

Meeting consumer requirements: quality, safety, emerging concerns

The Proposition

Enterprise managers and public sector policy-makers must implement more coordinated and robust strategies if local agro-industry, particularly the small and medium enterprise, is to meet effectively increasingly rigorous consumer requirements in the areas of food safety, health and quality.

Rationale and recommended response

Full responsibility for meeting safety and quality standards lies with each food chain stakeholder, irrespective of its size.

In recent years, the difficulties of complying with food safety standards have increased perceptively. Greater consumer demand for food attributes that far exceed existing legal standards is now having a significant influence on the buying decision. And private quality standards (i.e. those applied by agro-processors, importers and retailers) are, in turn, becoming more stringent and differentiated.

These more demanding consumer requirements are not limited to the international food market. Quality considerations now have a significant influence on consumer choice in the domestic market of most developing countries. This is having a significant impact on the ability of small and medium-sized agro-industries and agribusinesses in developing countries to compete.

It is, therefore, no longer sufficient that food producers and processors focus on meeting only legal food safety standards. Meeting these "minimum" requirements guarantees neither market access nor competitiveness.

While the public sector's primary responsibility is to maintain a national control system that protects consumer safety and health, this traditional role must be expanded to include support that enables local agro-industry to mount a comprehensive, consumer-oriented approach to safety, health and quality. Leadership must be exercised to create a "partnership for quality" with farmers, agro-processors, transporters, food companies and the scientific community.

Focus of the debate

- 1 Can the small and medium-scale food producer be expected to meet, in a cost-effective manner, the exacting food quality and safety standards of consumers and of the international market? Are there examples of success and, if so, how was this achieved and what lessons can be learned? What partnerships were in place?
- 2 What are the best market mechanisms for ensuring food quality and safety through the food chain? What negotiation schemes could be used to match the interests of international importers/exporters with those of small and medium agro-industries and agri-businesses in developing countries?
- 3 Other than safety and health considerations, what are the quality-related consumer requirements that have the greatest impact on the national and international competitiveness of food producing firms in developing countries?
- 4 Can larger agri-businesses and agro-processors assist smaller food producers and farmers to respond effectively to the challenge of meeting safety, health, quality and other consumer requirements? Does grouping, or clustering, food chain actors represent a relevant approach? Are there examples of such partnerships that could guide national strategy?
- 5 What constitutes a relevant public sector response to the challenge of meeting increasingly exacting consumer requirements in international, and domestic markets? How should such an effort be launched in coordination with other initiatives to raise the competitiveness of small-and medium-scale agro-industry? Do policy mechanisms and incentives provide the answer and, if so, which have been most successful?
- 6 How relevant is the notion of establishing a "partnership for quality" that involves farmers, the private sector and the scientific community? How should such a "partnership" be set up, managed and coordinated? And by whom?

Lisbeth Munksgaard is senior manager, external science and innovation at Danisco A/S, which is a world leading producer of bio based food ingredients. She has more than 25 years of experience in cooperation between the public and the private sector from positions in the food science academia and positions in food and feed administration. Thus she has experience in introducing and approving HACCP-systems in food premises, in risk management and risk communication and in building public-private food research partnerships. She is a member of the board of the European Food for Life technology platform, which is an industry led driver of industrial relevant food science in Europe.



Professor Thomas Ohlsson is currently senior advisor to the Swedish Institute of Food and Biotechnology (SIK) in Gothenburg, Sweden, from which he recently retired as Vice President and director of the research group on Environmental and Process Engineering and of SIK. He has done research on food processing and manufacturing technologies and also environmental and sustainability assessment of food production systems and products. Mr Ohlsson is a Fellow of the International Academy of Food Science & Technology and is a member of the operational group of the Food for Life technology.

Bernhilda Shamiso Kalinda is the Operations Manager for Choicenuts Zambia Ltd. which is a leader in processing and marketing of groundnuts. She has been Quality Assurance Manager in Cheetah Zambia Ltd. for processing and export of paprika as well as quality assurance management in flowers, agro processing and dairy products. She holds a BSc degree in Natural Sciences and certificate in Agribusiness.



Gustavo Idigoras is Counsellor for the Ministry of Agriculture in the Embassy of Argentina to the European Union since 2004. He serves as the Argentinean delegate to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Agricultural Committee and International Grain Council. Previously he was the Director of the National Department of Markets in the Secretariat for Agriculture in charge to multilateral and bilateral agricultural markets negotiations. He has also serves as Director of the International Affairs Department with the National Health Service (SENASA), in charge of market access negotiations.

Moderator: Dr. Roberto Cuevas (Guatemalan Chemical Engineer, M.Sc. Food Science and Technology, M.S. Chemical Engineering, Ph.D. Food Science and Food Engineering) is Senior Officer in Agro-Industries, Rural Infrastructure and Agro-Industries Division of FAO, Rome. He works on agro-industry policy and competitiveness, food quality and safety, process engineering and bio-energy, through normative work and field projects in Africa, Asia, East Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. During 1985-2000 he contributed to the design and implementation of programs to deliver high quality and safe, nutritionally-improved processed foods for millions of beneficiaries in poverty and malnutrition conditions in 10 Latin American countries, where he contributed to build partnerships of government, international organizations, the food industry, academy and agribusinesses.

