

AACC International Food Safety Systems Task Force: Consumer Confidence Built with Collaboration, Not Competition

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Call to action! Food safety is an area for collaboration. The food industry as a whole stands to benefit, or fail, based on the performance of individual organizations. Consumer confidence can be gained when the food industry consistently delivers safe foods. Sharing best practices allows the industry to move more rapidly toward the goal of perfection. Learn what AACC International working groups are doing to move the safety of our food forward and get involved.

At the center of this discussion are our communities, our families, and our brands. Eating safe foods is a basic human right. The AACCI Food Safety Systems Task Force was formed in 2009 when food safety initiatives began to expand rapidly and impact the daily activities of all food-related businesses. AACCI meeting attendees expressed concern that valuable food safety, quality, and regulatory resources are being utilized to prepare and execute multiple audits and complete redundant customer surveys at the expense of not advancing the safety of our food supply. Lack of standardization has resulted in competing requirements and further delays in food safety improvements. Recent recalls, reports of deaths associated with tainted foods, and the threat of intentional adulteration have weakened consumer confidence. The U.S. government has responded by increasing the authority of the Food and Drug Administration through the Food Safety Modernization Act of 2011. Compelled by the need to rapidly deploy solutions, member organizations have volunteered their time to participate in the AACCI Food Safety Systems Task Force. The task force has undertaken the challenge to develop tools for the industry to

- Share best practices, provide guidance and direction, and improve the safety of our food supply chain through collaboration
- Optimize the deployment of food safety resources by eliminating redundancy and streamlining efforts

The task force operates as a group of volunteers who contribute through active participation in working groups. These volunteers are both AACCI members and nonmembers who have experience and expertise in the area of food safety and food safety systems. The working groups conduct their efforts primarily through conference calls, with some in-person meetings when needed. The initial efforts of the task force were focused on embracing the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) by developing a Common Survey and ISO 22000 help guide.

The Common Survey represents a compilation of numerous customer survey questionnaires. Development of a single survey to address common food safety, quality, and regulatory

information allows for questions to be answered once. The customer receives a prompt response to their request for standard information when the supplier forwards a copy of the survey. This limits redundancy in responding to customer requests and allows more focus on nonstandard concerns and customer solutions. The Common Survey is currently available for free download on AACCI and will soon be available for free download through iCiX.

The ISO 22000 Guidance document provides input from industry experts on achieving compliance with the base standard for GFSI audits, such as FSSC 22000 and Synergy 22000. The guidance document was developed through input from industry food safety experts and represents their interpretation of the standard requirements with examples and sharing of best practices. This guidance document is currently undergoing peer review by a second group of experts.

The future direction of the AACCI Food Safety Systems Task Force has been prioritized based on input from members of the task force, AACCI focus groups, annual meeting participants, and allied trade organizations, including the American Oil Chemists' Society (AOCS), the American Bakers Association (ABA), and the North American Millers Association (NAMA), as well as direction from an Ideation Round Table of industry executives representing eight major food companies. New working groups are forming and beginning to work on the next set of deliverables:

- Guidance document PSA 220
- Model food safety system
- Traceability
- Allergen global harmonization
- Shelf-life standard method
- Supplier manual
- Risk assessment—How to
- Audit check list
- Environmental monitoring

The payoff for these volunteers and their organizations is that ultimately the industry will have better tools and knowledge to work with, not to mention streamlining of the process to deliver safe foods. As a member of a working group, there is an opportunity to set the direction the food industry will take. To get involved or to volunteer members of your organization, please contact Jody Grider (jgrider@scisoc.org) at AACCI headquarters.

Collaboration is a strong thread in the fabric of this task force effort. The members believe that through collaborative efforts the best systems and tools will be available to the industry to protect our communities, our families, and our brands.

The challenge now is to get involved. You can start to use these new tools; you can help create the tools that are being developed; and you can promote the AACCI Food Safety Systems Task Force tools to your customers and suppliers. When the industry works together, everyone wins!

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