Simpler food safety makes strides

Expert Analysis

By **ROB KOCH**

NOWADAYS, many grocery chains and produce markets won't or are reluctant to accept product from suppliers without some form of a food safety program and proof of certification from either an independent third-party verifier or certification body.

One of the greatest challenges is meeting different buyers' food safety requirements with a single food safety program and managing the various audits requested by customers.

Multiple demands

Without a standardized audit or certification process, suppliers may suffer "audit fatigue" from devoting effort and resources to multiple audits to satisfy the food safety requirements of multiple buyers. Exacerbating this fatigue is the duplication that occurs from different audits requiring information in different formats. Further, most audits are active documents that will change with new technologies and customer demands.

There is hope. The food safety industries are beginning to address the burden of audit fatigue and duplication. In November 2007, GlobalGAP and the Safe Quality Food Institute, two of the larger certification bodies, agreed to harmonize aspects of their audit certification programs.

Key players

Here are the key elements of the most widely used certification organizations:

Safe Quality Food Institute, *www.sqfi.com*: SQF Institute was acquired by the Food Marketing Institute, *www.fmi.com*. SQF Institute offers two food safety audit certification programs, SQF 1000 and SQF 2000.

SQF 1000 is tailored to growers/producers. Components of the 1000 audit require the supplier to have site-specific plans developed for Good Agricultural Practices, and food safety and food quality concerns. SQF 2000 focuses on manufacturers/distributors. Included in the 2000 audit are Good Manufacturing Practices, and food safety and food quality plans specific to the manufacturer's or distributor's facility.

SQF certification also includes other components, such as worker welfare, environment, animal care and food security.

GlobalGAP, *www.globalgap.org*: GlobalGAP was previously known as EurepGAP, which was established in 1997 in response to customer concerns and to replace the cumbersome auditing system that required producers and retailers to complete multiple audits for different markets. GlobalGAP integrates all agricultural products into a single farm audit. To achieve certification, ag suppliers should follow the instructions found at its Web site.

GlobalGAP also has a unique complementary component called "benchmarking." If a nation or region has existing GAPs or other agriculture systems that comply with GlobalGAP's benchmarking process, the national or regional system can be recognized as an equivalent to GlobalGAP.

Primus Labs, *www.primuslabs.com*: California's Primus Labs provides services including pesticide residue testing for microbiological organisms, third-party auditing, development of documents and data management systems, and bilingual educational materials.

Primus Labs' audit and third-party verification services include the following organization and production processes: ranch, harvest crews, packinghouses, processing facilities, greenhouses and cooling/cold storage.

Also, Primus Labs offers online food safety-based document/manual development tools. By using these tools, organizations can develop site-specific GAPs, GMPs, monitoring logs, flow charts, standard operating procedures, employee education outlines and hazard plans.

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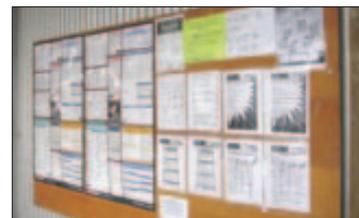
REQUIREMENTS: Portable bathroom and hand-washing facilities and bilingual labeling are standard requirements in food safety certification audits.

UP-TO-DATE: A central posting board keeps employees updated and informed.

DOCUMENT: Accident logs and documentation of employee activities are absolute musts for food safety programs.

Checklist for food safety protocol

WHEN developing food safety protocol and completing a certification process or audit, it's important to:

✔ Know the certification or audit requirements for a food safety program.

✔ Fully meet and then document or demonstrate that those requirements are regularly met within the supplier's food safety program.

✔ Know whether the certification satisfies the market's requirements; understand how often an audit of the food safety program is required by the supplier's markets; and know if their market requires their food safety program to achieve a certain audit score or level.

Most certifications or audits and market requirements cover Good Agriculture Practices, Good Manufacturing Practices, sanitation, hygiene, food security, pest management and environmental topics. However, agriculture suppliers may find that different markets require these topics and more. To ensure all necessary requirements are met, it is advisable to have documentation from the customers outlining specific requirements.