



Feed quality assurance in the new era of food safety:

A Business Perspective

■ Mike Laughlin

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Food safety and integrity of the food chain are hot issues in aquaculture and livestock industries today. Many changes are happening in the global animal production and processing sectors that will impact all of us, both from a business standpoint and from a personal perspective. Most of us would like change to happen at a manageable pace so that we can adjust our businesses in an orderly way, but today's changes are happening so quickly that it is almost impossible for us to be able to predict with any certainty what the outcome will likely be. However, it is nearly certain that the viability of the livestock and aquaculture industries in the future will depend on convincing the consumers that their food supply is safe and secure.

Are food crises new developments?

Many of the crises that we are hearing about today have been with us for a long time, but the improved diagnostics and communication systems allow us to hear about them sooner and in much more detail than what we have heard in the past. Even when governments are not 100% transparent with what is really happening, the news eventually gets out. This causes consumers to doubt the safety and integrity of their meat supply and results in severe backlashes that affect farmers and businesses involved in the food supply chain. A case in point is the recent episode of avian flu in Asia resulting in drastic reductions in poultry consumption and the quick imposition of trade barriers throughout the world on poultry products. The influence of such crises on today's adult consumers is probably not as large as the potential impact on younger adults and children that are in the process of developing their dietary habits.

Common Issues

While aquaculture indirectly benefited from the recent poultry crisis through increased substitution of poultry meat by fish and shrimp, aquaculture producers should not fool themselves into thinking that aquaculture is somehow immune to these problems. While it is true that these specific problems deal with livestock production and the aqua businesses are seeing benefit, in the future the circumstances may be reversed. As a matter of fact, both the industries face common issues with respect to food safety:

- The use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) in the food chain
- Contamination of feed ingredients with toxins accumulating in the environment
- Usage of antibiotics and medications and their residues in meat/seafood
- Risks of contamination and spoilage in storage and transportation
- Intentional addition of toxins to the food supply (Bioterrorism)
- Traceability becoming a regulatory compliance

Traceability: A case in point

The requirement for complete traceability in food chain is gaining more momentum everyday. The issue is already very visible in Europe where a new traceability law goes into effect in April. It has also become an important issue in the US as it took several weeks to trace the origin of the BSE cow. Legal requirements are being put in place for traceability. But even without the legal requirements, traceability standards will be put in place as consumers become better informed and demanding.

Within our business we use the phrase “one step backward and one step forward” on traceability. We want to make

sure that we know exactly what the inputs that we receive are, where they come from and that they meet the exacting requirements that we have put in place. We also look one step forward to ensure that we are doing whatever we can to help our customers put stringent requirements in place and that they enforce biosecurity procedures. If any link in the chain fails, the whole chain falls apart as we have seen in many markets.

What needs to be done?

We, as the feed industry, help turn the nutrients from high quality ingredients into wholesome food that consumers can enjoy with confidence. We have to take that responsibility seriously. Do not tolerate cutting corners, adulteration or illegal additives. The entire industry suffers from the acts of a few.

We must view food safety as a journey of collaboration. From the raw materials that the feed industry sources, to the plates and bowls of consumers, every step is equally important. If we all do our jobs with end product integrity as our number one priority, the future for aquaculture will have no limits. ■

Mr. Mike Laughlin is with the animal nutrition business of Cargill, Inc., a large US company that is active in many links of the food chain globally. Apart of from buying and selling commodities, the company processes many of the same commodities into products that become vegetable oils, sweeteners and flour. The company also produces and processes eggs, pork, beef and poultry around the world. Mr. Laughlin supervises the animal nutrition businesses of the company in south Asia, parts of Latin and North America that focus on both the livestock business as well as aquaculture.

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