

HOW FOOD SAFETY CAN GROW YOUR BUSINESS



Food manufacturers are required by law to employ food safety management systems created to “assure food safety from harvest to consumption”. Current guidelines have meat and poultry producers attached at the hip to USDA *Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point* ([HACCP](#)) and *Food Safety & Inspection Service* ([FSIS](#)) standards. Food production is a tricky business.



Food safety is a pinnacle of food production. High-level safety certifications, global reach and premium service deliver invaluable tools for building brand and increasing customer base. If food safety is absent from your marketing budget, it shouldn't be.

WHY GFSI

Big box retailers such as Wal Mart and Costco require GFSI certifications. If you don't have it, they'll want to know when you can get it. Whether you're a large vendor or an upstart vying for a tiny piece of shelf space, high level safety protocols put you in the game and help manage your business.

The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) is the benchmark for global food safety standards. Enacted in 2000, it is a certification required to do business with most large food service and retail chains. GFSI helps pave the way for the voluminous number of food supply chain vendors from start to finish.

The independent certification process is not an easy one. Third party auditing groups generally perform the type of food safety audits required for GFSI certification: SQF (Safe Quality Food), BRC (British Retail Consortium) and FSSC22000, are just a few. Find the complete list at [My GFSI](#). It takes 12 to 18 months on average to get approved, and can cost upwards of \$50,000 or more. Unfortunately, the size of your company has no bearing on the process. Small and large companies alike face the same types of fees.

Companies who pursue GFSI certification are able to elevate their reputation and marketability by demonstrating the highest standards of food safety.

EXPORTABILITY

Domestically, you know the rules and your customer base inside and out – export changes everything. There are different levels of certifications and requirements to export products from the U.S. Each country you do business with will have their own requirements, some of which require [EV Certification](#) (export verification).

Similar to GFSI, EV requires specific programs and processes audited by the [AMS](#) (Agriculture Marketing Service, a division of the USDA) twice a year. Sellers will be required to write dedicated export programs providing source verification on all products. Each country will also have specific documents that need to be completed and signed off by a USDA veterinarian prior to shipping.

Once the necessary export requirements are met, you will need to consistently monitor them for change. Where China, for example, currently holds vendors accountable for certain anti-microbial compounds, another country may not – or China may change their requirements next month.

Export requirements are fluid; ever evolving in a choppy sea of international regulations and guidelines. If you choose to grow globally, your business must stay on top of these situations, be prepared for robust source verification programs and bear any on site audits conducted by the USDA.

SAFE SERVICE

Food processors and manufacturers are ultimately liable for the products they sell. It is this trickle-down effect that commands food safety be a top priority. Providing the best all-around service that you possibly can to your customers, should also play a big role.

Managing the *cold chain* for refrigerated and frozen food is crucial. When a customer receives an order, their purchase may have already been “temped” numerous times – from the line, to storage, packing, shipping, etc. Your customers need to feel confident top food quality has been maintained at all times.

Often times, it comes down to a question of *where* your customers store their protein. For example, meat should be stored under 35 degrees if possible, near the back of coolers to avoid spoilage from frequent door openings letting warm air in.

It is equally critical for sellers to help their customers handle food correctly, wherever they may fall in the supply chain. Whether you’re serving packers, retailers or restaurateurs, *always work directly with your customers* – help them achieve best shelf life and proper storage. If your customers want to do in-house processing, cutting and/or packaging, they also need to become acutely aware of food safety procedures and may need to have their own HACCP plan in place.

It is to your mutual benefit to help your customers with all facets of food safety and any potential protocols. Vendors who take the extra time to assist and educate, build strong profitable relationships.

GROWING PAINS

Government compliance and ever-changing certification requirements drive big companies to invest deeply in food safety. They understand how crucial it is to their bottom line.

Smaller companies often ignore the value of food safety investment citing time, personnel and cost. Regrettably, it isn’t until they see their businesses suffer, that they realize the benefits of food safety investment far outweigh the front-end commitments they should have made.

WRAP UP

Food safety is a critical part of the food industry. Protein Producers must have solid food safety programs in place to create high value products, ensure liability protection and provide premium customer service.

One of your potentially biggest sales tools is food safety. High level safety protocols gain access in the marketplace, help you stand out in the crowd and ultimately grow your customer base.

PPG Founder, Tim Vlcek has a wealth of hands on experience with domestic and global food safety issues. If you’d like to know more about GSFI certification and global exporting, please feel free to contact him directly at: Tim@theproteinprofitgroup.com.

