

TRANSPARENCY TO REALITY IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN

THE GLOBAL FOOD SAFETY INITIATIVE: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Chairman's Speech: February 2006

I am delighted to be here in Paris speaking to you at the 5th GFSI International Food Safety Conference.

I have had the pleasure of working with many retailers, manufacturers, standard owners, certification and accreditation bodies from around the world over the last few years. Since 2004 I have been the Chairman of the Global Food Safety Initiative.

Here we are in this independent world of open borders, mass migration, universal access to information and technology, drenched in global media –

This world has brought great benefits as trade becomes easier and high quality supply chains are developed and improved by companies that share a vision of getting it right for their customers.

Now we can start to see food safety issues for what they are.... incidents which affect everybody, in all countries.

Some of these incidents are entirely avoidable. We live in an interdependent global economy, but some people may not share the same values or visions. Some incidents are not so avoidable but still provide important lessons. The food industry will always share an imperative to learn from the failures, to share the best practice and to participate in an industry that always seeks to achieve continuous improvement.

The story of the GFSI has been an example of people working together to try to share values and visions. To try to make Food Safety an integrated and fundamental issue of interdependency.

We have just experienced a very important year for us. In June, the GFSI Foundation was formally created under Belgian Law.

The foundation has very simple aims

- Implement and maintain a scheme to recognise food safety standards world-wide
- Facilitate mutual recognition between standard owners
- Work towards world-wide integrity in the certification of standards and the accreditation of certification bodies
- A simple set of rules for standards, harmony between countries, cost efficiency for suppliers

The GFSI Foundation started with 6 Directors representing Royal Ahold, Carrefour, Metro, Migros, Tesco and Walmart. We were delighted to welcome a new Director during the year who is Cory Hedman from Hannaford's in the USA. We also welcomed two representatives from major manufacturers to support and advise the Board: Yves Rey from Danone and Dan Funk from Dole.

The GFSI foundation makes policy following these conferences. Last year in Rome, meetings before the conference involving our key stakeholders and especially the GFSI Task Force of retailers, gave us the suggestions that resulted in a Business Plan that I will tell you about in a moment.

This year we have just completed another series of meetings and have great feedback to help us put together next year's Business Plan

Let me tell you about the progress we have made in this year's plan.

First of all, we've benchmarked 7 standards during the year since the last conference.

Please note, this is the first round against the GFSI Guidance Document V4 that has raised the bar for all the standard owners. This round includes a benchmark of the protocols that deliver the standard. Some of the benchmarked versions of the standards had been issued before the GFSI document.

Post – farm gate

Safe Quality Food 2000
Dutch HACCP
British Retail Consortium
International Food Standard

Pre – farm gate

Eurepgap
Safe Quality Food 2000
New Zealand VEGFED

First, let me tell you first about the post-farm gate standards, all of which remain recognised.

BRC Version 4

A big change from the UK retailers in this new version published a year ago. The removal of Foundation and Higher Levels, and the inclusion of recommendations as requirements. A detailed protocol to help global implementation and a scoring system. Fully recognised against Version 4 by GFSI. Also the first standard owner to sign a contract with the GFSI Foundation.

Dutch HACCP

There remains an issue on accreditation which has now been overcome by the technical committee. We are expecting to be able to continue to work with Dutch HACCP to maintain their recognised status.

SQF 2000

The SQF 2000 is looking currently at building extra guidance into GMP sections, and has also changed its requirements for SQF Experts and auditors.

International Food Standard V4

IFS has been looking at a number of issues following benchmarking and we are expecting to continue to work together.

Now I would like to move on the pre-farm gate standards.

SQF 1000 was the first pre-farm gate standard to achieve full recognition from GFSI.

NZ VEGFED has been benchmarked, and is looking at a number of issues before deciding how to move forward.

Eurepgap has been benchmarked. They have asked GFSI to recognise their own benchmarking process. Our Guidance document does not allow us to do this. A GFSI contract is currently with the new Eurepgap Board.

At this point I would like to put up the list of retailer and industry experts who have been involved with the GFSI benchmarking process this year. I would like to thank them for their time and their efforts. If any delegates would like to be considered to be included in a future GFSI team, please let us know.

Following an informal meeting last year in Rome, the GFSI recognised standards all agreed to meet annually to report on their progress. We had our second meeting a couple of days ago here in Paris (update).

We've also been working with BRC and IFS in their communications with the European Commission recently who have been investigating the application of standards in the global market. The Commission is interested in helping poorer countries to develop their capacity to trade. We believe that GFSI represents a part of the solution and not a part of the problem. It is not enough to simply open the door to trade, but that we must help people and communities cross the threshold. For the moment though the task is to continue to build a practical dialogue with legislators.

Last year in Rome, the #1 question for GFSI was "What are you going to do about the ISO 22000 standard?"

Well, during this year we have seen the official launch of ISO 22000 and it has been greatly welcomed by many stakeholders within the industry. There has also been some confusion unfortunately.

GFSI had liaison status during the development of ISO 22000. This of course does not mean that we have benchmarked the new standard. In fact, it couldn't happen, as ISO policy wouldn't allow it.

We have been working with Jacob Faergemand, the Chairman of the committee that wrote and delivered the new standard, and also with ISO themselves. I am delighted to welcome Peter Donnelly the Chairman of CASCO (Conformity Assessment) to the conference today. I am also delighted to make the following statement

"ISO is a neutral provider and developer of a range of International conformity assessment Guides and Standards. One of the objectives of GFSI is to implement and maintain a voluntary scheme to recognise food safety management systems world-wide. ISO appreciates the facilitating role GFSI has played within the retail food industry since its formation in 2000 and the significant value GFSI can add in the development of ISO's

Family of food safety management standards. ISO has committed to work with GFSI to ensure that ISO international Standards on Food Safety have the greatest opportunity to meet the needs of the market. ISO and GFSI are currently exploring ways to collaborate to further advance global food safety matters of global interest

Good Agricultural Practice has been a harmonisation topic for GFSI throughout this year. It remains a difficult area. We are limited (rightly) to deal with food safety only. Therefore, Environment and Animal Welfare remain out of our scope. However, we have been seeking to continue to facilitate a discussion on this subject, and expect to be able to announce our future contribution during this coming year.

So what does all this tell you about the times in which we live? That whether you are French, American or Japanese – the number one task for working on food safety is to move from interdependence (where your problem becomes mine, and vice versa) – towards an integrated global community with shared values. We should be saying “These differences are interesting, let’s understand each other better so we can deal with food safety problems together”. Let’s share the issues and the solutions.

But those of us who believe in harmonisation have to work to ensure that achievements are not taken for granted or obscured by the inevitable disagreement attendant upon such an ambitious and complex project. When the rocky road to harmonisation becomes particularly difficult, I sometimes think back to the way we were... six years ago the world's food retailers did not actively collaborate on food safety... now we do.

The proliferation of food industry efforts to solve the many food safety challenges represents a very healthy approach from lots of stakeholders. All parties seek to identify and adopt best practice... GFSI aims to help them see and understand each other’s best practice better.

A quote I would like to propose to the Conference is from the author Max Beerbaum:

"There is much to be said for failure. It is more interesting than success"

So when we started to plan this conference we gave ourselves a very challenging title:

"Enhancing transparency from farm to fork"

Transparency is about showing what has happened in an open way. It is allowing light to pass through so that objects behind can be distinctly seen.

Things go wrong. Let's learn from them.

You will be the judge of how well our speakers today and tomorrow respond to the challenge. But you must also judge the conference on how knowledge is shared, how best practice is openly proposed and about how you manage to use the opportunities for discussion. Your participation is a part of making sure this international food industry delivers the continuous improvement it requires of itself. We can move forward, together.

And we are all here to listen to some great speakers, to meet new contacts and renew old ones.

Thank you!