

Food Safety



Author
Gavin Bucket

How do you trust the food that you are purchasing?

Earlier this year, one of the most high profile restaurants in the world (The Fat Duck - currently ranked #2 in the world by Restaurant magazine) was closed for more than two weeks due to a potential food poisoning outbreak. The Fat Duck and its head chef Heston Blumenthal were published around the world for all of the wrong reasons following 529 people claiming to have contracted food poisoning while eating at the restaurant.

In September 2009, it was found that the most likely cause of the outbreak was a bacterium called Norovirus, which had been found in the oysters that had been supplied to the restaurant. For more than two weeks the restaurant was closed, and the negative publicity that was received will last for years to come, yet the problem has now been linked to one of the restaurant's suppliers. Virgin Blue here in Australia suffered similar publicity in August 2009, when one of its suppliers was found to have supplied Chicken Wraps that contained Listeria. This outbreak also received national coverage, even though the outbreak was only known to have affected seven people (including two pregnant women who were forced into premature labour). Both of these outbreaks were caused by food products that had been received from external suppliers where little or no processing was undertaken by the purchaser of the product, yet it was The Fat Duck and Virgin Blue that received most of the negative publicity.

So it got me thinking; what controls do you have in place to ensure the safety of the food products that you are serving?

When we prepare HACCP Systems

for our clients, we include controls on the suppliers of all food products and services. Where appropriate, we prepare a letter that we send to their suppliers asking them about the food safety practices that they have in place.

We recommend to all our clients, to only purchase food products from suppliers that are HACCP Certified (or similar, such as ISO 22000, SQF, WQAS or BRC), however it is not always possible to find a HACCP Certified supplier in your area, or a supplier of the products that you need that is HACCP Certified.

There are other controls that you can implement. These include:

- Conducting an inspection yourself of the suppliers facility and vehicles,
- Asking for a copy of the supplier's last local council/food authority inspection report,
- Conducting random testing of your supplier's products by a micro testing laboratory,
- Requesting Certificates of Analysis from a supplier on the products/batches of materials they are supplying to you,
- Make it a condition of supply that a random food safety audit is conducted on their business once or twice a year by an accredited external auditor,
- Search the company's history on the internet,
- Ask for references from long term clients of the supplier.

What ever you do, don't make your decisions based purely on price. To conduct tests, maintain a HACCP system, conduct audits and deliver training all costs time, effort and money.

Sometimes an offer that is 'too good

to be true' may well be!

A slightly higher price may be worth paying if the safety of your supplier and the products they supply you are intrinsically safer. Do you want to be the next Fat Duck or do you want to ensure the ongoing safety of your customers.

You can be assured that all of Simplot's Suppliers are HACCP Certified and that Simplot conducts audits on their facilities as well, however what other suppliers do you use, and what controls do they have in place to protect themselves and you. This month's article is definitely Food 4 Thought.

Until next edition,
Eat well. Eat safe!

Gavin Bucket

Founder and Managing Director
The Gourmet Guardian Pty Ltd
Website: www.australianfoodsafety.com.au
Email: gavin@australianfoodsafety.com.au

Links:

<http://news.theage.com.au/breaking-news-world/fat-duck-outbreak-caused-by-norovirus-20090911-fjlp.html>
<http://news.theage.com.au/breaking-news-national/virgin-blue-listeria-linked-to-nsw-20090819-eg3o.html>

WIN!

Question of the Month

Do you have anything you'd like to know about? The next Question of the Month will be awarded a probe thermometer valued at \$60.00.

Email your questions to Gavin at: gavin@australianfoodsafety.com.au and be sure to mention Food 4 Thought for your chance to learn AND win!