Impact of food safety compliance on growth of food and beverage business

By Roy Kirby

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We have, of late, experienced an alarmingly high number of food safety-related incidents, both in South Africa and globally. Re-establishing trust in the food safety industry, in manufacturers, and regulators is more necessary than ever. With a consistent approach to quality standards across geographies, and a genuine concern for developing a safety-centric culture for consumers, this is indeed possible.

Food safety-related outbreaks can have far-reaching consequences for all parties concerned across the supply chain. Singular events of foodborne disease outbreak can cause both devastating consequences for consumers including loss of life and notable reputational and economic losses for businesses. Some examples of direct and indirect economic losses include but are not limited to, cost of recall, product destruction, share price impact and time loss due to operational shutdown.

Growing, globalised food trade

The World Trade Organization and its predecessor, the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade have helped to create a successful international trading system, facilitating exceptional global economic growth over the last 60 years. A globalised food trade, extensive production and complex supply chains are factors that contribute toward an increased number of microbiological food safety outbreaks.

With the anticipated doubling of the global demand for food and international trade in the next few decades, it is expected that this will drive an increase in foodborne disease incidence. A factor contributing to the expected increase in foodborne disease, but not often considered, is that of growing and ageing populations. Young and elderly are higher risk consumers along with pregnant women and the infirm.

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Consumer empowerment raises the bar

In addition to the increasing demand, one of the global megatrends that impact the food industry is consumer empowerment. Technology has made access to information easier for consumers and as they become more knowledgeable, their increasing demands raise the bar for brand manufacturers continuously. Additionally, Mintel's 2018 report specifies a general mistrust of food safety throughout manufacturing and supply chains by consumers.

Advances in analytical and omics technologies are set to improve food safety by making great strides in surveillance. However, harmonization of applications in the global market present multiple challenges, with regards to policy, technology and operations. Such a multitude of challenges can only be addressed by an international and multidisciplinary community of researchers, public health practitioners, and other stakeholders.

Listeriosis outbreak shines a light on food safety in SA
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Maintaining public trust

Often the relationship between the regulator and industry is seen as one between stakeholders with opposing objectives. Recent meetings between industry and regulators held under the umbrella of the Global Food Safety Initiative have confirmed that this is not the case.

Some elements of successful food safety systems implementation include technical robustness, food safety-centric culture, horizon scanning and management commitment. In the manufacturing industry, implementation of robust food safety systems and compliance to standards is critical to ensuring business success and fostering international trade.

Public access to a safe food supply chain is seen by governments from around the world as a key element of ensuring public health. Both governments and industry have a role to play in maintaining public trust in the safety of food and maintaining that trust is key to ensuring the public have access to a healthy and balanced diet.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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