

phase. "Once that was accepted, companies thought it would be the regulations that would drive the necessity of having programs in place, but rather it has been the customer — retailers, foodservice companies and others who have insisted a food safety program be in place because of the risk management, due diligence perspective," says Kathryn Cooper. "It is interesting to see the evolution. First it was a matter of convincing everyone that food safety was important, but now there is a larger focus on food security. In November 2006, we are holding a symposium entitled "Risk Management and Food Security," which will cover elements in risk management such as loss prevention and food security, including tampering for blackmail purposes. This symposium will be preceded by a two-day course in food defence coordinator certification."

She adds that in the United States, SYSCO requires all suppliers to have a food security policy in place. "This goes beyond basic bio-terrorism requirements. If risk management and food

safety are compromised, that can cause a disruption to the entire supply chain."

NAFSA (North America Food Safety Associates) is a diverse organization of seasoned independent food industry associates, who offer a wide variety of skill sets and experience within the industry. Expertise ranges from developing and implementing GMPs and HACCP based programs, in addition to various quality systems; food safety auditing services, nutritional labeling, workplace safety, C-TPAT certification, management/employee training, coaching and temporary Quality Assurance personnel placement services.

"Services in the areas of consulting, training and auditing are key to NAFSA," says Pius Gasser, president of the company. "We provide initial and on-going consulting services to bring customers up to the required regulatory and industry food safety standards. NAFSA validates and recognizes whether a company meets or exceeds food safety standards through customized training and auditing services. Our solutions include connecting clients with companies that

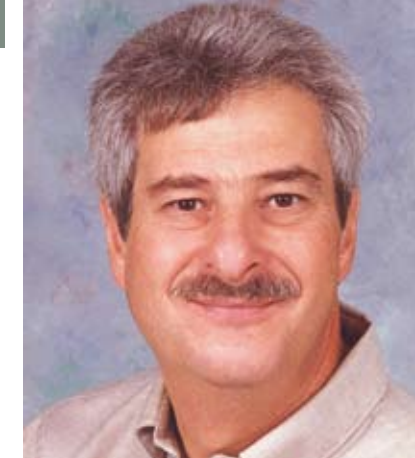
will get the job done, such as introducing the right contractor for building upgrades. For a nominal annual fee, these NAFSA Allied Associates are pre-screened to ensure they are well versed on delivering the highest levels of services and/or products, which will meet required NAFSA food safety standards."

He adds that, "These days, if a company is not periodically third party audited and approved, they stand to lose their competitive market advantage. For instance, if a supplier wants to sell to a large retail grocery chain, the only way that will happen is if a third party audit process validates product safety. Making sure safety measures do not slip through the cracks in a busy farming, processing, manufacturing or warehouse/distribution operation helps a vendor to either retain business, or prepare for increases in their business base."

NAFSA is certified to perform the Food Products Association (FPA) "SAFE" audits and also provides a full range of recognized food safety audit services to organizations within North America, South America and Europe. ■

What is in Your Food?

by Dr. Greg Blank



THE PRESENCE OF PESTS including insects, rodents and birds in foods signifies two major problems. Firstly, pests whether they are dead or alive are known vectors for the transmission of pathogenic viruses and bacteria such as enteroviruses, Salmonella, Escherichia coli and Campylobacter. While feeding, pests produce various types of filth or extraneous matter including urine and droppings or excreta. Invariably hairs, feather barbules and or insect fragments are also shed, all of which contribute to pathogen dissemination. Secondly, their presence may indicate that the food was manufactured, processed, harvested, stored or transported under unsanitary conditions. Good housekeeping is paramount in producing a product containing negligible extraneous filth and is a cornerstone principle in maintaining a compliant prerequisite program for HACCP recognized food establishments. Health Canada develops regulatory standards and or guidelines related to the type and amounts of extraneous matter permitted in foods. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) administers the regulations and is empowered to seize food products and prosecute establishments and or individuals that are in violation. In some instances, recalls have been initiated.

Based on the International Commission on Microbiological Specifications for Foods (ICMSF) a three class acceptance sampling plan is normally used to assess whether a food product (lot or batch) is acceptable based on the level of filth or extraneous matter. A three class sampling plan consists of the following specifications: n, c, m, M. Where: n = number of sample units from a lot or

batch that must be examined; c = maximum acceptable number of sample units that may exceed the value of m (lot is rejected if this number is exceeded); m = maximum number or amount of relevant filth. Values greater than this

why certain levels of filth are tolerated in foods? The answer to this will depend on the nature of the food, as it is virtually impossible to grow, harvest and or manufacture food without some inclusion of extraneous material. Many fruits,

Certain levels of extraneous matter are permitted in our food.

are either marginally acceptable or unacceptable. M = quantity that separates marginally acceptable from unacceptable. Values greater than M are unacceptable. As an example, in the determination of heavy filth (droppings or insect eggs) in black tea the following sampling plan is used: n=3; c=1; m=70 mg; M=120 mg. Based on the criteria, three representative samples(n) consisting of 25g are taken from a lot of tea and examined for the presence of heavy filth using a prescribed procedure. If any one of the samples contains more than 120 mg of filth (M), the entire lot is unacceptable. As well, not more than one of the samples (c) can contain heavy filth in excess of 70 mg (m). Obviously, if all three samples contain filth levels below 70 mg the entire lot is accepted.

Based on the above example, the question that remains to be answered is

vegetables and cereal crops, for example, are infested with field pests during the growing and harvesting season. Although this situation is regrettable it does not necessarily represent a lapse in maintaining sanitary conditions. Therefore, should allowances be made based on whether the food is raw or processed, whole or comminuted? Allowable levels of extraneous material found in foods are based on their nature to cause disease or affect quality. Overall, some level of contamination must be deemed acceptable while excessive levels are unsatisfactory and indicative of poor manufacturing or lack of proper sanitation. ■

Dr. Blank specializes in food safety, preservation and HACCP and has been professor in the Department of Food Science at the University of Manitoba for 28 years.



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