

Food Safety

Australia's transport industry needs mutual recognition in the food safety audit regime

Practicality and reality do not always prevail in the race towards implementation of accredited food safety systems. There is a concerted push by many large and small customers to ensure safe transport systems through the implementation of approved carrier/supplier programs. The transport industry must be careful to ensure that the correct balance is struck so as carriers do not land themselves deeper into the "food safety pit".

If you are involved in the transportation of unprocessed fruit and vegetables, be aware that you may be asked if you have a food safety plan or quality based system in place. In recognition of the need for safe food, a number of quality standards have evolved incorporating

portation of fresh produce. Details can be found at www.auftac.com.au.

The critical issues are transporting products at their desired (pulp) temperature and maintenance of the cold chain from "paddock to plate". Additionally, appropriate control mechanisms must be in place to reduce or eliminate the likelihood of product contamination.

So what program is right for your business? The answer, I believe, is up to the individual or company. Remember, though, if you are involved with transporting fresh fruit and vegetables in an unprocessed state, your business is generally categorised as "low risk".

However, be aware that if you carry other goods such as chemicals, dairy, meat, etc., then there will be

be done annually. At the end of the day you are the one paying for the audits and this is a significant cost to business.

If you do decide to implement any of these systems, and if you decide to hire a consultant's help, make sure that they fit into your business, with limited "paper shuffle". Never let the systems take control of your business.

In my opinion, the largest obstacle to overcome with any of these quality systems is a matter of effective and efficient staff training. Unless your staff are provided with training and take ownership of the system, the likelihood that any program will fail is very high.

Food safety plans have become a necessary part of transport and, whether we like it or not, they are here to stay. We can be hopeful that mutual recognition of audits will allow greater flexibility to the transport industry and reduced costs.

Here are my web site picks this month. One of these, Qld Legislation On-Line from the Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel, has been designed to help you access and get copies of the latest legislation and updates. The site is www.legislation.qld.gov.au/Legislation.htm. You can register by email to receive all updates and reprint information.

The other site is the Department of Employment Training and Industrial Relations where there is a whole host of Workplace Health & Safety information. The site address is www.detir.qld.gov.au/hs/hs.htm for all the latest material and information resources.

Push for mutual recognition (of food quality systems) if you have to satisfy more than one party

this aspect (eg: SQF 2000CM, WVQMS™ and HACCP™). These more recent quality systems are designed to integrate food safety with the quality elements.

These programs identify potential hazards (which can be both food safety and quality orientated) and implement control measures which specifically address those hazards. These protective measures ideally aim to either eliminate the risk or significantly reduce its severity. Simply put, these quality systems require a Risk Analysis of your business process, covering all the activities associated with the transport and handling tasks. This effectively forms the base from which your quality system evolves.

AUFTAC (the Australian United Fresh Transport Advisory Committee Ltd.) is currently developing a generic HACCP plan for the trans-

specific hygiene protocols that will need to be implemented to avoid cross contamination between loads. Similarly, if you carry seafood, dairy or meat products, then the risk is likely to be greater.

Select an auditing body with previous transport and handling experience. Talk to the audit company at length about what they can do for you, how they audit and check what skills and qualifications they have. Reality and practical knowledge of transport processes is the key.

Also, push for mutual recognition of audits if you have to satisfy more than one party. This will require an auditor with the necessary skills and knowledge, as well as an understanding of the differences between the various systems.

The majority of the quality systems have commonality, so there is no reason why more than one audit should

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