

Global harmonisation of food regulations and legislation

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There's no question that as the avenues of global trade widen, the higher the probability of "traffic" jams in worldwide commerce. Barriers to trade in the form of differing—and sometimes, conflicting—country-by-country import/export rules and requirements, can and do make it difficult for food businesses to get traction in overseas markets. In an attempt to eliminate these hurdles, a network of scientific organizations has launched a global initiative to facilitate harmonization of food safety regulations and legislation. The objective is to discuss, globally, the scientific issues that buttress the decisions made by individual governments and international regulatory bodies in order to achieve global scientific consensus on such issues. The Global Harmonization Initiative (GHI) Working Group anticipates that elimination of the regulatory differences will make it more attractive for the private sector to invest in food safety, R&D, consequently strengthening the competitiveness of each nation's food industry and of the industries supplying the food sector.

IUFoST, who will help the organisers through its global FST network, supports this initiative. The reason for the initiative is that many food safety regulations have been developed many years ago and often are based on detection levels of undesirable substances, rather than safety levels. With the improvements in analytical techniques, detection levels have dramatically gone down with the result that products may be rejected

while the concentration of contaminants is far below the product safety level. In some cases products may be rejected while the concentration of "contaminants" is the concentration naturally found in the products. The numerous food scares of the past decennia such as BSE, Salmonella in eggs, acrylamide, Escherichia coli O157: H7, avian influenza and foot-and-mouth disease did not help and have led to tougher legislation and stronger maintenance of such legislation.

While consumers demand food products with a higher natural nutrient content, the introduction of processing technologies developed to meet this demand is severely hampered because obtaining approval for new processes is time-consuming and expensive, particularly so because requirements differ between countries.

Since the start of this Global Harmonisation Initiative (GHI) many other organisations and individual scientists have joined. The organisations include the European Hygienic Engineering and Design Group (EHEDG), the Food Chemistry Division of EuCheMS, FEMS and Foodforce. The initiative is also supported by publishers, including *Elsevier Science* and *Food Safety Magazine*, which is very helpful because of the means of communication they provide.

There have been various symposia and workshops in the USA and Europe and several others have been planned. Most recently there has been a successful symposium during the Annual Meeting of IFT where a series of very relevant presentations provided many data giving insight into the global food regulation problems. The presentations can be viewed on the GHI website: www.globalharmonization.org, where also more detailed information such as the GHI charter, forthcoming GHI meetings and "how to join" is available.