ACCREDITED FOOD SAFETY TRAINING – FOOD INDUSTRY REAL NEED

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Abstract

Food safety is an increasingly important public health issue on global level. The main reasons for increasing level of food borne illnesses are lack of knowledge, lack of competent person in food production facilities, governmental food safety agencies, and public.

During delivery of Food Safety Trainings, (IRCA LA ISO 22000: 2005), all over the world, on students with different background, like Academia, Food Industry, Food safety agency, we notice that market needs competent employee.

In conclusion, competent person on market is achievable if all involved parties, has an impact on providing relevant learning solutions to the food industry:

a) Food industry:

To put accent on importance of food safety education and training for employees and managers in the food industry; strategic decision of opting for accredited versus un-accredited training; the choice and considerations of internal training delivery versus external training delivery;

b) Academy:

To define a food safety training curriculum and establish training standards that needs to be demonstrated at various stages of employment in order to produce safe food in accordance with current legislation and in line with best practice;

c) Government:

The methods and considerations for evaluating the effectiveness of food safety education and training.

Key words: *Food safety education and training, trainings, industry.*

1. Introduction

Almost all countries have a food control system, howsoever poorly developed or enforced, to protect their populations against unsafe, adulterated, or otherwise poor quality/safe food. The problem is not exclusive, namely food borne outbreaks show no distinction between developing versus developed countries. Recent data and information on food borne outbreaks have illustrated a worrying and increasing threat to public health.

The basic responsibility of industry is to produce and market good quality and safe food that is honestly presented. It is the duty of National Governments and Food Safety Agencies where single Agency or multi-Agency to ensure compliance by industry to national food quality and safety requirements.

In this paper we will focus on some of the reasons why this trend is occurring and what we can do to reduce and minimise the incidents and frequency of incidents from happening in the future via education and training.

2. The Important of Food Safety Training and Education

Regulation (EC) 852/2004 [1] lays down the general hygiene requirements for all food business organizations (FBOs). Food business organizations are responsible for ensuring that food handlers have received adequate instruction and/or training in food hygiene to enable them to handle food safely. Training should be appropriate to the tasks of staff in a particular food business organization and be appropriate for the work to be carried out. Training can be achieved in different ways.

These include in-house training, the organization of training courses, information campaigns from professional organizations or from regulatory authorities, guides to good practice etc. With regard to HACCP training for staff in small businesses, it must be kept in mind that such training should be proportionate to the size and the nature of the business and should relate to the way that HACCP is applied in the food business.

Both ISO and private label food safety standards emphasis the importance of training and development of the HACCP or Food Safety Team and all persons working for and on behalf of the food business organization that has or has the potential to impact food safety.

These standards go further by recognizing there is always a need to review the effectiveness of training and development and the competence of HACCP and/or Food Safety teams, to provide refresher training, and to train new personnel that have joined a HACCP and/or Food Safety team.

All the standards recognize the training of persons working for or on behalf of a food business organization should be proportionate to the size and the nature of the business and should relate to the way that HACCP and/or FSMS is applied in the food business organization and industry.

In summary, food safety training and education needs to address both technical, social, economic and cultural aspects of food safety and there is a need to develop food safety standards that need to be demonstrated at various stages of employment and persons level of responsibility in order to produce safe food in accordance with current legislation and in line with best practice.

2.1 Accredited versus Unaccredited Food Safety Training and Education

The question of accredited versus unaccredited training is a topic frequently raised by FBO's and the food industry. It is important to acknowledge that in-house training, or instruction and supervision, may adequately meet food safety training requirements even when programmes are not certified by a recognised Competent Body. The key issues for consideration include the competence of the Internal Trainer, not just in terms of the technical competence but in their ability to train 'Adults' and be familiar with different learning preferences of Learners. The second an arguably the most important issue is the effectiveness of the learning outcomes and the assessment procedures and records demonstrating the Learner has achieved the desired competency standards.

In summary, the FBO is primarily responsible for making its own decision on what options to select, all FBO's are encouraged to consult and take input from the Competent Regulatory Authority or Authorities who may have specific requirements that need to be met by the FBO.

2.2 Consideration of Internal versus external Food Safety Training and Education

Having identified a training need within the FBO, the FBO must then decide whether to use internal resources to deliver the training and/or to seek the assistance of an external training organization to design and deliver the learning solution. Both options offer different benefits as well as limitations.

At the end of the day, it is up to each FBO to decide for themselves what option to choose. In terms of food safety training clearly the quality of the Trainer and the training learning solution proposed are primary considerations to be reviewed by the FBO.

2.3 The need for an effective and industry centered food safety training curriculum

Food Safety education and training is consistent with the principle of prevention and a pro-active indicator of a FBO's food safety culture and commitment to supplying safe food and loss of reputational damage.

As stated by ISO 22000 [2], food safety is applicable to all organizations, regardless of size, which are involved in any aspect of the food chain and want to implement systems that consistently provide safe products. Hence food safety is not just for food handlers and/or the primary and secondary food producers, food safety is applicable to service providers, i.e. designers and service providers supply hygienic designs, installation and maintenance services, producers of equipment, transport and storage operators etc.

Both statutory and regulatory requirements as well as ISO and private label food safety standards requires education and training

- Ensure that all employees know their responsibilities to maintain the HACCP and/or Food Safety Management System.

- The HACCP and/or Food Safety Team and the other personnel carrying out activities having an impact on food safety shall be competent and shall have appropriate education, training, skills and experience.

- Personnel responsible for monitoring, corrections and corrective actions of the food safety management system are trained.

- There is a need to evaluate the implementation and the effectiveness of food safety training and education.

- Personnel are aware of the relevance and importance of their individual activities in contributing to food safety.

- Training and education needs to ensure that the requirement for effective communication is understood by all personnel whose activities have an impact on food safety, and

- The Food Business Organization needs to maintain appropriate records of food safety training, education and actions.

In summary, food safety training and education needs to address both technical and behavioural aspects of food safety.

As reported in the University of Surrey evaluation report of UK food hygiene and safety training [3] current evidence of the effectiveness of training is limited and the report further suggest the behavioural impact of training is low or could not be determined.

From our own experience as consultants, trainers and auditors the current food safety training gaps include:

- Food Safety education and training does not adequately cover modern scientific and management concepts, micro/chemical product standards, identification and evaluation of statutory and regulatory compliance, risk assessment, HACCP as defined by CODEX, specifically the selection of control measure combinations, validation etc., process and risk based auditing of food safety and finally the behavioural aspects of food safety.

- The lack of resources on methodologies for evaluating the effectiveness of training.

- The lack of a behavioural based program on food safety (Johnson [4]).

- Lack of resources trained inspectorate and laboratory staff, funding on ISO and private label food safety standards.

- Insufficient involvement of scientific expertise from the academia, industry, consumers to strengthen the scientific basis for food control decision making processes.

2.4 The role and responsibilities of Food Safety Agencies, Academia, and Industry

The FAO, within the United Nations publication 'assuring Food Safety and Quality - Guidelines for strengthening National Food Control Systems emphasise an increasingly important role for food control systems is the delivery of information, education and advice to stakeholders across the farm-to-table continuum (FAO/WHO [5]). Some Regional, National and local Food Safety Agencies have positively responded by providing information, advice and training to business on how to produce safe food. Some have gone a step further by setting competency standards to be met by FBO's. A practical example is the Guides to Food Safety Training, Levels 1, 2, and 3 which were produced by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) [6]. These guides were developed in consultation with industry representatives, authorised officers and training providers, and they define the minimum competences to be demonstrated by staff, appropriate to their stage of employment. Reference the FSAI website http://www.fsai.ie/food_businesses/training_guides.html

Academia has always played an important role in food safety education and training. The issue for academia is the current undergraduate and post graduate programs do not reflect the needs of the food industry and in particular in relation to the gaps identified in the industry centred food safety training curriculum.

For industry the challenge is to overcome the traditional barriers to food safety and education as highlighted in the University of Surrey evaluation report highlighted earlier [3] and to maximise the return on investment in training/evaluation of the effectiveness of training as highlighted by the International Journal of Environmental Research The impact of training on knowledge and standards of food hygiene – a pilot study (Powell *et al.* [7]).

3. Conclusions

- The importance of awareness, training and competence of all persons involved in the food chain cannot be underestimated in terms of its contribution to the prevention of food borne illness outbreaks, reputation damage for FBO and the industry as a whole.

- Irrespective of the interested party, Food Safety Agency, FBO, Service Provider such as the designer, installer of hygienic design products and services to the food industry there is a need to be knowledge of food safety statutory and regulatory requirements including relevant ISO and private label food safety management system standards.

- For Educational and Training Providers there is a growing need to provide industry centred and food safety programs that are flexible in design and delivery to address the various stages of employment of FBO personnel including their level of responsibility. The education and training programs need to be scientific and competence based effective and fit for purpose based on the 'real' needs of the FBO and the food industry.

4. References

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