

Food Safety & Technology Council Winter Meeting

The Fairmont Mission Inn & Spa
January 18, 2011
Sonoma, CA

Council Members in Attendance

Shibu Abraham, FMC Corporation	Karan Khurana, Pulse Instruments
Ed Beckman, California Tomato Farmers	Greg Komar, Growers Express
DeAnn Benesh, 3M Food Safety	Sharan Lanini, Fresh Express, Inc.
Jeffrey Brandenburg, The JSB Group	Bob Mills, Misionero Vegetables
Barry Eisenberg, UFPA	Gurmail Mudahar, Tanimura & Antle
Bob Elliott, Sunkist Growers, Inc.	Gail Murray, Disney Consumer Products
Lisa Fuentes-Intveld, The Nunes Company	Sean Picquelle, Taco Bell
Donna Garren, NSF Davis Fresh	Paulette Pierson, Monsanto
Tom Gautreaux, Maxwell Chase	Bill Pool, Wegmans Food Markets, Inc.
Technologies, LLC	Gale Prince, Your Food Safety Coach
Hank Giclas, Western Growers	Walter Ram, The Giumarra Companies
David Gombas, UFPA	Keith Refsnider, Driscoll's
Scott Grow, G.O. Fresh	Matt Rekeweg, Dow AgroSciences
John Gurrisi, Darden	Rob Robbins, Product Safety First
Johnna Hepner, PMA	Joan Rosen, Fresh Express, Inc.
Scott Horsfall, California Leafy Greens	Nancy Shimabukuro, Walter P. Rawl & Sons, Inc.
Marketing Agreement	Amy Smith, Dupont
Michael Jantschke, Pro*Act, LLC	Tim York, Markon, Inc.
Justin Kerr, Sanitation Specialists, LLC	Thomas Young, Del Monte Fresh Produce, N.A.
Andrew Kesler, Jack in the Box, Inc.	Brian Zomorodi, Ready Pac Foods, Inc.

Guests

Shannon Andreas, FMC Corporation	Allan Noe, Representing Syngenta Crop Protection
David Benjamin, Locus Traxx	Dan O'Connell, Sun Rich Fresh Foods, Inc.
Nick Bova, Junction Solutions	Andrew Pandol, Pandol Brothers, Inc.
Mario Estrada, Markon, Inc.	Ruth Petran, Ecolab
Teri Gibson, Peri & Sons Farms	Jane Proctor, CPMA
Robert Guenther, UFPA	Steve Robinson, Dole
Joe Holt, Eathbound Farm	Randy Russell, Russell & Barron
Christian Hotter, Junction Solutions	Jack Sparr, iGPS
Amanda Kreig, PakSense	Mike Stuart, Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association
Tim Lynch, Pro*Act, LLC	Trevor Suslow, University of California, Davis
John McClung, Texas Produce Assoc.	Ed Thompson, Avendra
Michael Menes, True Organic Products	Ed Treacy, PMA
Ernesto Nardone, N2N Global	

Meeting Synopsis

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman, Walter Ram.
The minutes from the previous meeting were unanimously approved
Brief Reviews of Presentations/Discussion Topics

FDA Surveillance Research – Dave Gombas

The overwhelming feeling from everyone in attendance is that this is a poorly defined program. It is well funded and has focused on leafy greens. Pathogenic organisms such as Shigella, E. coli O157:H7, Salmonella and STEC are being analyzed. There are many objectives, but one being to correlate isolates with specific regions of USA production.

When first started, all samples were blinded and there were no recalls/withdrawals. This has not been the case for the past year...there have been numerous recalls that have resulted from a laboratory positive with no reported illnesses.

As for now the program is on hold until March. We are unsure of future funding and whether or not the FDA will change their approach. The program was to be a five years project. Members of United and the FS&T Council have met with the FDA to change the program. Information was well received and the next step is to meet with Mike Taylor. No date is set.

Specialty Crop Research Initiative – Dave Gombas

At the time of our meeting the USDA had set a budget to fund \$ 50 million for research. Funds were targeted for specialty crops of which 10 % was earmarked for food safety. Our concern is that we have limited industry involvement in the review process, about everyone is from academia.

Past funding has created many questions. For example, a greenhouse tomato project was reviewed without anyone from the industry on the panel. If we would have participated, the objectives would have been much different. This project was funded and the critical project to address field sampling techniques was not. We must take a more aggressive approach and get onto research review committees. Everyone was asked to contact Jim McFerson (509-665-8271) to get onto review panels. United will send the FS&T members notification when personnel are needed to increase participation.

Finally, this year 19 members have given support to Dr. Buchanan's project to establish scientifically based parameters for industry food safety guidelines. We are hopeful this project will be funded.

USDA/MDP and Food Safety – Gurmail Mudahar

Gurmail from T&A gave an excellent review of the MDP Program. This is a program that is 10 years old and everyone agreed that is not adding valuable food safety information any longer. Over the past 10 years it is assumed that 100,000 samples have been analyzed. The program was originally designed to train USDA labs around the country how to sample and analyze produce for pathogenic organisms. In 2007-8 the USDA started to use the results for enforcement...not the originally intention. Industry was never consulted or had input into the changes. E. coli O157:H7, Salmonella and Shigella are being analyzed. If a positive result they notify FDA. When this occurs the government moves quickly and in most cases a company is requested to conduct a recall. The FDA approach is to act before the facts are known...lot number insignificant in many instances. Samples may be 15 days old when analyzed. In addition produce handling procedures may not be optimum thus causing contamination. Samples at this time have been limited to "ready to eat".

Growers, processors are not notified at the time samples are taken. Most results are well past shelf-life. Does a single sample positive make any sense to cause a recall without

reported illnesses? We do not believe this program is adding to public safety. There must be other alternatives.

The FS&T Council/UFPA must pursue USDA and FDA to stop/change program. We recommend independent studies to correlate recalls with public illnesses. What should we do? Our understanding is that from 11,000 samples E. coli O157:H7 and Shigella were all negative with 16 positives for Salmonella. No quantification results were available.

Again, the program was never designed for recall purposes, but rather train labs and conduct a survey. FDA has clearly stated they must do a recall if a positive is communicated from the USDA. The FDA is starting to look at practices since they see the limits of what they are doing. Sampling is based on convenience not scientific methods. USDA wants the program to keep going...they know industry is not happy with the program. People from AMS are also questioning the program.

If you are asked to conduct a recall each company should ask for the lab results and methodology. There have been cases where the methods and/or handling were questionable. Information is now being gathered and will be reviewed by Dave Gombas. Once reviewed, Dave will schedule a meeting with the FDA to review the findings and try to stop this program. A White Paper defending a program change/elimination has been prepared and is being reviewed prior to Dave Gombas proceeding ahead.

Audit Benchmarking Matrix – Gail Murray

After about 2 years of effort a matrix showing audits from different companies was published and is available on the United Website. The tool has been effective and the feeling was that we should keep it current. The original question was...is one audit better than another. The matrix shows side by side comparisons of audits so people can identify the scope of an audit, costs, auditor competency, and other factors common in most audits. With this information, members can make their own decision about audits. There was agreement that the comparison table does meet our needs.

Gail asked how many had seen or used the benchmarking matrix. The number was low, but many mentioned they did not even know it existed. Later in the minutes Walter Ram will talk about the Food Safety Website and outlining activities of the FS&T Council. Most agreed this would have made members more aware of the matrix.

Customer use of the information was discussed. The general feeling was that they are not using our information since most still request audits without qualification. Dave and Barry will let members know of the matrix at meetings they attend. All agreed there is no other tool like this in the industry.

It appears at this time that buyers are starting to limit the number of companies being used for audits. A few companies are using the matrix when developing budgets. It may take some time before this matrix is actually used to reduce the number of audits.

All agreed we need to update the matrix before we "market" it to our members. Updating should be relatively easy and most thought it could be accomplished in 1 to 2 months. The following agreed to work with Gail on updating the matrix: Gale Prince, Ed Beckman, Keith Refsnider, Scott Horsfall, Donna Garren, Ernesto Nardone, and Wil Sumner. To see the audit matrix, [click here](#).

Standards Harmonization Update – Dave Gombas

Dave gave a review of the process and where we stand today. There are two harmonized audits; one for the harvesting for a processing [plant/field packing](#) and another for [postharvest](#). There are 89 items in the audit that address comprehensive food safety questions. The audits are being tested/evaluated at this time. Tests are being done with apples, potato, mushroom, and leafy green. More test audits are being conducted and will also include diversified operations.

A team made up of the auditor, auditee and customer are all working together with the field audit. There is a need to expand testing and interested parties should contact Dave. NSF is also evaluating the audit and has had positive comments. One customer has already expressed interest in moving to the audit, but is on hold until after the Harmonization Team meets in March.

The Operations Committee will need to identify how the standards will be used, policies, how to handle disputes as well as updates. These questions will be addressed by Dave Corsi, of Wegman's who is leading the group. Global G.A.P and others are also looking at the audit to establish new standards and reduce conflicts between audits. We are optimistic that working with Global GAP will speed the GFSI process.

Commodity Specific Food Safety Guidance with Citrus, Avocado and Tree Fruit – Bob Elliott

In 2009 the California citrus Industry began to work on a guidance document with several citrus organizations. The result was a general guidance document now available on industry websites. A more comprehensive grower plan with standard operating procedures to implement and forms for documentation is near completion as a next step. Initially the AFDO Model Code for Produce Food Safety was used as a guide as it was deemed best suited to citrus industry needs of available materials at the time. However, with the new Harmonized Standard now essentially complete, the industry chose to develop the grower plan as a citrus-specific component of the Harmonized Standard. A pilot test is planned in cooperation with the Harmonized Standard TWG at a citrus growing operation in California this spring. The Florida and Texas citrus industry contributed input, however Florida is working on GAPs guidance suited to their region, market and growing conditions. This will include guidance for growing of both fresh and processed Florida citrus.

The California avocado industry is developing commodity-specific GAPs coordinated through the California Avocado Commission. Their approach has included using existing third-party audit standards, guidance already prepared by some avocado marketers, the citrus GAPs guidance and the Produce GAP Harmonized Standard. There are many growers of both citrus and avocados so there is interest in creating guidance that suits both commodities.

The Northwest tree fruit industry began activity in December 2010 to develop commodity-specific GAPs with the goal of a guidance document within six months. They intend to use many of the components from the Produce GAP Harmonized Standard in their approach. In addition, work done in Canada on tree crops may also be incorporated. This group has involved the Center for Produce Safety (CPS) to assist in developing science-based parameters for several components of their program. The citrus group has also discussed cooperative research with CPS.

Food Defense – Walter Ram

The presentation started by asking participants..."Is there a perceived need to address this area". All agreed that a single episode will change our industry and these changes will most likely be out of our control. The key question for our council was "Where do we start". We are in a situation where we must address the entire chain of handling. Need some type or program to address preventable situations. Our greatest threats may be from a disgruntled employee or an unscrupulous competitor. There are documents available from other areas (Coast Guard) that may be useful to our industry. We need people to help with this area especially from different sectors of the industry.

The proposal to create a food defense guide that outlines principles, dispels myths, and creates an understanding of hazards is being addressed. The FDA is working on regulations and the FS&T Council should act now to develop a program to lead the FDA. The Battelle Research Institute in Columbus, OH is working with Homeland Security on fresh produce and grapes at this time. They have been in contact with Barry Eisenberg and industry representatives. They are to release their findings in a confidential document to the government in the near future. The point was made...do not reinvent the programs already in place, but determine how we can enhance existing programs. The FDA and DHS would be willing to work with our industry to develop this document.

Gale Prince is involved with the Univ. of Minnesota on a Food Defense Program and the University of Maryland has started activity to profile people who would be involved in an incident.

The following have volunteered to assist in developing our document: Lisa Fuentes, Justin Kerr, Michael Jantschke, Gale Prince, Ed Beckman, Jeff Brandenburg, Hank Giclas, Bill Pool, David Benjamin, Gregg Storey, and Sharon Lanini

Education – Barry Eisenberg

As part of Barry's new position he is to tackle the area of education driven by priorities identified by the FS&T Council. He is looking for guidance/input for the program. A Certificate Program was discussed and did not receive enthusiastic support. The new program being implemented by Cornell, the USDA and FDA was discussed. Before United takes any action we need to have a better understanding of the new program.

Jeff Brandenburg mentioned a project was started two years ago to develop a listing of available food safety courses already offered in the US. Once completed this would identify areas that need additional attention and could lead to a new set of educational priorities for United Fresh. It was decided to put our resources in this project before we start additional activities.

All members are asked to forward any education courses/seminars to Jeff:
jbrandenburg@jsbgroup.com.

The following volunteered to assist in completing the course listing project:
Jeff Brandenburg, Bob Elliott, Wil Sumners, Keith Refsnider and Scott Horsfall.

Lot Definition – Barry Eisenberg

The lack of standardization was clearly identified. The FS&T Council was in agreement that it is not our role to define a lot, but to determine if there are common principles that can be used to defend how a lot was identified to customers or government officials.

The Council decided that they should prepare a "White Paper" with the input from as many commodity groups as possible. A meeting is scheduled for April 14 in Salinas. The scope of the project will be outlined at that meeting.

The following people have volunteered...Barry will be contacting commodity groups for representation:

Brian Zomorodi, Tom Lovelace, Bob Mills, Bob Elliott, Hank Giclas, Ernesto Nardone, Gale Prince, Bill Pool, Lisa Fuentes, Ed Beckman, Joe Holt, Andy Kennedy

Biological Testing Methods – Trevor Suslow

The presentation focused on the need for rapid micro testing. The time to make a decision drives many of the analytical programs, but all programs must have a sound sampling plan, testing platform and a decision tree how to apply the test results. There is a move towards risk indexing.

Testing should take into consideration specificity, costs, satisfying a customer demands and the time it takes to obtain reliable results. In no case should suppliers release product before test results are known. If a positive result, it is highly recommended to contact the testing lab and bring in an expert if needed to understand the methods, and how results are arrived at before making a recall/withdrawal decision.

A sampling plan is critical and there is no one right method. Programs must identify if sampling is untrimmed, trimmed product, only the edible portion, a whole fruit, and so on. In general, labs are using a 25 gram sample, of 3 – 5 melons or a quarter taken from 2 to 5 tomatoes. There are all types of variations and no single method is universally accepted. The key is consistency. One should also be concerned about the time from sampling to analysis since organisms can die during handling.

The number of testing methods continues to grow. The proliferation in rapid test techniques continues, but in general most laboratories are relying more and more on PCR methods. Cultural confirmation is preferred by the FDA, but even they are looking at PCR more seriously as a tool for final results. Companies are still developing "dip sticks", but regardless of the technique, suppliers and customers must be concerned about false positives and negatives.

Methodology for EHEC analysis remains an open question in the industry and among scientists. Methods are in place, but the question of accuracy has not been unequivocally answered. Duplex and Multiple PCR is the preferred method at this time and have been used to identify 6 EHEC's of most interest. In all cases enrichment time is critical to achieve adequate numbers to analyze.

Website Design – Walter Ram

This subject has been discussed over the past year and we are now ready to drive the project to completion. Staff in the United Fresh Offices will need guidance from our Council.

Priorities for the new design include, but will not be limited to easy to navigate, showcase recent FS&T Council activities, give information on the newest topics, dispel rumors, list sources of reference materials, meeting schedules, educational opportunities, address export/import issues and so on. Though some of this is already on the site, easy access and use is not evident to a newcomer to the site. Walter will drive this project and bring people in to help as needed.

USDA Microbiological Data Program (MDP) – Robert Guenther, Randy Russell

Robert presented a detailed overview of the MDP and the new Food Safety Modernization Act. It was suggested that the FS&T Council take the leadership to develop evidence to support changing or eliminating the MDP Program. Senator Harkin is the key person who originally drove the program and is the person we need to convince that a change is necessary. The key is to talk "science" on the hill, guided by Robert and Dave Gombas. Some of the talking points discussed at our meeting included that after 10 years of sampling at 10,000 samples a year that the original mission to train labs must have been accomplished. No need for more sampling. Gurmail is heading an effort (identified above) and input from others is welcome.

Committee: Gurmail Mudahar, Wil Sumners, and Rob Robbins.

Food Safety Modernization Act – Robert Guenther

The Food Safety and Modernization Act (FSMA,) was signed into law in January 2011 and is the first major change to food laws since 1938. The program will be phased in over three years. It emphasizes prevention and has a major risk based component to the act. The FDA has also been given greater powers and has the authority to force a recall if the company in question refuses to do a voluntary recall. The act also identifies that the FDA should be more interactive with other federal and state agencies.

The frequency of inspections is to be increased, though there are questions about staffing and needed funding. With inspections and potential recalls the FDA will have greater access to company records. Imports will also receive greater attention.

Processors, Wholesalers, and Distributors will need to register their facilities. Risk assessments will be mandatory, but the FDA requirements/tool are not known at this time. Record keeping is mandatory.

Food Importers will most likely be most affected by the Act. The FDA has the power to require companies to have certification identifying that suppliers are meeting standards. The FDA expects most companies to voluntarily certify their operations using something like a third-party audit, but this is not decided.

The area of traceability will receive major attention. The PTI group has been interacting with the FDA and we are hopeful that many of their recommendations will be incorporated. The FDA will be determining how to create pilot projects. Electronic transmission of information will probably become a must, but again no final decision at this time.

The Tester Amendment was added by Senator Tester at the last minute. This amendment exempted small farms from being part of the bill if they met the following criteria: Less than \$ 500K in annual sales, at least half of their product was sold to farmer markets or directly to retailers/restaurants, and that distribution was less than a radius of 275 mile radius. Retailers will be required to identify their sources of product and the FDA can revoke the exempt status if they feel a supplier is seriously violating food safety practices.

Other Points

The FDA will be creating a list of products that they deem as high and low food safety risks. This is not only for produce, but for all food industries. It is expected that they will rely on past incident data to develop their categories.

The actual number of inspections is not settled. The first year the plan is for the FDA to inspect 600 facilities and then doubled each year after. Areas that will need to be addressed include, but are not limited to the mechanism to identify high and low risk products, fees, writing of new regulations and funding (One estimate is \$ 1.4 billion to run the program). Industry will be responsible for some of the funding, but the majority of the funds will be from the Federal Government.

United will be holding webinars on FSMA in the near future as well as establishing implementation groups where needed. Greg Komar when he was with Davis Fresh had experience with defining high and low risk crops and may be an excellent resource.

The United Website does have a White Paper summarizing FSMA that gives an excellent review of the bill. All are encouraged to read this paper, please see attached.

Lastly, in the "**What Have You Heard**" Segment three items were brought to our attention. First, resistance is building to the use of methyl iodide as a replacement for methyl bromide. No action at this time, but if this is eliminated soil fumigation will have limited alternatives. Secondly, the FDA has increased their intervention at the Mexico border. This is especially true for romaine, broccoli and strawberries. The testing creates delays and there have been cases when suppliers dumped product due to shelf-life issues. Lastly, the new Canadian Listeria Policy was briefly discussed. As of yet, no actions in the USA.

If you need any points clarified please contact Barry Eisenberg at 831-801-1706 or beisenberg@unitedfresh.org.