
GS1 Singapore Food Safety Forum 2016: Focus on Traceability

Today's global food supply chain has evolved into a complex and tangled maze. Besides the increasing difficulty to ascertain the products' origin, ingredients and their attributes, it is also hard to ensure food safety along the supply chain from the farm through to food processing, retail and finally to the consumer.

While this dynamic 'food supply web' appears daunting, having a traceability standard can help track and monitor the multiple threads of this enormous web, hence improving public safety and boosting consumer trust.

This was the key takeaway for more than 80 participants who attended the GS1 Singapore Food Safety Forum 2016 held on 28 July at the SMF House. With the theme "**Gaining Consumer Trust through Traceability in the Food Supply Chain**", this forum, which was organised by GS1 Singapore, aimed to provide a platform for food industry professionals to learn insights from industry experts on different facets of traceability and food safety.



Participants at the GS1 Singapore Food Safety Forum held at the SMF House

Importance of Traceability

In his opening address at the forum, Mr Sunny Koh, SMF Deputy President and Chairman of SMF Food & Beverage Industry Group, stressed the importance of traceability in the food supply chain. Noting that failure in traceability in the food supply has resulted in several food safety incidents, locally or globally, he said, "As the value chain becomes more complicated with business-to-business interfaces, the threats to food quality and safety also increase."

According to him, there is an urgent need for an effective traceability system in the food supply chain to reduce the number of recalls, combat fraudulent activities and counterfeit products, monitor products coming from countries with lower health and safety standards, assess risk of contamination or spoilage due to the long and complex supply chains, and avoid food-borne illnesses due to contaminants.

"I believe we do have the basic tools or infrastructure to create a much more effective traceability system in our food supply chain. As a sophisticated metropolis and trading hub within the region, it would put Singapore on the world map if we could spearhead the development of such a system," he added.



Mr Sunny Koh, SMF Deputy President and Chairman of SMF Food & Beverage Industry Group, giving his Opening Speech.

Food Safety: A Shared Responsibility

That food safety should be a shared responsibility was a point of consensus for at least three speakers at the forum. The first speaker to drive home this point was the keynote speaker, Dr Ch'ng Ai Lee, Senior Specialist of the Veterinary Public Health Laboratory Chemistry Division, Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA).

Speaking on the topic '**Ensuring Food Safety in Partnership with the Industry**', Dr Ch'ng's view was that food safety should be a shared responsibility amongst the government, the industry (producers, manufacturers and distributors) and the consumers. Her speech addressed areas such as AVA's responsibilities for food safety, food legislation and standards, food safety challenges, an integrated food safety system and food safety testing.

Dr Ch'ng added that AVA has put in place a Food Safety Partnership Scheme since 2003 to give recognition to manufacturers, importers or supermarkets or grade 'A' restaurants that have displayed commendable food safety assurance and undertaken food safety consumer education efforts.



Dr Ch'ng Ai Lee, Senior Specialist of the Veterinary Public Health Laboratory Chemistry Division, Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA), passionately presenting on Ensuring Food Safety in Partnership

This theme of shared responsibility was further reinforced by Ms Chong Nyet Chin, Director, Food Safety & Quality, NTUC Fairprice Co-operative Pte Ltd, who spoke on "**Food Safety Requires a Culture of 'Shared Responsibility'**". Ms Chong stressed that the responsibility for food safety is shared between the public and private sectors and that the industry needs to 'harmonise standards'. Within the industry, a cultural change is needed to get the players to think global and act locally, and to demonstrate transparency.

NTUC is the first supermarket chain in Singapore to be awarded the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) certification in 2001. Since then, the group has adhered to the HACCP international standard of ensuring food safety and handling.



Ms Chong Nyet Chin, Director, Food Safety & Quality, NTUC Fairprice Co-operative Pte Ltd, sharing with the participants about a Culture of 'Shared Responsibility'

Mr Wong Seng Yew, Verification and Audit Manager Asia of Oceania & Africa Nestle Quality Assurance Centre, also gave a perspective on '**Food Safety Management at Nestlé**'. According to Mr Wong, the application of food safety management system (FSMS) is mandatory in Nestlé as it is part of the company's quality management system.

Given the increasing attention on food safety and compliance, Nestlé has established an early warning system to identify potential issues well in advance to avoid issues and crises. While synergies between all business operators in the food chain are pivotal to ensure end-to-end safety, Nestlé also employs increasingly sensitive, simple and affordable analytical methodologies enhanced by advances in data analysis to ensure food safety.



Mr Wong Seng Yew, Verification and Audit Manager Asia of Oceania & Africa Nestle Quality Assurance Centre, sharing on Food Safety Management at Nestlé

Traceability is on the cards

GS1 Singapore's Technical Manager, Mr Andy Siow shared his perspective on '**How to develop a thorough traceability system based on Global Traceability Standards**'. According to Mr Siow, the findings of a recent survey on Food Safety & Product Quality Practices in Singapore showed that 71.4% of the companies have plans to implement a traceability system to further strengthen their existing safety and quality management programme, while 70% of the respondents are in favour of a standard-based traceability solution to trace product information along the entire supply chain.

Mr Siow said that the GS1 Global Traceability standard can help provide a single traceability process to comply with all quality and regulatory requirements. This standard ensures interoperability with trading partners, allows for efficient recall or tracing of end-to-end supply chain, determines the minimum requirements for all company operations across sectors and makes traceability global in scale and technology-independent.



Mr Andy Siow, GS1 Singapore's Technical Solutions Manager, sharing his perspective on 'How to develop a thorough traceability system based on Global Traceability Standards'

Systems and Tools to support Traceability

Mr Gennady Volchek, CEO, Authenticateit™ Pty Ltd, who spoke on "Traceability to Trust: Is it Genuine? Is it Safe? Was this product recalled?", shared with the audience the benefits of Authenticateit™, an app that provides consumers and brands greater protection from the threat of illegal and unauthorised imports.

Speaking on "Food Traceability using Digital Colour Labels", Mr Alfred Au, Regional Business Development (AP), VIPColour Technologies Pte Ltd, highlighted the merits of tools such as the VP700 On-Demand Color Label Printer which are PTI (Product Traceability Initiative)-compliant.

For Mr Liew Yew Fah, Vice Chairman, Mandai Link Logistics, the issue of "Maintaining Control of the Cold Chain" is "one of the biggest challenges for Food Distributors". He shared some of the best practices for safe distribution, which include temperature monitoring, facility inspection, warehouse sanitation, insulation of delivery trucks and real-time visibility tracking system.



From Left: Mr Gennady Volchek, CEO, Authenticateit™ Pty Ltd, Mr Alfred Au, Regional Business Development (AP), VIPColour Technologies Pte Ltd and Mr Liew Yew Fah, Vice Chairman, Mandai Link Logistics, sharing on their views on the topic of Food Safety

Ms Angela Chua, Trainer & Consultant, Synergy Asia, spoke on the "Basic Audit Requirement on Traceability in Food Safety Management System".



Ms Angela Chua, Trainer & Consultant, Synergy Asia, sharing with participants on the Basic Audit Requirements that are present on Traceability in Food Safety Management

Commenting on the forum, Ms Hoong Yu Qin, Assistant Manager of Quality Assurance Department at Sheng Siong Group, said, "The forum focuses on a subject that is very interesting, and it is good that we have so many experts sharing their knowledge with us."

Dr Ch'ng sums it up well with this statement, *"Given the paramount importance of food safety and as Singapore is an international trading hub with food imports from so many countries, I believe we are heading towards a requirement for traceability in our food supply chain. But this should be a shared effort and responsibility too. What is needed is for us to harmonise, synchronise and standardize, but it is easier said than done."*

The forum, which was covered by Channel News Asia, has indeed put the timely spotlight on the subject of traceability, which is becoming increasingly important for Singapore. There is no question about the 'why' for an effective traceability standard or system. The importance now lies in the 'how-to' aspect of the issue.



Ending the forum with smiles

From Left:

**Mr Liew Wai Leong (CEO, GS1 Singapore),
Ms Angela Chua (Trainer & Consultant, Synergy Asia),
Dr Ch'ng Ai Lee (Dr Ch'ng Ai Lee, Senior Specialist of the Veterinary Public Health
Laboratory Chemistry Division, AVA),
Ms Chong Nyet Chin (Director, Food Safety & Quality, NTUC Fairprice Co-operative),
Mr Sunny Koh (SMF Deputy President, Chairman of SMF Food & Beverage Industry Group),
Mr Wong Seng (Yew Verification and Audit Manager Asia of Oceania & Africa Nestle
Quality Assurance Centre),
Mr Gennady Volchek, (CEO, AuthenticateitTM Pty Ltd),
Mr Alfred Au (Regional Business Development (AP), VIPColour Technologies Pte Ltd),
Dr Siti Noorbaiyah Abdul Malek (Director, ASEAN Food and Beverage Alliance),
Mr Liew Yew Fah (Vice Chairman, Mandai Link Logistics) and,
Mr Andy Siow (Manager, GS1 Singapore)**