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FOOD SAFETY: practices promote Universal Health Coverage (UHC)

NEW STANDARDS to benefit horticulture industry
KEBS provides certification solutions to ensure food safety

By Malachi Motano

Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) wants players in the food sector to demonstrate that their products, processes, and services meet the highest levels of safety and quality.

KEBS also wants the very players to keep up with growing trends and market demands to compete regionally and globally.

As a result, the Bureau through its Certification Body (CB) department provides the various players and the food industry with audit and certification solutions against a variety of food safety certification schemes and certifies food safety systems against a range of internationally and regionally recognized standards.

They include FSSC 22000 - a scheme recognized by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI), ISO 22000 – Food Safety Management system, HACCP – Food safety based on CODEX Alimentarius Food hygiene requirements, FSCE - GHP+ for Catering Establishments and GMP – Good Manufacturing practices.

KEBS certification services help operators to demonstrate their commitment to food safety and quality and will enable alleviation of risk, achieve compliance, improve efficiency in operations and ensure sustainability and thus meet the contractual obligations, and regulatory requirements, gaining access to new and global markets.

Food Safety is related to the presence of food borne hazards in food at the point of consumption. Food reaches consumers via supply chains that may link many different types of players. One weak link can result in unsafe food that is dangerous to health. As food safety hazards can occur in the food chain at any stage, adequate control throughout the supply chain is essential.
That food safety is at the core of the very existence of humanity is an undoubted truism. Food safety is at the very root of a healthy populace, needed to inject impetus in the socio-economic growth of the global community,” says Lt Col (Rtd.) Bernard Njiraini, KEBS Managing Director (MD).

He said KEBS has been at the vanguard of the war against poor food safety practices and has, indeed, recalled from the market many food products that were deemed unsafe.

Food products are among the most-traded commodities. As markets become increasingly globalized, and as the world’s population grows, the global food supply chain will only continue to increase in scale and complexity. Precisely because of these megatrends influencing mass production, distribution of food and food safety, compliance is vital.

This has necessitated the need for establishing a food safety management system by all players since food safety is a joint responsibility of all players along the food chain including, producers, manufacturers, transport and storage operators, sub-contractors, retail and food service outlets, and service providers.
Kenya, just like other countries in the rest of the world is putting in place robust checks to ensure its people are served with safe, quality food, without the usual contaminations of unscrupulous manufacturers and traders.

“In fact, talk of universal health coverage by the government can be well collaborated by the adoption of proper food safety regulations and good research in this area,” said Lt Col (Rtd.) Bernard Njiraini, KEBS Managing Director (MD). According to the MD, as a scientific discipline, food safety draws from a wide range of academic fields, including chemistry, microbiology, and engineering. These diverse schools of thought converge to ensure food processing safety during sourcing, manufacturing, preparation, storage, or sale.

Meet shelves in a Nairobi supermarket

“Food safety practices promote Universal Health Coverage (UHC)”
According to the MD, as a scientific discipline, food safety draws from a wide range of academic fields, including chemistry, microbiology, and engineering. These diverse schools of thought converge to ensure food processing safety during sourcing, manufacturing, preparation, storage, or sale.

“In this sense, food safety is a systemic approach to hygiene and accountability that concerns every aspect of the global food industry,” he said.

He says preventing foodborne illnesses through robust food safety practices at all levels of the food chain would contribute greatly to universal health.

The diseases encompass a wide range, from diarrhoea to cancers, and are caused by contamination of food at any stage—production, delivery, and consumption.

“Of late, there have been disturbingly frequent cases of food recalls at the national and county levels, triggered by the suspicion that they do not meet the standards for safe human consumption,” said Lt Col (Rtd.) Njiraini.

Statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicate that Africa has the highest per capita incidents of food illnesses, causing 137,000 deaths, and 91 million cases of diseases yearly.

While the health costs and socioeconomic losses are astronomical, most foodborne illnesses can be prevented. The MD says KEBS has been at the vanguard of the war against poor food safety practices and has been, indeed, recalling from the market many food products that were deemed unsafe.

“It is through this spirit of ensuring that Kenyans are served morsels on their table that are safe that KEBS recently invited food safety microbiology researchers from Washington State University (WSU) to explore measures geared towards prevention of obesity, foodborne illnesses, and metabolic diseases.
The Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) has launched new Kenyan standards to benefit the horticultural sector.

Dubbed KS 1758: 2015 & KS 1758: 2016, are aimed at boosting food safety and traceability along the agriculture value chain for fresh produce.
KS 1758 is a Code of Practice for the Horticulture Industry that is divided into two parts, Part one for Floriculture and Ornamentals and Part two for Fruits and Vegetables that was developed with reference to International and Regional Private Voluntary Standards and Government Regulations.

Already there are programs that have been rolled out from which producers, farmers, supermarkets, groceries, county markets, consolidators, packhouses, and exporters will benefit through knowledge transfer and assistance in the implementation of the KS 1758 Standard, internationally occasioning reduced market demand, and high cost of freight.

“Stack fresh-baby carrots”

“It is in the wake of these challenges that the Ministry through the Horticultural Crops Directorate, Kenya Bureau of Standards, the horticulture industry, and other stakeholders established a Kenyan Standard dubbed KS 1758: 2015 & KS 1758: 2016. These are aimed at addressing food safety and traceability of horticulture produce,” said Mithika Linturi, Agriculture and Livestock Development Cabinet Secretary (CS).

“This will enhance the quality and safety of our products hence leading to increased trade in the domestic and international markets,” said Linturi who was speaking at a meeting with the Fresh Produce Consortium of Kenya (FPEAK).

Data available at the Horticultural Crops Directorate shows that between January to November 2021, exports for horticulture products rose from Sh136.7 billion in 2020 to Sh145.4 billion in 2021.

This represented a six percent increase and was attributed to increased volumes despite the average export prices being low compared to those achieved in 2020. Linturi pointed out quality issues that should be a concern to Kenyans.

“Kenya successfully exported the first hot water-treated mango consignment to Italy after a seven-year self-ban, and it was found to be compliant in both phytosanitary and quality aspects,” he said.

The Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Services (KEPHIS), Agriculture and Food Authority (AFA), Horticultural Crops Directorate, Kenya Bureau of Standards, and Kenya Accreditation Services (KENAS) are working to ensure compliance with Sanitary and Phytosanitary issues, especially in the standard KS 1758.

“I commend Bureau Veritas on their certification of nine individual producers and one group of farmers this year to KS 1758. We call upon more farmers and stakeholders to embrace the KS 1758 Standard,” he said.