

FSSAI, ICMSE, CHIFSS organise symposium on microbiological food safety

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Our Bureau, New Delhi

FSSAI, the International Commission on Microbiological Specifications for Foods (ICMSF) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)-Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) Initiative on Food Safety Sciences (CHIFSS) jointly organised a two-day International Symposium on Microbiological Food Safety: Sampling and Testing in Food Safety Management.

It was done in order to promote the latest approaches in microbiological sampling, testing and statistical interpretation and to further strengthen capacity building of trained resources in India in the area of microbiological limits and criteria to microorganisms associated with food and food production.

The FSSAI-industry collaboration aims to strengthen science-based food safety capability building in India and this is progressing rapidly. With the advent of the globalisation of the food supply chains, there is an impact on the food safety and quality aspects of food across global markets.

Effective food safety management systems and standards are, therefore, important from a public health as well as an economic standpoint as national government seek to protect their consumers while facilitating trade. The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), the global organization responsible for establishing international food standards, has been key in promoting effective use of microbiological sampling and testing to help drive continuous improvement in food safety and public health.

As one of the FSSAI's collaborations to promote science behind food safety, CHIFSS has been contributing in an impactful way since 2016. With an aim to bring in global best practices in microbiological food safety assurance for public health protection and safe food production, FSSAI and CHIFSS partnered with ICMSF. This Commission, with 19 members from 14 different countries, is a small but active and authoritative group, having members from governments, academia and industry, and representing quite different geographies and environment around the world.

ICMSF provides timely, science-based advice and guidance to governments and industries on appraising and controlling the microbiological safety of foods in support of public health

protection and facilitation of fair trade.

In his keynote address, N Bhaskar, advisor, quality assurance, FSSAI, emphasised on the SAFE (science-based activity framework for ensuring) microbiological quality that culminated in SAFE (surveillance activity framework for ensuring) microbiological activity and safety.

Martin Cole, chairman ICMSF, took the audience through the global challenges to ensuring a safe and secure food supply. In an environment of global interdependence in food safety, countries cannot solely rely upon their own food safety management systems, and it is, therefore, essential that food safety standards are universally based on sound scientific principles and focus regulatory efforts on genuine public health risks. The global increase in the number of incidents related to food safety in recent years has led to a paradigm shift in the way that food safety is managed. Regulatory efforts have become focused on the use of risk assessment tools to drive food safety policy and standards away from prescriptive to outcome-based control measures. New risk management approaches have been developed that are based on concepts such as of food safety objectives and performance objectives.

These approaches enable the food industry to meet specific objectives through the application of the principles of Good Hygienic Practices (GHPs) and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP).

This modern approach to assuring the safety of the food supply provides a scientific basis that allows industry to select and implement control measures specific to its operations, and leads to a better understanding of the role of microbiological criteria in testing. The symposium comprised deliberations on microbiological sampling and testing, Statistical aspects of these and microbiological testing in various commodities for safety and quality. A poster competition for the young scientists/scholars showcased their research and innovation on microbiological food safety. It was attended by over 11 international experts from around the world and over 300 stakeholders including eminent scientists, government officials, and professionals from academia and industry along with students from related fields. The symposium set the tone for capacity building in the area of microbiological food safety management.

Insights on microbiological sampling and testing coupled with ICMSF case studies and available tools for microbiological criteria setting will together help strengthen the national standards for microbiological food safety.