

Food safety - analysing, measuring and monitoring the risks

Photo : J. Merckling - Alimenta



Dr Sam Page of the World Health Organisation.

For the first time since these conferences have been organised, a session on food safety was included in the programme. It began with a global outlook on risk analysis, given by Dr Sam Page of the World Health Organisation in Geneva. The WHO and the FAO of the United Nations have organised food safety risk assessment activities since the 1950s, dealing with food additives, contaminants, and more recently with microbiological hazards and foods produced by biotechnology. For Sam Page, the only way to gain public confidence is through good science and improved communication.

Transparency is important but not always possible as Corinne Courvalin explained. A research scientist for ESSEC, Paris, she has been officially-mandated to cover a number of food safety crises. Using a case study involving *Listeria monocytogenes* she described the complex decision tree of actions and reactions required following a public scare. She was unable for confidentiality reasons from providing a written version of her talk for the conference file !

Communication was also the focus of the talk given by Dr Sebastian Kastrup of Wiertz, Eggert, Jörissen GmbH in Hamburg. He presented the newly-set up European Mycotoxins Awareness Network (EMAN), an EC-funded group aiming to provide communication links between industry, scientific research groups and government bodies on a number of aspects related to mycotoxins. More information is available on www.mycotoxins.org.

One session cannot hope to provide an exhaustive coverage of food safety aspects and the programme could only deal with some of the major problems facing the food industry. Reports on the latest analytical techniques to detect organic contaminants - remember the dioxin scandal in Belgium in 1999 - and pathogenic micro organisms such as *Legionella pneumophila* and marine and fresh water algal toxins were given.

In order to ensure the safety and quality of the food they sell, the major European retailers carry out regular inspections of their suppliers to check the quality management systems in place. A centralised approach followed in the UK, with the BRC (British Retail Consortium) standard for accredited inspections was presented by David Richardson of Checkmate International. Elisabeth Mouton, a consultant for SC2A in Paris, described the procedures in place in France, where the retailers prefer individual audits of their own suppliers. With the proposed shake up of the European Community's food

safety and hygiene rules, placing full responsibility for food safety on the food producers, such inspections will become ever more frequent. Would the move to a pan-European accredited inspection system ease the burden on small food business, who currently have to comply with a number of different audit rules, imposed on them by different retailers, often from different countries?

The case for small food businesses in the developing countries was put by Dr Linda Nicolaidis of the Natural Resources Institute, UK. With increasing international trade, these countries are heavily reliant on the EU and North American markets for their livelihood. According to Dr Nicolaidis, the importing countries should set realistic food safety objectives that can be met by the developing nations.

The session finished with a question and answer session chaired by Dr Louis Vareille, of Panzani, France. A lot of questions probably went unasked by the tired and hungry participants at the end of this particularly packed session. A move toward a round-table style discussion to give more people the opportunity to air their views is foreseen at the next FASIS event.



Dr Louis Vareille of Panzani.

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The complete folder of the presentations can be ordered from the Organisation Committee (price € 220).

DATES TO REMEMBER
7th International Symposium on Food Authenticity and Safety
October 15- 16-17, 2003 Nantes, France

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