

Why a Food Safety Culture?

Incorporating a culture-based approach to food safety where all employees are valued and trained to act on safety risks helps ensure a food safety program's success.

Liliana Casal-Wardle

The Acheson Group

presented as a part of the 2021 PMCA Virtual Production Conference

Food manufacturers are seeing enhanced requirements toward ensuring products remain safe for consumers. Regulators are strengthening food safety guidelines within the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and the New Era of Smarter Food Safety, launched by the FDA in 2020, the Safe Food for Canadians Act, stricter regulations within the EU and Safe Food Australia. The common denominator throughout these regulations is a preventive risk management approach to food safety.

Historically, human error has played a role in regulation deviations, contaminant outbreaks and product recalls. A culture is human—it has to do with feelings and beliefs about what is right and wrong based on our values and common sense, not simply because it is the law. A focus on incorporating a set of values within a food safety management model, along with commitment, training and reinforcement, guarantees consistency in a food safety program.

The food industry is increasingly aware of the need for consistency and the role of people and their behaviors in managing food safety risks to protect both brands and

consumers. It is essential to implement a culture-based approach to food safety where those at all organizational levels are valued and trained to act on safety risks.

CONSUMER FOOD SAFETY EXPECTATIONS

Consumers expect specific and accurate information about the products they purchase, and with a few taps on a smartphone, can easily access details and reviews on these products. Using social media, consumers voice their opinion whether they enjoy a product or had an unpleasant experience with it.

There is also an expectation of transparency in a food's origin and the quality and safety of its ingredients, along with consistent quality control from the farm to pantry shelves.

Consumers understand food control procedures, standards and activities that government and industry use to ensure a food supply is safe. Accuracy of labels and the expectation that products have consistent quality and taste are the least consumers expect for their loyalty to the products they choose to consume.



Liliana Casal-Wardle, PhD, is senior director of food safety at The Acheson Group. She specializes in regulatory compliance, risk mitigation, project design and processes for brand and consumer protection.