



Food Safety Culture - The Secret to Continued Food Safety Success

WHAT IS FOOD SAFETY CULTURE?

Food Safety Culture exists when the collective values, beliefs, traditions, interactions, behaviours and attitudes of an organization are deeply influenced and driven by producing safe food.

IMPORTANCE OF FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

- Approximately 50% of foodborne illness cases are a result of breakdowns in the culture of the company responsible for the safety of the product.
- The success of a food safety program depends on a culture of food safety.
- Implementing a culture of food safety:
 - Reduces consumer complaints, recalls, rework, waste
 - Reduces employee turnover
 - Protects brand and reduces legal liability
 - Allows access to new markets
 - Increases quality of product and consumer confidence
 - Increases efficiency

ACHIEVING A CULTURE OF FOOD SAFETY

Implementing cultural change is a challenging task, especially if you're the one leading it. The following may be useful when introducing food safety culture at your facility.

MANAGEMENT COMMITMENT

An organization's commitment to food safety culture will only be as strong as their leaders. Leaders must accept the difficult challenge and understand that it will require time, patience, perseverance and a strong commitment. Leaders must understand that behaviours within an organization are largely influenced by their own. Proper food safety behaviours that are consistently demonstrated by leaders will become reinforced within the organization. Leaders must demonstrate their commitment to food safety through their actions and not just their words.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is key when implementing a cultural change. Involving employees in the change process from the beginning will build trust and allow employees to voice their opinion and fully engage. Encourage two-way communication. Employees who observe unsafe food practices will feel more inclined to report them and leaders will be able to determine which employees are not aligned with the new direction and provide them with further support.

Food safety topics should be at the forefront of conversations and be highlighted in employee orientation and training, weekly team meetings, throughout the facility, etc. Food safety must not only be communicated, but it must also be understood. It is critical for leaders to define the food safety expectations of employees and ensure that each individual understands how food safety applies to their role and how their activities affect food safety. Expectations will allow for accountability, which will encourage the correct behaviours.

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RECOGNITION AND APPRECIATION

Employees are more likely to demonstrate desired food safety behaviours when they are motivated to do so. Recognizing and appreciating behaviours that are consistent with the organization's food safety values will reinforce these behaviours. It is important to continuously celebrate food safety successes and recognize both small and large contributions.

RESOURCES

In order to implement a culture of food safety, the proper resources and tools must be available and accounted for in the budget. Training is one of the most important factors that will determine an organization's food safety culture. Employees must be properly trained and understand the importance of food safety and proper food safety practices. Training should be continuous and employees should be periodically assessed to determine where further training or education is required. Resources required for food safety such as equipment, handwashing stations, SOPs, etc. should be readily available and adequate. Lastly, do not be afraid to reach out for help if you need it. Be it from someone from another operation that has gone through this before, or someone that is in the same position as you.

SET GOALS AND REVIEW

Leaders are encouraged to set food safety goals, provide food safety performance indicators and perform reviews of the performance. Assigning a dollar amount to incidents/deviations that occur can be beneficial. For example, include the amount associated with downtime and then compare this to a properly implemented and resourced quality and food safety program.

REFERENCES

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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Clarissa McIsaac
Food Safety Project Technician
Perennia Food and Agriculture Inc.
Tel: 902-896-0277 Ext. 227
Email: cmcisaac@perennia.ca