

Cracking the integrity code: A new approach to food assurance?

A November 2017 edition of food and drink retail magazine *The Grocer* featured an article bearing the title: [‘UK food assurance is broken. So how do we fix it?’](#). Written by Buying and Supplying Editor Carina Perkins, the article puts forward the claim that “Everyone – from food safety experts to industry leaders and trade unionists – seems to agree the current system of assurance is broken.”

More audits, higher prices, less progress

Perkins goes on to outline a situation whereby “the UK food industry is more audited than ever – which is ultimately driving up prices for the consumer – but no one is any safer than before.”

The article features comments from several industry experts including former [Authenticate IS Technical Director Dawn Welham](#), who outlined the need for increased transparency and a shift away from an ever-increasing number of checks and balances, proposing that “more of the same is not going to change the business... while most businesses have the competency to pass audits, it is necessary to separate out those who continue to do the right thing when no one is looking from those who don’t.”

Well informed vs. well intended

“Knowing who your suppliers really are, back to the farm for every single ingredient in every single product that your customers buy, is anything but simple; at best, many food businesses only know who their primary or immediate suppliers are. Full supply chain mapping is a good starting point, but making sure that you are working with suppliers who are well intended and well informed is a much harder task.”

A holistic approach

As an ex-EHO and President Elect for the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, Dawn’s comments reflect the need for modernisation: “With the technology available now, there’s no reason why things should still be the same as they were 20 years ago. We need to create a much more holistic picture of a business’s intent in order to crack the integrity code which will help to ensure better food safety”.

While expressing sympathy for retailers who “are doing what they are being asked to do by regulators, given that there is no viable alternative at present”, Dawn also highlights the huge amount

of power held by retailers and the key role they play in creating a solution: “Companies need to set the example from the top and make sure that they are doing the right thing even when no one is looking. They need to set clear expectations about what good practice looks like and make sure that they are being communicated at every level, so that when something isn’t right, everyone in the company is empowered to challenge it.”

Integrity indicators

Dawn’s comments also reflect the need for collaboration which would ultimately allow for the benchmarking of “integrity indicators” such as staff turnover, absence levels, engagement scores and accident rates, as well as product data including shrink levels, sales density and waste figures, all of which would give better insight into the culture at the heart of a business and enable the food industry “to crack the integrity code”.

Read the full article on [The Grocer](#) website