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INTRODUCTION

THE GLOBAL FOOD SAFETY CONFERENCE

The 2018 edition of GFSI’s Global Food Safety Conference was one for superlatives. Some 1,200 delegates congregated in Tokyo for the event, comprising the highest attendance rate in GFSI and GGF history. The packed programme and parallel meetings benefited from unprecedented government support while the conference stage welcomed a host of inspiring and illustrious speakers from some of the world’s biggest food companies and organisations.

The delegates hailed from over fifty countries and from every corner of the food industry: multinationals and SMEs, retailers and manufacturers, research labs and regulatory agencies. While the record-breaking attendance is hardly a surprise - the event has grown steadily since its first iteration in 2001 - it is an especially encouraging figure for the first GFSI Conference in Japan.

Japan is only the second Asian country to host a GFSI Conference, after Malaysia in 2015, as the global event typically alternates between Europe and North America. This year’s conference attracted a record number of attendees from Japan and elsewhere in Asia, who left Japan’s concern with food safety to leave a spark of food safety revolution in Asia, who left

Whether they hailed from Japan or Jamaica, Canada or Cameroon, the delegates agreed on one key topic: the creative power of collaboration. In every plenary session, speakers mentioned the importance of open communication. The prevailing notion was that collaboration - across the public-private boundary, among international governments, and between companies and their customers - is the solution for every food industry issue from regulatory redundancy to crisis management. The conference itself proved to be a fertile ground for these collaborative conversations.

This year’s event was a tremendous success and clearly marks GFSI’s position on the global map as leaders in advancing food safety. Together as a community we have the opportunity to push forward the GFSI vision of achieving safe food for consumers everywhere.

PROGRAMME AT A GLANCE

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The first morning of the GFSI Conference 2018 opened with an introductory pre-conference session, led by Peter Freedman, Managing Director at The Consumer Goods Forum (CGF). Mike Robach, Chair of the GFSI Board of Directors and Vice President of Food Safety, Quality and Regulatory Affairs at Cargill, and Andy Ransom, CEO of Rentekit Initial, intimately titled GFSI & You, the first half of the two-hour session served as a refresh-service during the mission and activities of the Global Food Safety Initiative. The speakers covered the Initiative’s origins, its recent achievements, and the bright future open to companies that adopt the GFSI approach.

Katsuki Kishi, GFSI Board Member and General Manager of the Quality Management Department at AEON, opened the session with a brief introduction that called the audience’s attention to the unique location of this year’s conference, as well as its global implications. As the Chair of the GFSI Local Group Japan, he spent considerable time thinking about the successes and challenges of the conference. He recalled worrying about attracting delegates to Tokyo; the conferences are historically dominated by Americans. “But it turned out to be a delightful result,” said Kishi.

Scanning the audience in the packed ball-room, Kishi noted that this year’s attendance was split nearly in half between Western countries and other regions. “This diversity makes the conference more attractive,” said Kishi. It was especially appropriate that this unprecedented diversity occurred in Japan, which has long served as a meeting point between Western and Eastern culture. Kishi envisioned the conference serving as a gateway towards greater GFSI presence in the Asian region.

“It is a pleasure to see so many of you here,” Kishi said in closing, as if welcoming old friends to his own home.

Peter Freedman, Managing Director of the CGF, zoomed in from Ransoms’ continent-wide scale with a brief introduction to the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) and its parent organisation, The Consumer Goods Forum (CGF). He began with a slide that charted the portfolio of strategic topics addressed by the CGF and its members, from health and wellbeing to environmental sustainability. Freedman drew the audience’s attention to the CGF’s projects that relate to the food industry, including an initiative on sustainable supply chains and an effort to reduce food waste.

Clicking to another visual, Freedman introduced the brand of the CGF that conference attendees know best: the Global Food Safety Initiative. His visual aid featured a world map superimposed with GFSI’s various groups of stakeholders: retailers, manufacturers, certification programme owners (CPOs), academia, consumers, government regulators, and so on.

“Our duty is to make sure GFSI has the proper governance to represent all stakeholders,” said Freedman. He revealed that governance on the following slide, which featured a mosaic of smiling faces from the GFSI Board of Directors. Freedman reported on the changes that took place at the last election: new members Scott Stillwell, Natalia Dyrenson, and Roy Kirby joined the board, while the remaining members were re-elected. Mike Robach began another term as Chair, aided by Co-Chairs Anita Scholte op Reimer and Gillian Kelleher.

Continuing Kishi’s point about the potential of Asia, Andy Ransom, CEO of Rentekit, led the audience through a lightning round of facts about the region. “I love Asia,” he declared, “I love its culture, its entrepreneurial spirit, its culture.” But with that increasingly globalised culture comes complexity. Asia is the most highly populated continent, with 60% of the world’s people but only 30% of its land mass. Urbanisation and population density make increasing strain on food supply. Meanwhile, the collective GDP of the continent is set to grow by 6.3% between 2018 and 2022, widening the already rapidly-expanding middle class. By 2030, 66% of the global middle class will reside in Asia — over one billion tech-enabled, culinarily curious people to feed.

“Today’s delegates are from every part of the food chain. They’re sharing best practices and taking action to deliver safer food everywhere.”

Mike Robach, Vice President of Food Safety, Quality and Regulatory Affairs at Cargill, stood to introduce the conference from the vantage point of his position as Chair of the Board. Before beginning his talk, he thanked Kishi and his team, the CGF and GFSI teams, and the delegates for coming together to create the largest event ever held by GFSI.

Robach framed his talk by outlining the three core strategic objectives of GFSI benchmarking & harmonisation, capability building, and public-private partnerships.

GFSI has also taken new steps forward in thought leadership. The board considers what leaders do on regional and local levels and reshapes these actions for the global stage. This amount of cross-national, vertical collaboration requires transparency and inclusivity. “We want to share best practices to make all our supply networks better,” said Robach.

The main goal of all GFSI activities is to create benchmark certification as a passport to food safety. “We must transcend the barriers we’re up against and harmonise food safety management and standards,” Robach said. That harmony includes regulatory changes, such as the US FDA’s Food Safety Modernisation Act, a landmark piece of legislation that impacts all food that finds its way across US borders.

Companies that lack the infrastructure or capacity to achieve full certification can access the first steps of the food safety apparatus through the Global Markets Program, a curriculum that becomes the basis for training in the supply chain.

After introducing the main strategies of GFSI, Robach pivoted to the recent Government to Government (G2G) and Government to Business (G2B) meetings, at which representatives from over forty governmental institutions met to discuss public-private collaboration in the food safety sphere. This was the third iteration of such meetings, and Robach noted the attendees were “getting comfortable” about sharing best practices, data, and strategies for the benefit of consumers everywhere. As an illustration of this new level of conversation, GFSI entered Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) to continue to put real projects on the ground across the world.

Robach thanked the G2B and G2B meeting attendees, and the audience more broadly, for working towards transparency and collaboration across sectors. He quoted a former Cargill CEO, who perhaps foresaw today’s intrinsically interconnected system. “In a world where you can’t hide anything, you’d better not have anything to hide.”

The second half of the session was devoted to panel discussions, moderated by GFSI Senior Technical Manager Marie-Claude Quen-tin, which featured stakeholders from every sector of the GFSI community. First, a broadly international panel of Certification Programme Owners (CPOs) discussed their input to Version 7.2 of GFSI’s Benchmarking Requirements. This recently released version streamlines elements of the previous edition to promote flexibility, efficiency and practicality.

Tokuyuki Nishitani, CEO at JFSM, localised the concept of benchmarking in the Japanese context, reiterating some of Kishi’s earlier points about Japan’s potential to influence the wider Asia region. JFSM harmonises GFSI Benchmarking Requirements with the principles of washoku, a classical Japanese cuisine concerned with terriorgy, technique, and craft.

Marc Proctor, CEO of BRC Global Standards, sat on the panel as the first CPO to be recognised against version 7.1 of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements. He embraced the self-assessment aspect of the new benchmarking process, which allowed BRC to look at their own systems with critical objectivity, and to develop a more stringent approach to the assessment which the new process introduced.

Fons Schmid, Chairman of the Board at FSSC, explained GFSI’s forthcoming auditor examination programme: a remotely-procrtored, tamper-proof test that asks a baseline set of questions in order to set a global minimum for auditor knowledge. In case anyone in the audience questioned the veracity of the examination, Schmid assured: “It’s not fake news, it’s great news.”

Dan Lee, Standards Coordinator of the Global Aquaculture Alliance, introduced three new scopes of the latest GFSI Benchmarking Requirements: food agents, the catering
and food service sector, and retailers and wholesalers. All scopes tackle food fraud and food defense, which the GFSI requirements address through measures such as threat assessment and consumer risk mitigation. Lee quoted a headline from the copy of Japan News that had been sent to his hotel room that morning: “It’s time to shift focus from technology to standards.” GFSI provides the tools to make that shift.

Heather Gale, Executive Director of CanAdaGAP, noted the changes that had been made to the requirements to address the specific needs of the primary production sector, including farms. When requirements were impractical for a primary production setting, they were removed or other clauses were streamlined to remove wordiness or excessive specificity. “We’re still finding new ways to apply GFSI to the world of agriculture,” she allowed.

As the final speaker of the panel, Stephan Tromp, Managing Director of IFS, took on the challenge of extrapolating the future of the new GFSI Benchmarking Requirements. Tromp predicted a stronger focus on flexibility so the requirements can stretch to fit new food trends, emerging technologies, and food businesses of all sizes. “To achieve our goals, we must have everyone on board, no matter where they are located, where they work, or what size company they work for,” Tromp said.

The second panel was comprised of nine representatives from GFSI Local Groups, who Mike Robach lauded as the ones who “do all the work” at GFSI. True to this praise, the representatives related the intensive, focused work involved in bringing GFSI principles to their regions, from hosting Focus Days to harmonising standards with local governments. GFSI Senior Manager Andre Gerardi moderated the diverse discussion. She asked the representatives what accomplishments they were most proud of and what they wished to achieve in the future.

Pierre de Ginestel of the Europe Local Group expressed pride in his group’s wide range of members, but hoped for more representation from Eastern Europe. Along with recruiting new members, the group hopes to collaborate more with government regulators across the region. Katsuki Kishi, Chair of the Japan Local Group was naturally most proud of hosting the GFSI Conference 2018, but his group had much more to brag of: they hosted 400 delegates at GFSI’s Japan Focus Day and launched a Japanese version of the GFSI website which was painstakingly translated by members of the group.

Jie Xu of the China Local Group had a busy year; her group recently opened the first official CGF office in China. The office has allowed the group to accelerate their engagement with local stakeholders. Their membership now includes 57 companies, which convene to discuss topics such as auditor competence and benchmark localisation. Later this year, the group will host a China Focus Day in Shanghai.

Fernando Avellaneyra and Ana Vera of the South Latin America Group, also saw considerable growth in the past year. Previously focused almost entirely on Argentina, their group now includes representatives from Chile and other countries in the region. Those representatives focus on global market expansion, supplier education, and government collaboration.

Erich Jaeger of the South LatAm Local Group, represented a brand-new GFSI team. His group, structured by nine major companies from different sectors, is working on an MoU to promote food safety culture in Chile. They hope to strengthen the presence of Chile in Latin America through food.

Luis Hernandez of the Mexico Local Group recently helped to create a Mexican food safety standard with the partnership of the Mexican Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Agriculture, and academia. The official documents will be published in September. In May, his group will host a Focus Day in Mexico City. He invited anyone interested amongst the audience to support the event through sponsorship.

Christine Summers and Jorge Hernandez of the US-Canada Local Group spent the year putting down strong foundations with the help of representatives from companies including SISCO, Land O’Lakes, Hormel, and Costco, as well as a steering member from Cornell University. “The best thing about it is coming together with smart people in a noncompetitive environment,” Summers said, prompting smiles around the panel.

To close the session, a panel of eight key partners from international governmental and nongovernmental agencies described their methods for incorporating the GFSI approach into their daily practices. The partners painted a hopeful picture of a world in which the public and private sectors work in tandem toward a shared goal of safe food for consumers everywhere. Anne Gerardi again moderated, here focusing on the nuances of the panel members’ relationships with GFSI.

Vivek Pathak, Regional Director for East Asia and the Pacific at the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation (IFC), brings GFSI guidelines to agricultural SMEs in developing regions such as Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Ukraine. With GFSI accreditation, these SMEs can access the global market to a much greater extent than mere NGO funds could allow.

Robert Ahern, Leader of Agricultural Health and Food Safety at the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), sees GFSI as an opportunity to leverage the technical capacities and resources of the private sector. His organisation traditionally works in the public sector, but public funds for food safety have depleted in his region; IICA is therefore eager to collaborate with businesses that can help them further their development goals.

Melvin Spreij, Head of the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) at the World Trade Organisation, agreed with Ahern that resources are limited in the public sector. His organisation therefore partners with GFSI to develop training material for the collaborative food safety projects that they fund in developing regions. STDF also partners with the public sector because “food safety is a joint responsibility, and building trust is very important.”

Amare Ayalew, Program Manager at the Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PNCA) was the sole Africa-based speaker of the session. He noted that Robach’s map of GFSI stakeholders did not include Africa, but saw this as an “opportunity” rather than a slight. “We have over 55 member states, and we are ready to learn;” he said of his organisation. PNCA hopes to partner with GFSI to establish a network of food regulatory laboratories on the African continent, similar to the CDC’s PulseNet. “We need to ensure safe food as we expand trade,” he said.

Marcia Nightingale, Head of the Industry Assurance Team at the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA), has a particularly close relationship with GFSI: she co-chaired an informal working group with the Europe Local Group that drafted a reference document that instructs governments on leveraging private assurance to inform official control programmes for food and feed. She also undertook comparative analysis with government regulations and GFSI benchmarks at last year’s conference in Houston.

Mika Yokota, Director of the Food Industry Affairs Bureau, reiterated the importance of public-private collaboration. In recent years, her agency has increased communication with GFSI on topics such as improving SME operations, fostering trade, and analysing the food chain. Yokota played an especially important role at this year’s conference; she served as the chair of the 626 meetings. “I expect GFSI will join stakeholders of food businesses together,” Yokota said - an apt prediction for the outcome of the conference.

**ACTION STEPS**

1. Benefit from the GFSI community; reach out to potential collaborators outside of your sector or field of expertise - you might learn something new.

2. Check out a GFSI Focus Day hosted by a Local Group near you.
In keeping with the theme of leadership, the opening plenary of the GFSI Conference 2018 began with a surprise message from one of the world’s most influential leaders: Japan’s Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe. The Prime Minister positioned the conference as a natural expression of Japan’s long-standing safeguards with food safety, beginning in ancient times with innovations such as antibacterial bamboo leaves. He suggested that international food safety certification will allow other countries to trust the food products that Japanese consumers already recognise as safe. This confident prediction regarding Japan’s food safety culture would be reiterated throughout the plenary.

The session’s scheduled speakers were almost as illustrious as the unexpected guest. The audience first heard from another lofty member of Japan’s public sector: Ryousuke Kouzuki, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF). Like Prime Minister Abe, Kouzuki took Japan’s pre-modern innovations for preserving food as evidence of a deeply ingrained food safety culture among the Japanese. “We must thank our ancestors for teaching us to preserve food safely,” he said, backdropped by a slide collaged with soy sauce, miso paste, and natto.

While the ingredients in those quintessentially Japanese products have changed little since their invention, the process used to make them has modernised. Kouzuki described his recent visit to a soy sauce factory, where workers used electronic devices to ensure that every machine was perfectly cleaned. These special tools may resemble magic wands, but they can’t match the human capacity to adapt and innovate. Even the best-equipped companies must ensure that they motivate employees to improve constantly.

Kouzuki related this motivation with kaizen, or improvement, a defining feature of the adaptive work process popularised by the Toyota Way. Organisations that participate in kaizen constantly look for small, new ways to streamline work, eventually participating in kaizen constantly look for small, new ways to streamline work, eventually leading to a dramatic increase in productivity. “Japanese people are quite good at this,” said Kouzuki, and they therefore value certifications that involve kaizen.

MAFF promotes Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) at agricultural high schools across Japan, where students can learn about certification and confidently explain their actions to adult auditors. “These experiences can be life-altering sources of confidence for the students,” said Kouzuki. He described a heartwarming interaction with a student at one agricultural school, who spoke “with starry eyes” about working at Japan’s top agricultural corporation in the future.

Kouzuki has high ambitions for the future. He hopes to increase in the number of GAP certifications by threefold or more over current levels by the year 2020, when the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics Games will be held. MAFF is advancing certification as a Japanese strategy to improve its status on the global market.

Kouzuki also said, “MAFF supports these actions and hopes to cooperate with everyone. We would like to contribute actively to improving food safety around the world. I believe this conference is a significant step forward.”

As the session’s first private-sector speaker, Motoya Okada, President and Group CEO of Aeon, brought a nuanced perspective to the relationship between industry and government in Japan. To illustrate the complex nature of this relationship, Okada related his company’s most significant recent food safety incident: in the year 2000, an E. coli outbreak that became a mass media sensation. Though it was soon revealed that the Health Center of Saitama mistakenly linked the outbreak to Aeon, government agencies were then loath to admit to any fault. Only the then-governor of Saitama had the humility to formally investigate the case, leading to their apology. “I remember this incident to this day,” said Okada, suggesting that he remains wary of the government’s ability to effectively regulate industry.

When mad cow disease became an issue in the global food system later that year, Okada turned to GFSI rather than the government to assess the risk in Japan. Amid Japanese retailers, Aeon alone participates in sale restriction associated with mad cow disease. Aeon also leads the industry in transparency regarding GMOs. While withholding judgement on the safety of GMO products, Aeon clearly labels foods with GMO ingredients so that customers can decide for themselves whether to include these foods in their diet. Aeon customers never have to consume questionable products against their knowledge.

Some food safety issues are so complex that neither retailers nor consumers can decide how to deal with them. One example is the Fukushima radiation disaster of 2011, to which the government applied only provisional food safety regulations. Aeon took independent steps to acquire inspection equipment that would allow them to regulate and manage their own goods, despite Japanese consumers’ general trust of government regulation.

Okada is particularly aggrieved by discriminatory consumer attitudes regarding Chinese products. He sees these attitudes as bordering on hate-speech and feeding upon nationalist ideologies that do nothing to benefit the consumer. “We believe it is pertinent to abolish such attitudes,” he declared.

To mitigate against these attitudes, Okada suggested adhering to the Basic Consumers’ Rights that President John F. Kennedy presented to the United States Congress in 1962:

1. The right to safety
2. The right to be informed
3. The right to choose
4. The right to be heard

Despite this call for basic consumer rights in the United States back in the 1960s, the Japanese government took over forty years to sign their own Bill of Consumer Rights into law. Today, consumers have the legal right to insist on informed choice in all of their shopping decisions. Okada encouraged the private sector to “constantly improve laws for the sake of the consumer.”

Ken Theriault, CEO of Costco Japan, offered a “short and sweet” alternative perspective on the issues involved with running a retail business in Japan. Though Costco is the second-largest retailer in the world, it remains a relatively niche brand in Japan, with a modest 26 locations across the country; many of Costco’s issues involve adapting a quintessentially American product to a Japanese audience.

Costco’s food safety mission statement was developed in the US, but it bears a resemblance to the Japanese concept of kaizen: the company “promotes continuous improvement in product quality and product safety systems, for the benefit of our members and vendors.” Food safety culture is ingrained in every level of the company, “from the CEO down.” As a retailer with thousands of suppliers, Costco must maintain constant vigilance...
GLOBAL FOOD SAFETY CONFERENCE 2018 - #GFs18

TUESDAY 6TH MARCH / EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TUESDAY 6TH MARCH / EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the future, Costco Japan hopes to adapt more fully to the Japanese local market, leaving nothing “static.” They strive for simplicity and quality in everything they do.

Theriault closed by sharing one of his personal favourite methods for monitoring food safety culture: “walking the buildings” from the front door to the back door, four days a week. “It is very important that we walk the talk every single day we do business,” he said.

The Ajinomoto Shared Values are:

1. Increase mental well-being with a delicious and healthy diet.
2. Strengthen family and social proximity with social eating habits.
3. Improve sustainability by connecting local communities with the environmental protection community.
4. Focus on the opinions of the varying customers in different local communities.
5. Corporate responsibility

Ajinomoto has also developed four “story examples” that apply the ASV to specific situations for addressing global food issues.

- 1. Quality control
- 2. Information
- 3. Corporate responsibility
- 4. Family and social proximity

Ajinomoto has a presence in over 130 countries, many of which are home to large food-insecure populations. Recognising their potential to create positive change in these populations, the company developed a list of Ajinomoto Shared Values (ASV), which they apply in every region and at every corner of the company, from food safety to human resource management.

Ajinomoto’s president and CEO, Takaaki Nishii, said social responsibility is “walking the buildings” from the front door to the back door, four days a week. “It is very important that we walk the talk every single day we do business.”

Sarah L. Casanova, CEO of McDonald’s Japan, explained that the company’s supply chain and global food safety culture are “heartbeat” — had received several rounds of food safety training, and many were invited to a Food Safety Summit featuring 250 experts in the field.

However, rebuilding a reputation involves more than internal restructuring. Casanova emphasised platforms that allowed the public to comment on McDonald’s recovery process. Recognising that mothers make most food decisions in Japanese households, Casanova established a programme called Mom’s Eye to involve these key players in the conversation. The programme required her to visit mothers in all forty-seven prefectures, hear their questions and concerns, and take them to McDonald’s suppliers around the country.

Of course, Casanova also values the opinions of customers who aren’t mothers. In response to the Japanese enthusiasm for mobile applications, her team created Kode, an app that allows customers to send feedback directly to restaurant managers. By December 2017, Kode — which translates to “heartbeat” — had received 8.5 million pieces of feedback. Managers used this feedback to improve cleanliness, quality, and service with laser focus.

The session’s second speaker, Heidi Hovland, CEO of DeVries Global, reiterated Casanova’s emphasis on customer outreach and the power of new media. Hovland introduced the concept of influence, a perennial marketing concern that has undergone a democratic revolution thanks to social media.

In social media parlance, influencers are users who make an impact by directing their followers towards brands they support. Hovland divided this group into “macro-influencers” — users with followings into the millions — and “micro-influencers,” who may have hundreds or thousands of followers.

Sarah L. Casanova, CEO of McDonald’s Japan, illustrated the constructive energy of collaboration by sharing the incredible comeback story that her company has achieved since she took the reins.

Casanova’s deadpan wit — an extension of her ability to adapt on the fly — became apparent as soon as she took the stage. “Welcome to McDonald’s,” she joked, noting the similarity of her headset to those worn by drive-thru crew members. “May I take your order?” In fact, Casanova’s comeback strategy didn’t stray far from that drive-thru script; at every stage of the process, she asked the customers what they wanted and acted accordingly.

After a series of food safety incidents pushed McDonald’s Japan’s stock into a freestall in 2014, Casanova led a total overhaul of the company’s supply chain and auditing practices. All employees received a fresh round of food safety training, and many were invited to a Food Safety Summit featuring 250 experts in the field.

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Casanova closed the session with the industry version of a “happily ever after” ending: a chart showing three years of healthy growth since the slump of 2014. 2017 was the best year in McDonald’s Japan’s history of public trading, an enormous achievement for a once-belaboured brand.

Casanova isn’t one to become complacent in the face of success. “Food safety is a process that’s never done,” she cautioned. “We’ll continue to do everything we can to do even better.”

The session closed by sharing one of her personal favourite methods for monitoring food safety culture: “walking the buildings” from the front door to the back door, four days a week. “It is very important that we walk the talk every single day we do business.”

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Brands are quick to court influencers at the macro level, but Hovland reminded the audience not to underestimate the power of micro-influencers. Their followings are often fiercely devoted and can wield considerable influence in themselves. Perhaps most importantly, micro-influencers have authenticity — that indefinable but ineluctable quality that brands need now more than ever.

Hovland emphasised the positive, creative force of influencers and their ability to bolster brands against rumour and innuendo. He brought a fresh perspective to the theme of customisation, one geared both toward the business owners who shop at Metro C&C and those shoppers’ own customers. “If we can support our customers, they will thrive in the growing engaged community,” Ishida said. To that end, METRO C&C has established a programme that helps businesses access the tools that they need to join this interconnected, digitised community. Busy business owners can use the Metro C&C toolkit to build professional websites, field online feedback, and maintain a social media presence. Metro C&C even offers call centre support to ensure that their partners understand all the ins and outs of digitisation.

To ensure their partners’ success on the globalised market, Metro C&C emphasises global food safety certification. They lead by example; Metro was one of the first chains in Japan to adopt GFSI-recognised certification programmes. Their influence even encourages owners of izakaya (a type of informal Japanese pub) to modernise their practices for the sake of safety.

Metro C&C’s central goal is to make it easy to run a food business, so their customers can focus on their guests’ gastronomic experiences. As Ishida phrased it, “If we can help our customers win, then METRO will be winning.”

Takashi Ishida, CEO of METRO Cash & Carry Japan, opened on a similarly reassuring note. “Don’t be scared of the people yelling irraschaimas,” he said, in case anyone in the audience was unaccustomed to the enthusiastic traditional greeting of Japanese shopkeepers. “They just want to talk to you.”

As a CEO at one of the world’s largest B2B wholesalers, Ishida is used to representing the interests of shopkeepers. He brought a fresh perspective to the theme of customer engagement, one geared both toward the business owners who shop at Metro C&C and their partners’ own customers. “If we can support our customers, they will thrive in the growing engaged community,” Ishida said. To that end, METRO C&C has established a programme that helps businesses access the tools that they need to join this interconnected, digitised community. Busy business owners can use the Metro C&C toolkit to build professional websites, field online feedback, and maintain a social media presence. Metro C&C even offers call centre support to ensure that their partners understand all the ins and outs of digitisation.

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Carletta Ooton, Vice President of Health and Safety, Sustainability, Security & Compliance, at Amazon, demonstrated what customer engagement looks like on a Big Data scale. As one of the world’s largest ecommerce platforms, Amazon requires powerful analytical tools to maintain the meaningful communication involved in any food business.

Though Amazon began as an online bookstore, it now includes a wide range of food businesses. Amazon.com sells shelf-stable products, while the Amazon Fresh platform offers fresh produce and other perishables. Finally, Amazon Prime Now delivers chilled and frozen foods to customers in dense urban areas. The company has been branching into the brick-and-mortar supermarket business with the acquisition of Whole Foods and Amazon Go, a shop that features prepared foods, groceries, and no checkout counter; the built-in technology charges customers’ Amazon accounts as they leave. Safety is paramount concern on all of these platforms.

As the previous speakers agreed, the best way to maintain safety and quality in food business is to open the lines of communication to customers. However, Amazon receives 2.3 million interactions every day in 40 languages; there are hardly enough content experts in the world to parse that much text. Amazon therefore relies on natural language processing to determine which interactions could point towards food safety issues. Their software is advanced enough to understand the vast majority of comments. This allows trained, human experts to devote their attention to only the most complex decisions.

Through this system, Amazon can recognise a food safety issue in seconds and take action in minutes. After all, in the world of food safety, “good intentions don’t work. Speed matters.”

The subsequent panel discussion yielded valuable action steps from all four speakers, especially on the topic of crisis mitigation. “Keep your customer at the centre,” said Casanova, perhaps the most experienced panel member on the subject. “Listen to what they’re saying.”

Ooton had similar advice. “It’s not about the GMs or the financial impact. It’s about people. If you keep the customer at the heart of your decisions, you’ll make the right decisions.”

“Don’t hide,” said Hovland, recalling the example of Blue Bell CEO Paul Kruse. “The more you can step out of the corporate shadow and present a human face, the quicker your recovery will be.”

“Food safety is like breathing: you don’t realise you’re doing it until you’re not,” opined Ishida. “So you need to realise it’s very important in everyday life.” The audience was suddenly aware of their breathing, as well as their own deep-set, everyday efforts towards food safety.

**ACTION STEPS**

1. **Create a “tribe” of influence in the good times so that you have support in case of crisis.**

2. **Leverage the democratising power of social media to connect with consumers on their level.**

3. **Don’t hide from your consumers – present a human face to your business and open up the lines of communication.**
By providing a stepwise route towards accredited certification, GFSI's Global Markets Programme allows small, developing businesses to join the food safety conversation. Plenary 3 championed these growing businesses, as well as facilitating discussion among the government regulators that small companies are most likely to encounter on the local scale.

Before the public-sector regulators took the stage, the audience heard two private-sector testimonials from Global Markets Programme successes. The first, Tanatika Chirva, shared her story in a new episode from the GFSI web series, filmed on-site at her ready-meal factory in Ukraine. Over footage of her harried employees flipping crepes, Chirva explained how the programme allowed her to improve safety, gain consumer trust, and increase sales by over 50%.

Samantha Mah, Marketing Manager of the Malaysia-based health foods brand Wide Tropism, offered a similar success story on the stage. Wide Tropism began as a staple-foods distributor in a shop house, where Mah and two other employees packaged goods themselves. Despite their humble surroundings, they had big ambitions: a place on the shelves of AEON department stores. They applied to be a supplier, received an audit, and were summarily rejected. "We should change our institutions," he said. "We need more people believing in this new approach."

Later in his speech, Taylor tempered his optimism with caution. "Private responsibility can't take the place of public oversight, and no amount of regulation can make food safe without the private sector taking responsibility." Balance is key, Taylor urged; "Third-party auditors and public regulators can improve their systems through transparency and collaboration."

Mike Taylor, Former US FDA Deputy Commissioner, built on Chirva and Mah’s positive energy when he subsequently took the stage. "This is a time for optimism," he said, "a remarkable time for food safety around the world." He noted a pattern of collaboration between the public and private sectors, an allocation of responsibilities, and a dedication to providing safe food for consumers at all levels of society.

Through his work with the World Bank in sub-Saharan Africa, Taylor observed the heightened food safety challenges involved in running a small business in the developing world. This region lacks the public goods - such as surveillance systems, land-grant research universities, and regulatory bodies - that businesses in more developed countries take for granted. The Global Markets Programme can help to fill in the gaps left by underdeveloped public goods, even for businesses currently associated with the "informal" sector.

Xiaqun He, Director General of Registration Department of the Certification and Accreditation Administration of China (CNCA), spoke not to share a public-sector perspective from the opposite side of the world. Like Taylor, she emphasised collaboration between the public and private sectors, as well as among international public-sector representatives.

The cross-national conversation that began at GFSI 2016 continued in the subsequent panel discussion, which included regulators from nearly every continent on the planet: Michel Leporati of Chile’s ACHPIA, Dr. Stephen Ostroff of the US FDA, Jason Feeney of UK's Food Standards Agency, and Bill Jolly of the New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries.

Since its establishment in 2001, the CNCA has placed an emphasis on collaboration with international regulators. The G2G and G2B meetings at GFSI Conference 2016 were a particularly fruitful moment in CNCA’s collaborative history. The following year, CNCA sent a team of representatives to the FDA to study US regulation and share best practices.

Dr. Stephen Ostroff had a more positive perspective on third-party certification. "Third-party audits often hold their suppliers to a much higher standard than regulators," he said. "This is terrific. It's not us versus them, it's collaboration in the best sense of the word."

In the final minutes of the plenary, the focus returned to the Global Markets Programme and the small businesses that benefit from it. Mike Robach, Mitch Chait, and Mike Taylor announced the winners of the second annual Global Markets Awards. This year’s awards went to Asociaciones Agroindustriales Serranas de Mexico, The Nuts & Legumes Company of Pakistan, Plantations Industries Limited of Nigeria, and Fuji Foods of Japan. GFSI recognised these companies for improving their safety standards through the Global Markets Programme while providing authentic, high-quality food to their consumers.

Mike Taylor described the meeting with characteristic caution. "There's great potential for mutual support, but that's easier to say than do," he said. "There was also concern for private audits displacing public regulators, which no one wants. The panel full of public regulators emphatically agreed.

In an ideal world, we shouldn't have too much third-party certification," said Bill Jolly. "But many more remain unaccredited. CNCA encourages companies to earn international certifications and to produce products to offer the assurances that third parties trust and meets the needs of all parties concerned," she said.

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Xiaqun He's institution, which lies under the umbrella of the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine, supervises and coordinates certification and accreditation activities across China, including GFSI-recognised certifications. Over 22,000 organisations have received CNCA-approved certificates, but many more remain unaccredited. CNCA encourages companies to earn international certifications and to produce products for export and domestic consumption on the same standard. "Certification conveys trust and meets the needs of all parties concerned," she said.

The panel served as a recap of the G2G and G2B meetings that took place earlier in the week. These were condensed for the larger audience. Moderator Sharanjit Leyl asked the speakers to share the atmosphere of those meetings, which brought together representatives from over thirty institutions, and the main points that came out of them.

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**PLENARY 4:**

Emerging Technologies in the Food Industry

New Horizons, Challenges and Opportunities

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**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

1. Whole genome sequencing offers solutions for the increasingly complex supply chain, including the challenges involved in emerging food technologies.

2. Thanks to a winning recipe of talent, investment, and government support, China is at the forefront of food technology innovation.

3. There’s no one technological “magic bullet” for all the issues of the food system; solutions come from a thoughtful synergy of technologies.

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From the lunchtime Tech Talks to the technically-specific Special Sessions and Breakout Sessions, emerging technologies were an overarching theme of this year’s Global Food Safety Conference. The fourth plenary addressed these new developments through a focused, strategic lens. Discussion of technology can easily degrade into empty buzzwords for those not directly involved in its development. However, in this session speakers described food innovations in nuanced detail, without avoiding the financial, technical, legal, and health-related challenges involved in bringing these innovations to the consumer.

Martin Weidmann, Gelert Family Professor in Food Safety at Cornell University, began the session on a cautionary note that would temper the exuberance of the following talks. He ran through a list of food-tech media darlings — novel foods, lab-grown meats, yeast-produced dairy, ur-food-tech media darlings — novel foods, health-related challenges involved in bringing food innovations in nuanced detail, without ever, in this session speakers described directly involved in its development. How- ever, in this session speakers described food innovations in nuanced detail, without avoiding the financial, technical, legal, and health-related challenges involved in bringing these innovations to the consumer.

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**WEDNESDAY 7TH MARCH / EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- **GLOBAL FOOD SAFETY CONFERENCE 2018**

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**Ho calls the “magic formula” of talent, technology innovation.**

**ACTION STEPS**

1. Stay on top of developments in the startup sector to anticipate change before it sweeps the industry.

2. Acquire consumer trust through citizen science and radical transparency.


PLENARY 5:
Japan 2020, Nutrition and the Future of Food

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Food safety certification improves consumers’ lives by freeing them to focus on their own improvement.

2. Unconventional food sources such as algae can play a role in reducing hunger and malnutrition around the world.

3. The growing startup culture in the developing world is driving radical innovation in the food industry and beyond.

Traditionally, the final plenary of the Global Food Safety Conference aims its sights towards the future. The GFSI Conference 2018 had a particular point in the focus to orient on: 2020, when the Olympics will be held just steps away from the conference’s Tokyo venue. As revealed by the previous plenary’s speakers, Japan’s food industry moves at lightning speed — by the time the athletes descend upon Tokyo in two years time, they may very well be able to feast on euglena prepared by robot.

“Listen closely,” said Daichi Suzuki, Commissioner of the Japan Sports Agency and 1988 gold medalist. “Can you hear the construction getting ready? The people cheering? ‘No,’ he sighed, ‘that’s just an auditory hallucination.’ The cheering may have been a hallucination, but the construction is real: Tokyo and the surrounding areas are already preparing frantically for events two years in the future. Even the menus are in development. Suzuki shared enticing images of a chirashi-don (rice topped with raw fish) that used only ingredients certified to a GFSI-recognised certification programme. After all, as the Japanese proverb goes, ‘you cannot fight on an empty stomach.’

The adage takes on special meaning for Olympians, who eat not only to fill their stomachs but to power their bodies through feats that test the limits of human ability. As a young Olympian, Suzuki remembered carefully choosing his meals, receiving enough calories. Upon returning to his country was full of food — children suffered crippling vitamin deficiencies despite receiving enough calories. Upon returning to Japan, Izumo decided to devote his life to solving malnutrition.

Euglena offered that solution. Packed with 59 nutrients and the complete proteins that occur in meal, euglena offers almost everything a human needs to live. The only difficulty is growing enough to sell cost-effectively. After years of trial and error, Euglena Co. developed a way to cultivate euglena on a large scale.

Since their eureka euglena moment, the company has joined the Tokyo Stock Exchange — the first startup out of Tokyo University to receive that honour — and grown to a market cap of $1 billion. They’ve also achieved certification with FSSC, FDA, and halal and kosher authorities. “Japanese customers are very particular about food,” he said, and certifications can help consumers ensure safety and quality.

In the future, Izumo would like to see euglena expand from food to the energy market. The ‘futuristic superorganism’ can be made into biofuel or bio jet fuel, sustainable alternatives to petroleum products. “Come back to see us in 2020 and observe how much we’ve grown,” he invited the audience.

Like Suzuki before him, Bakas was particularly concerned with food waste. He suggested that Zeppelins could be used to ship food more efficiently, preventing food loss during transit. He also noted the start-up Copia, which connects people who have surplus food to people or institutions who have a lack. Finally he described a vision of new breeds of fruits and vegetables that have no inedible parts.

Bakas ended on one of the central themes of the conference: collaboration. “You’re a great community; a university of food safety,” he said. “I urge you to connect, here and digitally.”

“As you understand with the accents, we are French,” de Ginestel said. He welcomed the audience to attend next year’s conference in Nice, on the French Riviera. “It will be difficult to compete with this year, but the French never give up.”

See you in Nice in 2019!

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Robach marked the end of the conference with heartfelt thanks to everyone involved, from the Japanese government to the GFSI team and their CGF colleagues to the interpreters and moderator Leyl herself.

“You’ve kept this truly a professional operation,” he commended.

At last, Robach handed over the podium to his colleagues Pierre de Ginestel and Frederic René from the GFSI Board. Though lacking some of the fanfare of last year’s ceremonial handover to the Japanese Local Group — who came decked out in floral kimono — de Ginestel and René were equally determined to represent their country.

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See you in Nice in 2019!

ACTION STEPS

1. Partner with athletes or other influencers to impact the public perception of food issues.

2. Maintain an open-minded flexibility that will allow your company to stretch to fit new trends.
Discovery Tours

The Discovery Tours were the perfect opportunity to experience the culture and traditions of Japan first-hand. Attendees selected their tour from three bespoke discovery tracks, all designed to give unique insight into the Japanese food and beverage industry.

The “300 Years of Food & Beverage” tour charted a journey through time, from an ultra-modern Kewpie Egg Base to Sawanoi, the region’s oldest sake brewery. After sipping sake with views over a traditional Japanese garden, the group had the chance to visit the 1900-year-old Ōkunitama Shrine.

The gourmands of the group chose the “All About Taste” tour, which shed light on the ever-evolving Japanese palate. Attendees sampled choice tidbits at Kirin Yokohama brewery, the Ajinomoto Kawasaki, and a local Costco. After satisfying their stomachs, they sought more spiritual nourishment at the 900-year-old Kawasaki Daishi temple.

The “Farm to Fork” tour offered a sweeping view of the Japanese food industry, from the transportation and logistics facility Chronogate to retailer chains METRO Cash & Carry and AEON. The tour wrapped up at FoodEx Japan, the largest exhibition of the Japanese food industry.

GFSI Board Meetings

Leaders from major retail, manufacturing, primary production and food service operations who make up the GFSI Board of Directors met before the conference to discuss new challenges in the evolving food industry landscape. The Board welcomed valuable new additions from players in food service, ecommerce, traditional retail, primary production and manufacturing. Old and new members worked together on a volunteer basis to provide the strategic direction for GFSI in line with key industry needs.

GFSI Global Markets Awards

Four companies were recognised for excellence in advancing food safety as part of the Global Market Awards 2018. Nuts and Legumes Co. (Pakistan), Plantation Industries Limited (Nigeria), Fuji Foods Co. Ltd (Japan) and ASOCIACIONES AGROINDUSTRIALES SERRANAS S.A DE C.V (Mexico) were celebrated for their application of the GFSI Global Markets Programme, on their journey towards GFSI-recognised certification.

G2G and G2B Meetings

GFSI hosted the third edition of the Government to Government (G2G) and Government to Business (G2B) meetings in Tokyo. At this year’s G2B meeting, the GFSI Board of Directors were joined by 40 organisations representing 25 countries and five IGOs. The meetings were an opportunity to discuss third-party certification and emerging food safety issues while exploring how regulators and the private sector can advance food safety in the context of value chain management.

Paul Mayers of the Canadian government, Mika Yokoto of Japan and Mike Robach, Chair of the GFSI Board of Directors, ran the meeting, informing and aligning understanding of third-party certification from a food safety and trade perspective.
Exhibition

At the vibrant exhibition hall, delegates learned about new and innovative food safety solutions while mingling with the GFSI community. In fact, the conference’s exhibition hall has become a community in its own right, with many familiar faces joined by a few local first-timers. Over 30 exhibitors set up shop in the hall, some even performing traditional Japanese tea ceremonies or providing photo opportunities with mascots. While enjoying the attractions, delegates took the opportunity to make connections and do business with the diverse, friendly crowd.

Tech Talks

After their first appearance at GFSI 2017 in Houston, Tech Talks returned by popular demand at the GFSI Conference 2018 in Tokyo. These short sessions provided a break from proceedings in the main auditorium and offered a more relaxed and informal setting for discussion of specific topics in food safety. As the name implies, each of these presentations had a focus on food safety technology, including Big Data, Internet of Things, food logistics, and mobile apps. Experts from across the food industry shared experiences and insights, and showcased a new frontier of food safety science and technology.

Press Conference

The key focus of this year’s press conference, taking place just before the opening plenary session, was Public-Private Partnerships. Well attended by national and international media business and trade media, the press conference saw new partnerships announced, enabling the public and private sectors to drive progress on operational approaches to food safety culture and expand capacity based on the GFSI’s Global Markets Programme — a framework for implementing robust food safety systems in developing markets. “This kind of public-private collaboration is unprecedented,” said Mike Robach, Chair of the GFSI Board. “The support we’re seeing around the world now is signalling a big, positive change.”

Digital Conversation

The digital food safety conversation continues to grow and this year’s conference featured a live Twitter wall that fluttered with activity all conference long. Delegates shared their thoughts and session takeaways by attaching the hashtag #gfsi18 to their tweets. Conveniently located near GFSI’s own booth and the Presentation Theater, many delegates stopped to catch up on the conversation, while community members unable to make the trip joined in from around the world as well.

Special Sessions

The early birds among the attendees had the chance to catch a series of morning Special Sessions, where some of the leading lights in the industry discussed the hottest topics in food safety, technology and innovation. At the Wednesday sessions, experts from Greenfence, Ecolab, Bureau Veritas, and Rentokil regaled the delegates with tales of their adventures in the world of blockchain and Big Data. On Thursday, key players at DNV GL, SAI Global, SGS, and Diversey & CxS turned out to turn over complex ideas such as consumer trust, food defense, digital transformation, and the role of technology in food safety culture.
This year’s Breakout Sessions provided the chance for delegates to delve further into topics affecting the food industry. Attendees listened to real-life case studies — success stories and lessons learned — and got a practical, hands-on approach from those at the forefront of food safety.

At the Aquaculture & Seafood session, industry-leading speakers focused on the importance of quality and traceability. They outlined best practices to ensure that the world’s aquaculture supply-chains are safe, secure, and sustainable.

The Changing Role of the Regulator session discussed the need for iterative international food safety standards as global supply chains become more complex and interdependent. The speakers encouraged the implementation of international standards to increase trade and provide safer food for consumers everywhere.

The Food Safety Culture session welcomed an especially large crowd, who turned out to hear leaders from Europe, Asia Pacific, and the US share their own food safety culture models while highlighting common themes among the different strategies. Delegates walked away with practical action steps for building their own culture of food safety.

The Global Markets Programme and Capacity Building session offered valuable information for delegates curious about how GFSI’s pathway to certification can benefit their own organisations. Panelists from the public and private sectors, as well as various Inter-Governmental Organisations, examined how schemes such as the GFSI Global Markets Programme could be a solution to building effective food safety management systems in local manufacturers.

Ruediger Hagedorn of The Consumer Goods Forum moderated the Big Data session, which focused on the emerging role of this technology and predictive analytics in the food industry. Speakers examined the various tools available and demonstrated how these capabilities are helping companies improve consumer engagement, supply chain security, and food quality.

The Auditor Competency session contemplated the changing role of the food safety auditor in the face of developing technologies and new risk areas. Speakers shared auditing experiences and explored the applicability of wearable technologies such as Google Glass in the field.

The Primary Production session focused on the first step in the food supply chain: the farm. Capacity-building in primary production is one of GFSI’s core strategic objectives. The speakers gazed into the future of food safety with an in-depth discussion of how producers are exchanging knowledge with global food companies in real-time.

With meat fraud and similar incidents making colourful headlines in recent years, the Food Fraud session was understandably popular. This timely session explored the “why” of food fraud prevention strategies with the goal of imparting three key learning objectives: understanding the application of specific countermeasures in actual food fraud incidents, revealing how experts are shifting from traditional approaches to innovative responses, and demonstrating how a multi-disciplinary approach might be applied to reduce food fraud risk.

The final breakout session of the conference provided delegates with a Food Service and hospitality perspective on food safety culture. The session included speakers at the forefront of the food service revolution, including Yongjian Zhong from Meituan Dianping, a delivery platform seamlessly integrated into social media. Delegates also received insider tips on meeting the needs of the modern, millennial customer.
SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE FROM A FRESH PERSPECTIVE.

A focus on food safety can reveal opportunities for growth at every point along the supply chain journey. See how real-time data, integrated systems, and the power of human intervention can create an ecosystem of growth.

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greenfence dramatically shifts the paradigm of food safety:

The value chain is connected from farm to fork, preventing harm to the shopper; food is safer everywhere.

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A comprehensive service portfolio to help clients along the entire food value chain comply with the highest standards of quality, product integrity, health and safety, and environmental and social responsibility.

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Diversey and CxS are proud of having sponsored the 2018 GFSI Global Food Safety Conference. Diversey is an innovative global cleaning and hygiene technology company employing 9,000 in over 175 countries, while CxS, pronounced “C by S,” with the letters representing “Cleanliness” & “Sanitation” serves similar markets in Japan. Both offer food safety services such as consulting, auditing, training and micro-testing for industrial customers in the facility management, health care, hospitality, retail and food service and food and beverage sectors.

Thanks to the many of you who have attended our special session and interacted with us. To continue the dialogue: www.diversey.com https://cxs.co.jp/en/

For a healthier and safer world.
CONSUMERS REWARD BRANDS THAT CARE

ASSURANCE CAN HELP YOU BUILD TRUST IN EVERY LINK

How will digital transformation change the food industry and impact food safety? IoT, Big Data, advanced analytics and blockchain may sound like buzzwords to you, but we believe they will significantly improve our food value chains, contributing to safer and more sustainable production.

Digital assurance solutions will help you manage your supply chain more effectively while reducing cost and friction. Enabling unprecedented transparency, providing insight for better decisions, optimizing resource utilization and allowing you to benefit from consumer feedback are just examples of this ongoing transformation.

There has never been greater scrutiny of your supply chains and building trust has never been more important.

Through our portfolio of assurance services - certification, verification & training - we are here to help you assure safe food for consumers everywhere. Through our innovative projects and initiatives, we combine our industry knowledge and technology capabilities to pioneer digital assurance and help you build more trust into every link of your supply chains.

Want to learn more? Come visit the DNV GL stand. Our experts would love to discuss safe and sustainable food and digital trust with you.

ADVANCING FOOD SAFETY

By harnessing global data and insight, pioneering industry leading innovations and exploiting the latest technologies, we help food businesses all over the world proactively mitigate pest and hygiene related risks.

To find out more visit rentokil-initial.com/food-safety
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Recognized as the global benchmark for quality and integrity, with more than 95,000 employees, SGS operates a network of over 2,400 offices and laboratories around the world. Our food solutions include:

- GFSI Food Certification inst. BRC, BAP, IFS, FSSC and SCoF
- Seafood & Aquaculture Certification and Related Services
- FSMA Training, Audit and Consulting Services
- Social, Ethical and Sustainability Audits
- Food Fraud, Defense and Authenticity including:
  - Gluten-free, Halal and Kosher Certification
  - DNA-NGS Testing for Food Fraud and Key Contaminants
- Farm Sustainability Assessments (FSA)
- Animal Welfare Audits
- Services for Catering and Food Service Sector
- Supply Chain Risk Management
- Food Inspection and Testing Services
- Food Technical Training including Tailored Programs

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