



Pressure mounts for a single global food safety certification standard

By Rick Pendrous
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A single international standard for the safety certification of food production premises moved a step closer last week when stakeholders in the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) agreed the next steps forward.

The GFSI stakeholders met prior to the CIES – The Food Business Forum’s safety conference held in Munich last week. They agreed ways of dealing with non-conformities, auditor training and auditor quality as they apply to competing standards which make up the draft 5th edition GFSI document. They also came up with new proposals on audit frequencies.



Stakeholder views, together with those of workings groups held during the conference, will be fed back to the GFSI’s technical committee, which was behind the latest draft. These will be worked on over the coming months.

As well as examining benchmarking to provide improved transparency and auditor competence, the technical committee will look at how GFSI can fit in with the International Standards Organisations’ ISO 22000 standard for certification of food safety management systems published in 2005.

The GFSI, led by the big retailers, was launched in 2000 with the aim of harmonising food safety inspections and the certification of food production premises. It now encompasses four different standards, which are gradually converging, used throughout the world. These are the BRC Global Standard, International Food Standard (IFS), Safe Quality Food (SQF) Standard and the Dutch hazard analysis critical control point (HACCP) Standard.

There is much disagreement, however, given regional preferences and competition between the different standards, as to whether a single standard will ever emerge. Some think acceptance of similar – but slightly different – standards operating in parallel will be the most likely outcome.

Roland Vaxelaire, director for quality, responsibility and risk management at French retailer Carrefour, who replaced Tesco product integrity manager Chris Anstey as chairman of the GFSI board last year, said the idea was that a supplier “once certified, is accepted everywhere”. Vaxelaire, who is also on the board of the European Food Safety Authority, added: “Common acceptance of the four GFSI standards by retailers is very close.”

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