Update on Food Safety Systems

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AACC International was focused on food safety long before FSMA (Food Safety Modernization Act) became a popular acronym. In 2009 a Hot Topic session at the AACC Intl. Annual Meeting focused on food safety. More than 75 attendees participated in a workshop in which key areas of focus were identified and prioritized.

The AACC Intl. Food Safety Systems Task Force originated from this meeting. A group of experts and shareholders in the area of food safety systems has worked over the past two years to deliver against the identified priorities. It appears, as fall 2011 and the annual meeting approach, that there is an alignment between the efforts of the task force and anticipated guidance from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

This fall the FDA may begin to provide guidance with regard to regulatory action to support the FSMA legislation. This legislation has empowered the FDA to actively monitor and control food safety in the United States, including the safety of ingredients and foods that are imported.

The AACC Intl. Food Safety Systems Task Force will hold another Hot Topic session at the 2011 AACC Intl. Annual Meeting in Palm Springs, CA, on Tuesday, October 18, at 2:00 p.m. This session will provide an update on the efforts and deliverables from the past two years and then discuss priorities and the next steps.

Over the past two years, the Food Safety Systems Task Force Working Groups have been collaborating to develop and deliver new products to streamline food safety systems within food businesses:

• Common Supplier Survey
• Audit Scheme Guidance Document

These working groups were a collaborative effort of experts representing retailers, food manufacturers (including those who make consumer packaged goods), ingredients suppliers, academia, allied associations, and auditing organizations.

The Common Supplier Survey will be featured at the annual meeting during the Hot Topic session, as well as computer-based demonstrations in the AACC Intl. Marketplace. It will be posted on AACCnet as a free resource and download, with the hope that organizations will adopt this as their new supplier survey. The working group collected a broad range of supplier surveys that are being utilized, captured the best practices of each, and delivered a single comprehensive survey. The result is a survey that can be filled in by a manufacturer once and shared with its suppliers, eliminating redundancy and wasted resources. The survey is indexed and organized to a common format. Imagine if everyone used one survey what an organization could do with newly allocated resources focused on improving food safety programs.

A second working group embraced audit preparedness in light of the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI). Within GFSI there are two format schemes: product certification and food safety management certification. The food safety management certification uses ISO 22000 as its foundation and is paired with the applicable Publicly Available Standard (PAS), e.g., PAS 220 for food manufacturers. GFSI considers food safety management certification the future of food safety audits. To this end, the working group embraced the FSSC 22000 scheme and began work on an Audit Scheme Guidance Document. This group of experts met and reviewed the ISO 22000 standard line by line, providing interpretation and identifying where sharing best practices may be beneficial to the industry. The next step will be to complete this same analysis and guidance for PAS 220.

The output will be a web-based resource where individuals preparing for certification can find the Audit Scheme Guidance Document, which will provide interpretation of the standard and important considerations for the organization as they build their food safety programs. The goal is to allow the industry to collaborate through communication of best practices via a secure social network-based tool.

These working groups are focused on the following basic premises:

• “Eating safe food is a basic human right”
• Food safety is an area for industry collaboration
• Sharing best practices enhances the image of the food industry and ultimate consumer confidence

Other projects that have been identified and for which industry involvement is needed include:

• An AACC Intl. standard method for determining shelf life
• An AACC Intl. short course on grain traceability programs
• Development of a supplier quality manual
• Guidance on environmental monitoring programs

At the Hot Topic session, following an update on the Common Survey and the Audit Scheme Guidance Document for FSSC 22000, participants will have an opportunity to break into groups to develop and discuss a path forward for the additional projects identified.

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