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2010 FOOD SAFETY CONFERENCE - Press Highlights Day 1

The industry must speak as one voice

All stakeholders have a “duty to work together” to deliver safe food

In welcoming a record-breaking 675 delegates from 39 countries to the conference, The Consumer Goods Forum managing director Jean-Marc Saubade said consumer confidence had been shaken the world over, following a series of high-profile food safety incidents. The industry must work collectively to restore confidence and ensure that all consumers can exercise their right to buy and consume safe food. “We all have a duty to work together on a non-competitive basis to deliver this. It is imperative to join up the dots: between farm and fork; between science, industry and regulators; between standards, auditors and suppliers ...The industry will speak as one voice.” His call for collaboration was backed up by Leslie Sarasin, CEO of the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) and Pamela Bailey, President and CEO of the Grocery Manufacturers’ Association, two American trade bodies, who pledged to work together and with the Consumer Goods Forum to drive progress via the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI), which The Forum manages. In a call to action, JP Suarez, GFSI Board Chairman and Senior Vice President and General Counsel, International Division, Wal-Mart Stores, said GFSI was only as good as its participants. The initiative should not be an expensive luxury that only the biggest companies can afford. “We need to reach the small suppliers and figure out how to make GFSI relevant,” he said.

Don’t blame consumers

Safe food is producer’s responsibility, say consumers and academics

It is inappropriate to shift responsibility for food safety onto consumers, academics told the conference. While acknowledging that consumer education about cooking and food storage should improve, Marion Nestle Professor of Nutrition and Food Studies at New York University and author of Safe Food – The Politics of Food Safety, said that to focus on consumers as the weak link in the supply chain was to ignore the fact that most of the recent outbreaks of food borne illness in the US came from pre-cooked, fresh or ready-to-eat products. “It’s not the consumer’s fault,” Nestle told the conference. “They need safe food to begin with.” The opinion was also voiced by Lise Korsten, Professor and Plant Pathologist at the University of Pretoria, South Africa and Professor Doug Powell, Associate Professor of Food Safety at Kansas State University and founder of Barf Blog. The blog, which aims to spread awareness of food safety issues, often by amusing shock tactics, receives 20,000 visitors a day. Powell had a message for food handlers: “Dude, wash your hands!”

Research from Nielsen showed that consumers, too, place the primary responsibility for safe food at the door of manufacturers and producers. In an online poll of consumer perception of food safety in 54 countries, 68% of consumers said manufacturers had the main responsibility. Some 23% believed the onus was on the government to regulate, inspect and enforce policy, while only 8% blamed retailers. There was little correlation in the survey between geographic region or market maturity and the answers given, except when it came to consumers’ willingness to pay a premium for safe food. Here, those most willing to pay were clustered in developing markets, while consumers in developed markets were the least willing to pay extra for safe food. “The food retailer is not seen as the prima donna,” said Nielsen Director of Retail Insights Europe Jean-Jacques Vandenheede, presenting the results, “the manufacturer is.”

Choose partners within China to minimise risk

The rapid spread of supermarkets in China has been good for food safety, official says

Dr Junshi Chen, head of the Institute of Nutrition and Food Safety at the Centre for Disease Control & Prevention in Beijing, China, said that, despite “some outstanding incidents,” food safety as a whole had

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improved in China. This is thanks partly to new actions taken by the government – such as research and development investment, new tougher legislation and the development of a single mandatory food safety system, which will soon be implemented. But it was also partly due to the rapid development of modern retail. The expansion of supermarkets in China was to be encouraged, Junshi said: “It has been a good thing for food safety.” However, China’s problem is rooted in the sheer volume of very small producers who slip through the government’s net and cannot be adequately controlled. “In the [official] documents they may say that they are exporting bicycles, but really it is food, or pet food,” Junshi said. Ethics and honesty was a challenge. When foreign companies are assessing the risk of sourcing from a Chinese supplier, they should insist on government certificates, Junshi said. The Chinese government assurances are not enough. You must also get your own source of information within China [and work with] a partner, because “within China, people know very well if a source is good.”

The Consumer Goods Forum

The Consumer Goods Forum is an independent global parity-based Consumer Goods network. It brings together the CEOs and senior management of around 650 retailers, manufacturers, service providers and other stakeholders across 70 countries.

The Forum was created in June 2009 by the merger of CIES - The Food Business Forum, the Global Commerce Initiative (GCI) and the Global CEO Forum. The Consumer Goods Forum is governed by its Board of Directors, which includes an equal number of manufacturer and retailer CEOs and chairpersons. Forum member companies have combined sales of EUR 2.1trillion.

The Forum provides a unique global platform for thought leadership, knowledge exchange and networking between retailers, manufacturers and their partners on collaborative, non-competitive issues. Its strength lies in the privileged access it offers to the key players in the sector as well as in the development and implementation of best practices along the value chain.

It has a mandate from its members to develop common positions on key strategic and practical issues affecting the consumer goods business and to focus on non-competitive collaborative process improvement.

With its headquarters in Paris and its regional offices in Washington, D.C., Singapore, Tokyo and Shanghai, The Consumer Goods Forum serves its members throughout the world.

This press release is available on the website <http://www.theconsumergoodsforum.com>

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