How to Achieve Food Safety Excellence in Leisure & Entertainment Venues

The F&B industry has been in growth for decades as consumers look for an ever-expanding range of food types and dining experiences – from grab and go, to fine dining, to online delivery – consumers do not only demand great food but also great experiences whilst they dine. Modern Leisure and Entertainment (L&E) venues must respond to these trends and work hard to ensure great dining experiences are part of any modern-day L&E venue and guest experience.

It is therefore critical that the food served is of the highest quality, is safe and served in a hygienic way. The way food is produced and distributed in the modern world has been changing dramatically. Traditionally, many organisations focus on documentation, inspections, and education/training within their organisations, but systems, education and training alone may not necessarily produce a good food safety culture. Therefore, changing employee behaviour is critical for all food business operators. It is important to build an action-based food safety management system that integrates food science and social-behaviour.

Ever since the pandemic, the way customers look at food businesses has changed and become more focused. More now than ever, consumers understand the hygiene requirements clearly. In other words, food safety culture has changed from "how are you doing when no-one's watching" to "how are you doing when everyone's watching".

These are our recommendations when aiming at achieving a great food safety culture and excellent hygiene standards ultimately ensuring you are serving high quality, safe food.

A RELEVANT FOOD SAFETY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

It acts as a whole package that should address the contributing factors and risks during the food production. A basic Food Safety Management System (FSMS), based on HACCP* will make a positive impact. Ensure that the system developed is applicable, usable, and relevant to your operations. HACCP analyses all the expected hazards in food - physical, chemical, or microbiological and establishes a system that will prevent it from happening in various steps of the food flow – through formal "control points". Advanced FSMS like ISO22000:2018 creates a much larger impact by contributing towards positive food safety culture and leadership.

*HACCP – Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point – a commonly known, formal and documented risk assessment approach to managing food safety..

CERTIFIED
Food Safety Management System

Source: LEC Database (No Copyright)

PREMISES AND KITCHEN DESIGN ELEMENTS

Food Safety concentrates on operational hygiene and food preparation and storage practices, but to make sure the food is produced and served in a right way, the early planning and design stage plays a major role. Understand your food offer and the complexities this may bring to ensuring the correct design and layout of the premises. Having the right equipment in the right place. If you do not, it can cause food safety risks and be demotivating for your food handlers and prevent them from doing their tasks efficiently.

Whenever designing your food outlets.:- Small, Medium, or Large, always do a work session with other internal or external stakeholders; for example, culinary, engineering, Food and Beverage because you would need their contributions to prevent issues like poor space management, wrong equipment designs and process flow. Employ good kitchen consultants with good regional knowledge that can help you to design food areas meeting the needs and expectation of your internal operations and importantly local regulation requirements.

A COMPETENT AND ENGAGED FOOD TEAM

Food handlers who run the operations need competency.
Giving your people the right skills, knowledge and accountabilities based on your operations will help you to engage them in the key process controls leading to reduced food safety incidents. In addition, reduce food waste, improve efficiency, promote a positive food safety culture, and build a positive reputation with your customers.

Develop and use new learning methods. Like E-learning and interactive talk sessions will improve the knowledge of the food handlers to use their skills and might change the behaviour as well.

Source: LEC Database (No Copyright)

## SUPPLY CHAIN

Start by ensuring your expectation of quality, safety and hygiene is made clear to the suppliers of food, beverages, and packaging materials and that this is communicated clearly during tender and contract award.

It is important to check the credibility of such vendors by keeping an approved list of suppliers and by holding due diligence information such as a licence to trade/manufacture food and food safety management system certifications. After all, you run the risk of inheriting the food safety risk when their food is delivered to your premises if it is not of the right standard.

Audit them and get to know their operations and key people – either through your internal food safety team or via an external agency appointed to access the vendors and rate them. In addition, establishing a clear communication channel with the vendor and the business helps in the event of a product recall whether its due to manufacturing issues or any legal recalls initiated by authorities.
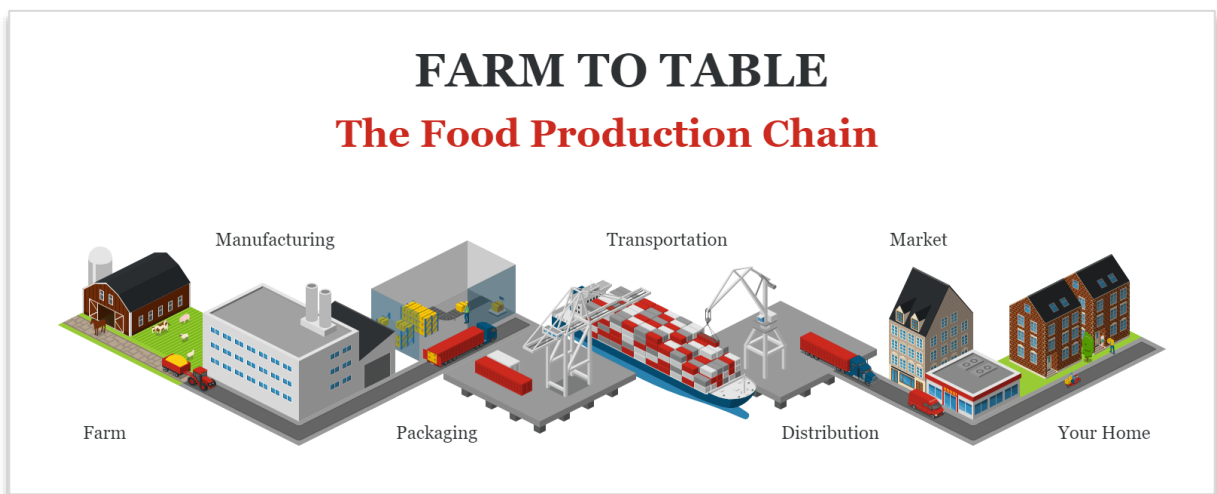
Source: Free Images

STRONG PARTNERS

Be proactive when choosing your key trading partners. Whether it is a cleaning service provider, maintenance provider, pest control service provider or even training and audit service provider. Each of these contributes heavily to the performance of the food safety management system.

- _Chemical Supplier:_ use products that meet your operational needs and best industry standards. Ask for product usage compliance checks on a regular basis.

- _Pest control Service Provider_: Use companies that offers integrated pest management (IPM) based pest control service. Do not forget to define the scope clearly. Some use latest smart solutions for pest monitoring and control.

- _Cleaning/Housekeeping Service Provider:_ Define the responsibilities and personnel requirements clearly. Like skills, tools, and quality of the service

- _Maintenance Service Provider:_ Set formal contract(s) for taking care of the critical equipment on a regular basis. Have a plan executed and ensure it happening. This will prevent breakdowns and ensure safe food preparation.

ESTABLISH GOLDEN FOOD SAFETY RULES

Establishing golden food safety rules and basic principle helps you to reduce the risk of unsafe practices and minimise the risk of food borne illness and contamination. Be as clear as you can be on the key safety controls in line with your HACCP findings:-

WHO defines 5 keys to have a safe food establishment.
- **CLEAN:** keep it clean
- **SEPARATE:** raw and cooked
- **COOK:** thoroughly
- **HOLD:** keep food at safe temperatures; &
- **RAW MATERIALS:** use safe water and raw materials.

Traditionally, if you have these 5 elements assessed in your food safety management system, it eliminates most of the food safety hazards from your operations.
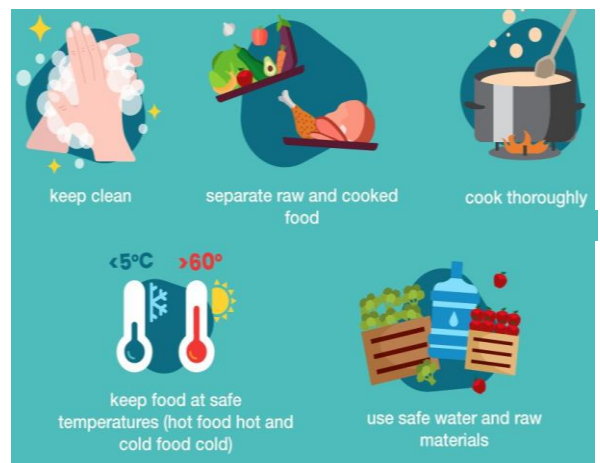
Source: WHO

ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUR REGULATOR

Work closely with your local regulator. We share the same ambitions to continue to serve safe food and avoid ill health. We have slightly different roles in this but will only be successful if we work together. The PIC program and FoodWatch by Dubai Municipality are a great example of how municipalities are becoming more transparent in inspections and ensuring full compliance. So, building a close relation with your local authorities and use of government platform are very important to ensure your food safety compliance and good authority engagement.

INNOVATION & DATA COLLECTION

Make food safety verification data as simple as possible. The long-complicated instructions might not be read by everyone and run the risk of living in the cupboard. IoT based temperature monitoring devices can be used if you want to go paperless for your checkpoints and improve labour and time efficiency in the kitchen.

Also use a smart auditing platforms and software tools that will help you to conduct internal food safety audits online. They provide various checklists pre-made for different types of businesses and can efficiently host your HACCP and other key documents.

Talk to your team, customers, and your partners. The data you will get can be used develop your food safety management system. Talking to your customers is a great tool to understand your customer's needs and expectations when it comes to food service. Collect and analyse data of incidents, quality breaches and non-conformances of inspections and audits – understand the root causes and action them.

The modern food and beverage industry is a kaleidoscopic of customer needs and demands and their need is ever changing. What is constant however is the need for food to be of high quality, safe and served in a hygienic manner – never more so than in 2021.

By following the guidance above you can ensure that you run an efficient food operation and create a positive food safety culture within your organisation.

(www.foodsafe.ae & www.foodwatch.ae by Dubai Municipality provides such guidance documents to run the food operations safely)

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The advice shared above is based on a high-level view of best practice when implementing Food Safety at leisure and entertainment venues. It is however important that you speak with and follow the recommendations of the local authorities and regulations in the countries that you operate. Their guidelines will help you to create your own operating procedures, staff training plan and documentation to ensure your food safety measures meet the requirements of your individual country, the regulations and recommendations of your local authorities.