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FOOD MANUFACTURE

Private and public collaboration on food safety

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The world's food industry moved yet another step towards a single global food safety standard with the announcement last week of an agreement between two private sector schemes and news of much closer collaboration between private and public sector bodies involved in food safety.

The private sector organised Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) and GlobalGAP have agreed to develop a joint approach to benchmarking for farm assurance scheme owners.

GlobalGAP is a private sector body that sets voluntary standards for the certification of agricultural products around the globe. The announcement was made at an international food safety conference in Barcelona organised by CIES – The Food Business Forum – which manages GFSI.



Picture courtesy of Istock: Andreas Reh

The move follows the strategic [alliance](#) established last year between GFSI and the US National Restaurant Association (NRA).

At the same time it emerged that GFSI would in future be working much more closely with the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and World Health Organisation which operate the Codex Alimentarius. Codex produces food standards, guidelines and codes of practice to protect consumer health and ensure fair food trade practices.

Closer collaboration between the private and public sectors was further encouraged by Robert Madelin, director general of the European Commission's consumer health directorate DG Sanco. "Let's talk more about how we can recognise what we are doing and get together to sell that to consumers."

The GFSI was set up in 2000 by retailers and manufacturers to pursue continuous improvement in food safety management systems, cost efficiency in the supply chain and, above all, safe food for consumers worldwide. It is an umbrella scheme for four different global standards: The British Retail Consortium (BRC), International Food Safety (IFS), Safe Quality Food (SQF) and Dutch Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP), which the GFSI has been attempting to "converge".

GFSI has also been working for some time to ensure its standards are complementary to the International Standards Organisation (ISO) food safety management standard ISO 22000. Last year the Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 220 was introduced, sponsored by the food industry, which is a standard designed to be used in conjunction with ISO 22000. It specifies requirements for prerequisite programmes (PRPs) to assist in controlling food safety risks within the manufacturing processes of international food supply chains.

Ezzedrine Boutrif, director of the FAO's Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division, said: "We see an important role for private standards in improving food safety." Chairman of the GFSI technical committee Kevin Swoffer added: "There is no conflict [between GFSI and Codex] – they actually complement each other."

Swoffer presented a hierarchy of food safety development with legislation providing the regulatory foundation, upon which Codex added the principles to follow; then ISO the generic standards; GFSI specific food safety "schemes"; above which were supplementary codes of practice that different companies might wish to follow.

GFSI and GlobalGAP have begun a review of the GFSI Guidance Document and the Globalgap Good Agricultural Practice Reference Standard with a view to aligning the two benchmarking processes and benchmarking criteria, to provide equivalent end results.

The partnership is intended to provide a harmonised and streamlined framework for benchmarking services to farm assurance food safety scheme owners specifically within the scope of food safety. It is hoped this will create greater recognition and confidence along the entire supply chain for all stakeholders from farm to fork.

J P Suarez, chairman of the GFSI and senior vice president and general counsel, International Division for Wal-Mart Stores, said: "We are delighted to form this partnership with GlobalGAP which will make recognition of food safety elements on farm much easier for retailers, manufacturers and food service operators."

Nigel Garbutt, chairman of GlobalGAP, added: "Producers will also benefit from a harmonised set of good agricultural practice food safety criteria, applicable to agricultural production around the globe."