done in partnership with the US FDA. Kevin said “We used the GFSI Guidance document to help us with the development of the project and supported the FDA as they learnt about the process.”

In the concluding plenary session of the conference Michael R Taylor, the Deputy Commissioner for Food at the Food and Drug Administration, responded to a question from the audience about this project. “It shows our interest in figuring out how certification used by the private sector can help the FDA. I don’t think it can be a substitute for regulatory oversight but it can certainly support delivering compliance.”

GFSI Global Markets Toolkit – Solutions for Less Developed Businesses

Let’s Work Together

This phrase aptly sums up a session that presented collaborative work being carried out between the public and private sectors to further food safety efforts in developing markets. There was resounding acknowledgment that while international organizations are primarily engaged in the use of public standards, private standards can also play a complementary role in ensuring the effective management of food safety for small and/or less developed businesses. Currently small suppliers have to fight against a large range of requirements, certification and high complexity. The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) established a Technical working group two years ago to develop a ‘toolkit’ that outlines the technical competency requirements for individuals employed by small and/or less developed businesses, in order to guide small suppliers through a continuous improvement process and give them access to local markets and new trade opportunities over time. This toolkit will be presented at the Global Food Safety Conference in London, 16th - 18th February 2011. Pilot projects are currently being carried out in several countries to test the practical implementation of the toolkit.

Getting the most out of food safety audits

Consumers around the world are showing their concern as a series of high profile food safety failures are reducing their confidence in the food industry’s ability to deliver safe food.

Food safety auditing can provide one of the solutions and has emerged as an issue that needs a fresh approach. The Global Food Safety Initiative has been facilitating a discussion between a network of global experts and this session on getting the most out of audits in supply chains, in stores and in restaurants included a range of views of the challenge. Auditors, retailers and restaurant chains shared their policies, their experience and their learning.

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Cory Hedman is the Director for Food Safety and Quality for Delhaize, America. He talked about the challenge of getting the best return on store audits. He stressed the cultural element of the retail environment where an audit can be a very intimidating process. The foundation of success is in training. He said “People generally want to do what’s right – they just don’t always know the right thing to do”. Cory also stressed the importance of listening. “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care!” This theme was shared by speakers from Lloyds Register, McDonalds, Publix Super Markets and Darden who proposed that recognition of people’s excellence whether in a store or in the supply chain helps get a return for investment in auditing.

The session concluded with a round of applause for a rousing call to action from Miss Xiaowei Shi, the Director General from the China National Council for Certification and Accreditation. “When it comes to global food safety – we must not be antagonistic – we need to have more trust in each other. Whether it’s with the growers, the processors, the food service sector or the retailers, we need a common approach. Let’s take action, not just talk, and let’s do it all together.”

The Global Social Compliance Programme

1000 codes of conduct and implementation systems (World Bank 2004)

158,000,000 children aged 5-14 in work today (UNICEF 2009)

614,200,000 people work “excessively” long hours (ILO 2007)

Presenting these figures, Terry Babbs demonstrated the scale of the problem facing companies today in international supply chains. As Groups Ethical Trading Director for Tesco, Terry Babbs’s role is to underpin the company’s responsible trading policies. Tesco, like the 29 other companies which have formed the Global Social Compliance Programme, needs to demonstrate that it is delivering on its public commitments to ethical sourcing as well delivering growth. “We’re only as good as our suppliers”, he explained, noting that Tesco wants to form lasting relationships with suppliers who share the company’s values. A genuine partnership is the goal rather than a purely transactional relationship.

Faced with this globally widespread complexity, the GSCP’s aim is to unravel the intermeshed strands of compliance systems and initiatives and to create the circumstances which will promote convergence.

Supplying companies today have to deal with as many as 30 or 40 audits in one year, a situation Terry Babbs characterised as a nonsense. GSCP, being business-driven and open source, is building a set of reference tools which will enable existing systems and initiatives to benchmark themselves and draw upon agreed best practice. The programme’s ultimate goal is to concentrate on fixing the problems through remediation. This must be based on the solid foundations of commonly-accepted standards to enable stronger collaborative efforts in training and capacity building.

Although it is business-driven, civil society oversight is well and truly integrated into the Programme through its governance structure which includes a heavyweight Advisory Board of internationally recognized figures from unions, NGOs and international organisations. This Advisory Board has open access to all of the programme’s discussions and output.

In this session one question which was underlined was the problem of auditor competence and methodology, illustrated by examples drawn from suppliers in India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Building on this, Terry Babbs also asked the question of the viability of a compliance-based framework. Compliance is necessary but real change needs to be based on shared values and the right incentives to change behaviour while respecting cultural differences – not only in supplying companies but among those businesses that source from global supply chains too.

Getting Most out of Micro Testing

To test or not to test, that is the question

Increasingly complex supply chains have greatly increased the challenges associated with monitoring food processing in the 21st century. Public attention to microbiological hazards has led food safety experts in the food industry to tighten its efforts in relation to microbial testing. In a session entitled “Getting the most out of Micro Testing”, speakers came together to highlight the need for major collaborative efforts among industry, public health, regulatory organizations and other public sector companies to expand the food safety focus to all parts of the supply chain, facilitating the elimination of pathogens through the implementation of HACCP programmes, prerequisite programmes, and by placing more focus on process

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rather than product microbiological testing to verify food process controls. To improve efficiency in the analysis of results, users of product microbiological test results should examine data trends over time to better assess process controls, rather than just for each lot of product tested. The application of Food Safety Objectives (FSO) provides a more scientific or risk-based approach for using microbiological criteria to produce safe food products and better assure public health.

Optimizing In-Store Hygiene

Consumers happy to swap store hygiene for price, survey claims

Staff motivation and top-level support essential for encouraging hygienic practice

Shoppers faced with recession feel store hygiene is less important than price, according to a survey of shopper attitudes published by the Food Marketing Institute (FMI). Presenting the results in a session on optimising store hygiene at Global Food Safety Conference, FMI Group Vice President for Food Safety Jill Hollingsworth said that 75% of shoppers in 2006 had ranked “a clean, neat store” as “very important” in determining their choice of principal grocery store, while 69% had chosen price. By 2009, however, the situation had reversed, with price becoming the primary driver of choice. “Shoppers shouldn’t have to make a trade-off,” Hollingsworth said. “A clean, sanitary store goes hand in hand with food safety.” During the session, speakers from Wegmans and Safeway detailed their approach to food safety in stores. The key was sponsorship and commitment to a food safety culture at the top of the organisation. The other essential pillar was training and motivating staff to adopt correct practices. “Your associates have to do it because they want to,” said Tom Ford, of sanitation provider Ecolab.

Emerging Issues in Food Safety – Where will you be in 2020?

The food industry is not only very complex but is also working at full capacity. Predictions aren’t easy and the effects of food safety issues are amplified greatly. Looking into the future is always a part of the Global Food Safety Conference. On the closing afternoon a session looked at the results of a global survey developed by GFSI sponsors, Diversey in collaboration with other industry experts, such as Cornell University, the World Bank and NSF-CMI and the Consumer Goods Forum. The survey response from almost 400 food industry executives and stakeholders came from 53 countries.

There was agreement from retailers, brand manufacturers, governments and NGOs that the most important food safety issue in 2020 would be dealing with microbiological problems.

The experts also predicted that the source of the problem would be not in the home or the stores. The problems will be from the farms and the factories.

The pull of consumer influence is evident in another important prediction. Food safety will become a part of the challenge to find sustainability. 80% of respondents believed this would happen.

Bob Gravani, Professor of Food Safety, Cornell University proposed some proactive take home messages for the delegates.

He urged building cultures of food safety within all organisations and building supply chain partnerships that push for harmonisation of standards to drive best practice.

John Lamb, Senior Agribusiness Advisor for Rural and Sustainable Development at the World Bank analysed the geographical implications of the survey. “Food safety in 2020 will be challenged by a range of issues such as public policy and climate change. It’s incredibly complex but one thing is for sure – it will be more challenging. The Global Food Safety Initiative will be of fundamental importance in finding the solutions.”

FDA promises stronger partnership

Updated laws will enable multi-partnership approach, Deputy Commissioner claims

Michael R Taylor, Deputy Commissioner for Foods at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) told delegates that the Obama administration was committed to making food safety “a priority”. Taylor acknowledged that the agency was working with an outdated legislative framework, but promised change. Legislation currently with Congress will give the FDA a mandate and the legislative tools to update its approach. “We will invest resources and effort to build a truly national, integrated food safety system.” However, the FDA would not succeed alone. “Partnership throughout the system couldn’t be more

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important.” Taylor promised to forge stronger relations with public agencies, such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), local government and private sector initiatives such as the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI). The new laws will also deliver stronger “tools for enforcement”.

10 years of GFSI celebrated, and a new Chairman welcomed

During the closing session of the Global Food Safety Conference, JP Suarez, Senior Vice President and General Counsel, International Division, Wal-Mart stores announced the end of his 18 month tenure as Chairman of the GFSI Board of Directors. He was delighted to pass the baton to Jürgen Matern, Vice President of Metro AG, who promised to keep the GFSI momentum going.

The Consumer Goods Forum

The Consumer Goods Forum is an independent global parity-based Consumer Goods network. It brings together the CEOs and senior management of around 650 retailers, manufacturers, service providers and other stakeholders across 70 countries.

The Forum was created in June 2009 by the merger of CIES - The Food Business Forum, the Global Commerce Initiative (GCI) and the Global CEO Forum. The Consumer Goods Forum is governed by its Board of Directors, which includes an equal number of manufacturer and retailer CEOs and chairpersons. Forum member companies have combined sales of EUR 2.1trillion.

The Forum provides a unique global platform for thought leadership, knowledge exchange and networking between retailers, manufacturers and their partners on collaborative, non-competitive issues. Its strength lies in the privileged access it offers to the key players in the sector as well as in the development and implementation of best practices along the value chain.

It has a mandate from its members to develop common positions on key strategic and practical issues affecting the consumer goods business and to focus on non-competitive collaborative process improvement.

With its headquarters in Paris and its regional offices in Washington, D.C., Singapore, Tokyo and Shanghai, The Consumer Goods Forum serves its members throughout the world.

This press release is available on the website <http://www.theconsumergoodsforum.com>

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