FOOD SAFETY ISSUES & TRENDS FOR 2020

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Change is coming. And it's coming soon. The Food Standards Agency has pledged to change the way it monitors food businesses by 2020, but what does that mean for your food business? What's the bigger picture regarding the future of food safety? And what can you do to prepare?

For answers we cherry-picked a panel of food industry experts covering issues such as emerging consumer trends, new technology, regulatory change, and how to turn food safety from a box-ticking exercise into a competitive advantage.

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REGULATORS TIGHTEN UP; CONSUMERS DRIVE CHANGE

The FSA has pledged to change the way food businesses are monitored by 2020. For starters: there will be a renewed focus on the consumer having the right to make culinary choices based on fact, not fabrication. That means the FSA will be doing everything in its power to make sure food is exactly what it claims to be. It ties in to the FSA’s overarching aim of moving towards the best food future possible.

Consumer or regulator: who’s driving food safety standards?

Is it legislation or regulation that drives change in the food industry? Ten years ago most people would likely have said that regulation is the primary arbiter of food safety standards. But as businesses see others suffering the catastrophic impact of incidents such as the E.coli outbreak on profits and customer loyalty, more are taking the lead on putting food safety at the heart of the business.

A NEW ERA OF ENGAGED CONSUMERS...

Hungry consumers don’t want to eat a horse

You already know the story. At the beginning of 2013, the news broke that meat masquerading as beef, in millions of burgers and ready-meals, was up to 100% horsemeat. The nation’s collective eyebrow was raised in the direction of food suppliers, food retailers and murky supply chains. The result is that consumers are sceptical.

Spanish research firm Azti-Tecnalia predicts a growing consumer demand for transparent, accessible information on food safety and traceability - as well as increasing desire for information on the personal, social, economic and environmental impacts of different food choices. In a nutshell: consumers want a greater connection with the food they are eating.

As we move toward 2020, food businesses that can vouch for the origins of their food will have a major competitive advantage.

Every customer is a critic

We live in an age where consumers can hold a fresh Panini in one hand and write a review of your business on their smartphone with the other. The reach of social media and online reviews means that reputation matters more than ever. Food safety blunders spread fast and, faced with more choice than ever before, diners use online reviews to help decide where to eat. Being alert to what’s being said about you online will become even more important in the run up to 2020.
But do consumers know enough about food risks?

Let’s take burgers, for example - a staple among restaurant diners. Many restaurants are offering their customers the option of a rare burger. Yet Professor Hugh Pennington, a world-renowned leader on E. coli, has found the risk of contracting E. coli from a rare burger is around one in 1,000.

It’s unlikely consumers are aware of that initial risk - nor the food safety steps that food businesses should take to mitigate the risk. Regulation has a crucial role in driving future food safety standards and helping food businesses enhance their reputation with customers.

Food safety sentencing gets tough

The FSA is determined to give this regulation teeth: from January 2016 large food retailers and manufacturers that breach food safety regulations will be subject to new sentencing guidelines. Fines for corporate manslaughter are set to massively increase - and could reach £3 million per offence.

ACTION POINTS FOR 2020

• Food businesses that can vouch for the origins of their food will gain a major competitive advantage as sceptical customers search for authenticity and quality.

• From 2016 large food businesses will be subject to new sentencing guidelines, with drastically increased fines for food safety blunders.

• Small food businesses should anticipate stricter sentencing as the FSA moves to crack down on manufacturers, suppliers and retailers who mislead the end customer. The FSA’s pledge is based on the belief that customers have the right to know that what they are eating is exactly what it claims to be.

DINING OUT & THE FUTURE OF FOOD BUSINESSES

An increased desire for dining out means UK restaurants, cafés and street food vendors are getting busier. How do food businesses satisfy growing demand while optimising food safety?

DINING OUT IS GROWING IN POPULARITY

For the past decade there has been year on year growth in the number of breakfasts, lunches and dinners that are being consumed in the nation’s cafés and restaurants. Breakfast has seen the biggest growth. 1 in 3 people eat their morning meal out at least once a week in the UK. As a nation, UK customers spend £76 million every day on breakfast. Food industry insight consultancy Horizons predicts that the UK food service sector will grow by £10 billion to be worth £56.3 billion by 2019, driven by pizza delivery outlets, managed branded pubs, pub restaurants and coffee shops. It’s fabulous news for the industry, but it does pile pressure on restaurant staff - and has knock-on effects in terms of food safety.

WHAT ABOUT MANUFACTURERS & SUPPLIERS?

How does the growth in restaurant dining affect food manufacturers and suppliers? Consumers want fresh food, on demand, seven-days-a-week. As retailers attempt to meet ever-growing consumer demand they will look for flexible suppliers who are capable of delivering produce off-peak. Seven-day-a-week culture, even in the UK’s smallest cities, is the new normal.

Retailers also want authenticity. Do you know where you source your ingredients from? Do you know where your suppliers source their raw ingredients from? Raised alertness to food origins is a trend that’s likely to have considerable staying power. Provenance will be the watchword as we move towards 2020.

Finally, as retailers are forced to measure up to increasingly stringent food safety regulations and consumer expectations, so they will look to their suppliers to do the same. If it is applicable to the type of food you produce, you will find more retailers insisting on automated temperature monitoring that alerts you if your storage falls outside a pre-defined range. Another fast-developing trend - born from how difficult it is to manage paper records - is for safety checks to be recorded electronically with a tamperproof date and time stamp.

2. Big Hospitality: Brits spend £76m a day dining out for breakfast - http://www.bighospitality.co.uk/Hot-Topics/Dining-trends/Brits-spend-76m-a-day-dining-out-for-breakfast [accessed 05.12.15]

THE FUTURE OF FOOD SAFETY TECHNOLOGY

From mobile apps to automated fridge monitors, there’s a growing range of smart technology available for food safety applications that makes it easier, faster and less invasive than ever before to monitor food safety. As we move towards 2020, we will see rapid adoption of smart systems such as Checkit within the food and hospitality sector. They will become essential not just for food safety and compliance management but ensuring the countless tasks required to run an efficient business and provide the best possible customer experience are carried out correctly.

THE END OF PEN AND PAPER SAFETY CHECKS

Food safety checks need to be carried out day-by-day, week-by-week and they have to be ready for inspection when the environmental health officer comes knocking. Today, the vast majority of food businesses use pen and paper-based safety checks for at least part of their overall food safety plan. After all, pen and paper is cheap, readily available and requires minimal effort upfront. But pen and paper-based safety checks, have considerable downsides. And the more sites you have, the bigger the problem.

1. They are tedious
Filling in paper-based safety checks is tedious, not least for staff who are already busy and the temptation is to hurry or skip them.

2. They can be falsified
Paper-based records are easy to falsify and they don’t notify you when it’s time to run a check. Your staff have very little to gain by falsifying them maliciously, but when kitchens are at their busiest there will always be a temptation to fill in safety sheets after-the-fact.

3. There’s potential for human error
Everybody makes mistakes. Typos, incorrect values and illegible scrawls come with the territory. That’s less than ideal when you are counting on a reliable stream of data to keep your business in check.

4. They are frustrating to store
A month’s worth of paper soon adds up to a hefty pile. As for five years’ worth … let’s hope you have a lot of storage space. You also need a filing system that allows you to locate a specific safety check, for a specific date at any given time. That’s easier said than done. Let’s also not forget that pen lids can easily find their way into food.

“...The problem with paper is forefront in everybody’s mind. People are starting to think about what sorts of technologies can help them and bring risks under greater control.”

- Dr Martin Nash, Checkit
SMART SAFETY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

The future of food safety is digital: a complete cloud-based platform will comprise a work management system that uses digital checklists and alerts to ensure that manual checks are carried out correctly and issues rectified. In addition, wireless sensing devices can automatically gather data on key areas of your kitchen or storage facility to monitor conditions such as temperature and humidity. Together, work management systems and wireless sensors not only liberate staff from paper-based checks they provide ‘Peace of mind’ to the business that key controls and risk areas are being properly managed. As a result, more businesses are adopting these new technologies. By 2020, it’s reasonable to expect that digital food safety management systems will be standard in the majority of professional kitchens, regardless of business size.

Here’s a quick rundown of what’s possible.

**Manual checks via digital checklists**
When staff carry out manual checks they are entered via a mobile like device, automatically time stamped and centrally recorded. No need for form filling. No illegible handwriting.

**Data capture via automated sensors**
It’s now possible to install fixed sensors that automatically capture data on metrics like fridge temperature, hot storage temperature and even the number of times a freezer door has been opened in a given timeframe. Data is transferred, stored and accessed centrally from any internet enabled device. No need for manual checks. No human error.

**Everything monitored - across multiple sites - from one location**
A simple screen provides a real-time feed of what’s happening at key food safety hotspots. You gather more data than ever before, with less effort than ever before, avoiding wasted time checking compliance data manually and unnecessarily. That spells big time and cost savings for any single-site business. And for multi-site businesses, the potential time-savings are phenomenal.

**Alerts when something isn’t right**
Systems that send out automated emails or SMS messages when they detect that something isn’t right - for example, if a freezer rises above a pre-defined temperature or an important food delivery is rejected – will enable you to take action fast. Tablets or smart hand held devices within the kitchen area allow your team to check that everything’s running smoothly at a glance. And if something does go wrong and triggers non-compliance? On-screen prompts will guide the user through the corrective action required to fix the problem - leaving an audit trail in the process. Cloud, tablet and mobile technology - is second-nature to millennial staff. It will be as easy to use as social media apps.

**Tamperproof safety records that are easy to review**
With digital food safety management systems you have a constant stream of data on your critical control points - time-stamped. And because it’s all stored centrally in the cloud, it’s easy for managers to go in and check the figures. No more wading through stacks of paper checks. No more filing cabinets. Managers can take a proactive approach to food safety and manage by exception rather than wasting time sifting through stacks of paper.

**What today’s technology will look like tomorrow?**

> We’ll see increasing usage of cloud-based technology and smart, simple to use handheld devices. Technology that allows more rigour in terms of how food safety is carried out and how records are captured and stored will provide brand protection against food incidents or claims that might damage the business.  

- Dr Martin Nash, Checkit

Automated checks on things like fridge temperature can only take you so far. Integrated kitchen management systems allow managers to use one system to create and incorporate checklists, alerts and audit trails for manual aspects of food safety such as kitchen opening, taking delivery, staff rotas, stock rotation and so on. This technology will empower staff to manage food safety via smartphones and tablets. The easier it is to execute food safety strategies, the more likely they are to be successful.

**ACTION POINTS FOR 2020**

- Pen and paper based HACCP safety checks will be redundant in most professional kitchens – replaced with time-saving, time-stamped and always accurate automated and digital checklist systems that do the job for you.

- Many businesses will have installed electronic kitchen management systems that allow you to control kitchen safety, stock rotation, staff rotas, stock ordering, delivery processes and more via synchronised wall-mounted tablets.
CONCLUSION - PREDICTIONS FOR 2020

The food industry is evolving at a phenomenal rate. Consumer preferences are changing. Revolutionary technologies are emerging and the regulatory landscape is in constant flux. More than ever before, your success as a food business depends on new technology to satisfying the demands of regulators and consumers. The food industry is evolving at a phenomenal rate. Consumer preferences are changing.

CONSUMER PREFERENCE & REGULATION

Many consumers are acutely engaged with issues of food safety and provenance. As 2020 approaches it will be increasingly important for food businesses to be able to vouch for the origins and authenticity of their products - and the FSA has made a public promise to change the way it operates to better police food businesses that deceive their customers. Food businesses should also prepare for allergen labelling to become more expansive, which could have knock-on effects on packaging operations and staff training.

THE FUTURE OF RESTAURANTS

As a nation we are dining out more and more and food businesses need to be alert to fast-moving consumer trends. Authenticity and quality are important watchwords, but when it comes to menus diversity is vital. Food businesses must be imaginative in considering what they can do differently to inspire consumer palates. Solo dining will also continue its year-on-year growth so busy urban restaurants should be ready to welcome lone diners. As for fast food, increasing numbers of consumers will seek out culinary options that are healthier. Good food on demand will be increasingly important.

FOOD FRAUD & TRACEABILITY

Businesses will need to be more proactive in policing the integrity of their supplier-retailer relationships - arranging their own audits if necessary. Forward-thinking businesses will become early adopters of emerging technologies like biological barcoding in order to improve traceability. All businesses should complete a vulnerability assessment to identify potential areas for food fraud or the malicious adulteration of produce.

FOOD SAFETY TECHNOLOGY

The future of the professional kitchen is digital. By 2020 pen and paper based safety checks will be redundant in the majority - replaced with digital work management and automated monitoring technology that gathers and interprets data on key food safety hotspots. Digital kitchen management systems allow businesses to monitor and control every aspect of routine tasks and compliance management - from food safety management to stock ordering and taking food deliveries.

“Businesses need to catch up and put these systems into place. Staff are receptive because Checkit makes it easy for them to get the tasks done that will guarantee the safety of the food.”

- Luis Navarro, Nanna Mexico